

Bonni Stachowiak [00:00:00]:

Today on episode number 586 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, Kindness and Community in an Online Asynchronous Classroom with Seth Offenbach. Production Credit: Produced by Innovate Learning Maximizing Human Potential. Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. Hi, I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students. I am so pleased today to be welcoming to the show Seth Offenbach. He's an associate professor in the History Department, Bronx Community College within the City University of New York. His first book was the Conservative Movement and the Vietnam War: The Other Side of Vietnam. His most recent article is Kindness and Community in an Online Asynchronous classroom from the January 2025 edition of Currents in Teaching and Learning.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:01:21]:

He's the past president of the H-Net organization and current list and book review editor for the H-Diplo Network. And as I'm welcoming Seth to the show, I just want to mention that as soon as I read his essay, which we'll be discussing today In Currents, I instantly thought, I want to talk to him. And I'm so glad that he's joining me today. His article explores how faculty can cultivate meaningful, kind, and inclusive learning environments within online asynchronous college courses. And if you're listening and don't think that you teach asynchronous, we all teach asynchronously and all have opportunities to draw from both inspiration as well as the practical suggestions that Seth has for us today. He draws from his experiences teaching at Bronx Community College, which is a Hispanic serving institution. And we'll start out first. Seth, let me welcome you to teaching in Higher Ed and invite you to share a little bit.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:02:25]:

What got you thinking about, curious about wanting to learn more about a pedagogy of kindness.

Seth Offenbach [00:02:32]:

Thank you very much for having me on today. This is really a great honor and a pleasure of my own and I am really excited to be here with you today and to talk about my work and my teaching especially. This really stems from kind of a lifelong evolution, if you will. I went to McGill University for my undergrad. I went to Stony Brook for my graduate school. And I had very traditional people whom I was emulating, right? People who would come into the classroom and teach. They would talk, they would discuss, they would write. And this was kind of, it was a very standard, I would say Especially for the late 90s, early aughts, very standard university education.

Seth Offenbach [00:03:11]:

And it really, as. As I've. The longer I teach, the more I realize how that just doesn't resonate with my students, partially because of who they are and partially because of the new generation that we have. And so I'm kind of looking at how can I rethink things? And of course, the biggest impetus for this change overall was the pandemic beginning in 2020. Up until then, I had never taught an online class. And so now all of a sudden, the City University of New York, where I taught, went online for a full year. And so I had to rethink everything that I was going to be doing in the classroom. And I had to do it while recognizing the reality of the situation, which was my classroom was never going to be the number one priority for people during the pandemic.

Seth Offenbach [00:03:53]:

Right. New York City was one of the hardest hit cities in the world, certainly the hardest hit in the US and my students particularly were a really vulnerable demographic. They were Hispanic. A lot of them were working in fields where they really weren't able to work from home. Right. They had to go, whether it was working at a grocery store as a delivery person or something like that. They had a lot of responsibilities outside the classroom. And while they wanted to learn, I was never going to be their only priority.

Seth Offenbach [00:04:19]:

And so I had to kind of rethink things a little bit. At the same point in time, I was inspired by two other people, Kevin Gannon, who wrote the book *Radical Hope*. I read it pretty much as soon as the pandemic came out almost. And Katherine Denial's work, the *Pedagogy of Kindness*. She hadn't written the book just yet, but I had listened to her speak. And the combination of the two really inspired me to rethink how I can incorporate kindness into my own teaching. Kate Denial, when she gave her talk, one of the things that a question that I've heard her ask a couple times, and it's in her book too, right, Is when we teach, why not be kind? It's a really simple question, and it's one that I think a lot of faculty

members don't think about. And so that was kind of what brought me about this journey is, listen, I like my students.

Seth Offenbach [00:05:10]:

I've always liked them. Why can't I be kinder to them? And what would that do to them if I was kinder, Right. How would it help them? And I think that this has kind of gone along my journey. And the article you referenced Kindness and community in an online asynchronous classroom. It talks about a little bit about my journey, but it's also some practical tips on how you can make your classroom a little bit nicer, a little bit kinder, a little bit warmer, and why that is really important. One of the things that I think right is a lot of people when they hear kindness in the classroom is they think that everything is just suddenly becoming easier. And that's not true. Right.

Seth Offenbach [00:05:50]:

My goal is to challenge my students intellectually. My goal is not to stress them out. Right. They are going to be stressed out because of everything. Especially again, I teach at Bronx Community College, right. So this is a Hispanic serving institution. The majority of our students have jobs or are helping caring for a family member. Sometimes it's a parent, sometimes it's another a child, sometimes it's a sibling.

Seth Offenbach [00:06:14]:

So they've got a lot of things going on and they're in school which inherently stressful. And so what I'm basically working with, right, is I'm dealing with this high stress environment. How can I at least offer them a helping hand?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:06:29]:

Yeah. I'm hearing a couple of themes from what you've shared and thank you so much for drawing us back to what was a really pivotal moment for you. I'm thinking back to even, oh my gosh, I've been teaching now 20 years in higher ed. So I think back to a time when I was very stressed because I would be gone for a Friday. I was teaching a Monday, Wednesday, Friday class at 8am So I was like, oh gosh, I better be there on that Friday. I don't remember it was a conference or what it was that meant I couldn't be there. And I'm talking to my TA about, well, I could get a guest speaker, but it'd be weird to bring a guest speaker in and then not be there. And then, well, maybe you could be, but it just all seemed weird to me.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:07:11]:

And I remember I can still remember the young man's name. He's no longer young, by the way, but he's like, okay, let's talk for a little bit. I need you to go

back to when you were in college. Did you ever take a Monday, Wednesday, Friday, 8am Class? Why, yes, I did. Okay, I want you to remember, what would it have been like if one day during the semester, just a single day on a Friday, especially your professor, told you that they couldn't be there at that 8am class? What would you have thought? You know, that. And by the way, today I think, especially with learning from people like yourself, that the asynchronous things, if anyone ever does have some time that they have to miss, either planned or unplanned, how wonderful these kinds of approaches can be for when life inevitably happens and to be thinking about that in advance before life inevitably happens. So I'm seeing that theme of you to put yourself a little bit in and have more empathy. The other theme that I'm hearing from you, you started to talk about this doesn't mean that the class is easier.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:08:11]:

It doesn't mean that the that what I'm hoping to facilitate in terms of learning is easier. In fact, the literature calls these things desirable difficulties. We still want to have high expectations. And because we learn better when we're challenged, we learn better when something gets us curious enough to want to wrestle through the challenges related to the learning. You're talking about a kindness unrelated to the actual learning where we just don't need to be mean, we just don't need to be cruel or to center ourselves in such a way that is both unrealistic, lacking in awareness of others context, and can really just be pretty narcissistic if we think about it in those terms. So I am excited to have you share. You've got three, three pillars of kindness and very practical tips for us to challenge us on. Start out by telling us what you'd like us to know about how we might rethink syllabus design and perhaps even how you rethought it.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:09:19]:

Some of the techniques that you decided to incorporate there.

Seth Offenbach [00:09:22]:

Sure. I first off, I have to give a shout out to the social justice syllabus design tool and an equity syllabus, which are two different things because. And also actually the liquid syllabus, that's a third thing. And the. They're all different things, right? In the last, I don't know, five years, 10 years, there's been a lot of online discussion about how to improve syllabi. And my very, my syllabus now begins with a preamble, which is something that I never would have thought of beforehand. And the preamble, it's really simple, right? All it says is your success is important to me. And if you need help, if you have any questions or you just want at any time, please see me throughout the semester.

Seth Offenbach [00:10:00]:

Right? And it's my way of kind of letting my students know that I am there for them. Right? That's my goal. I am your partner in learning. I tell them throughout the semester, my job is to help you. It's not just to teach you. Obviously I want to do that, but my job is to help you. There's no question that they have that is too, too small, too annoying, too boring. If you have a question, I'm helping you.

Seth Offenbach [00:10:24]:

Colleges are really intimidating places with weird lingo, weird language, weird everything. I mean, just for a second, what is a bursar? What's an ombudsperson? These are weird things that people don't necessarily know. And especially in a school where you have a lot of first generation students, the professor is the face of the college in a lot of ways. And we have to kind of remember that, that if our students have a question, if they have a question about advising or financial aid, I may not know the answer. I probably don't. I know nothing about financial aid. I'm pretty clear about that. But at the same point in time I do know who to ask, right? I know which person in financial aid office is going to answer my emails and so I can help connect them and facilitate those things.

Seth Offenbach [00:11:03]:

And that's my goal, to remind them, is that the syllabus is there to kind of lay things out for them. The syllabus is there to kind of help them a little bit and guide them. And so I begin with that preamble, right? I begin a little bit about myself and how I'm there to help them. And then I lay out some flexible policies which I have for them, which I think is kind of the second half of this.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:11:25]:

Wait, I just. I'm sure you're gonna say it, but, but the flexible deadlines have to do with, you know something? We all do poop when the poop happens. I mentioned earlier when life happens. But you've literally got poop happens policy. Tell us about the when poop happens.

Seth Offenbach [00:11:39]:

Yes, I have a sentence on my syllabus that talks about poop happening and it has a nice little poop emoji because as I tell my students, poop happens to everybody.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:11:48]:

Yes, it does.

Seth Offenbach [00:11:49]:

And we all miss deadlines. And one of the things I talk about in the article is that I. And as you mentioned earlier in the introduction, right. I edit book reviews and I edit basically almost 100 reviews a year. And if half of them are turned in on time, I'd be shocked. Right? Professors miss deadlines left, right and center. If you have any doubt, ask the secretary in your department how often professors forget to fill out forms. And I think that we know this because that's how the world works, right? There's always deadlines and then there are Deadlines.

Seth Offenbach [00:12:16]:

And then there are real deadlines, right? We don't miss. Most professors, I assume, don't miss the deadline on when the grades are due, right? Because we know that's a hard deadline. But you know, my school, we have midterm grades, and everyone knows that after the midterm grades are due, they're going to send out a second email saying if you didn't turn them in yet, you have another week. Because really, you know, they're due, but they're not. But they don't do that. They don't extend the final grades. Right? We understand the difference between hard and soft deadlines. And so I tell my students the same thing.

Seth Offenbach [00:12:44]:

I'm going to give you a deadline. Everything is due on a certain day. And the point of the deadline for me is to make sure that you continue moving forward with your work, to give you optimal time to work on your work and to give me time to grade your work, right? Because I structure my deadline so that all of my students work isn't due on the same day, so I can give you feedback in a reasonable deadline. But if poop happens, if something happens, if for any reason you don't get your work done on time, just tell me. You get an extension. Every student can get one extension without any questions asked throughout the semester. All you have to do is ask it in advance. You don't have to give me a reason, you don't have to give me an explanation.

Seth Offenbach [00:13:19]:

I don't need a doctor's note, I don't need a death certificate. I don't need a photo of your car. Or as one student once sent me a picture of her eye because she had pink eye. I don't need to see that. It's gross. What I need from you is for you to just ask for it. And so in that respect, it very much parallels the real world, so to speak, because most real jobs, if you're going to miss a deadline, you just have to tell your boss. And then once they get the deadline, once they ask for the extension, they get as much time as they need.

Seth Offenbach [00:13:47]:

In some cases, they have even more time, right? So sometimes they'll say to me, I only need a day or two to turn this in. And I said, that's nice, but you can have two weeks. Because I know that in a day or two you haven't started anything on that paper, right? And it's not going to be a good paper. And my goal is for you to produce good quality work. It's not for you to produce good quality work by my artificial deadline. And there are, I will say that I do have one real deadline. Right. The day of the final exam, everything has to be turned in.

Seth Offenbach [00:14:13]:

There's no exceptions to that. And I make that clear then. Right. The entire semester, I reiterate, that is a hard deadline. I'm not holding up the class's grades because you're late.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:14:22]:

Yeah, I think it's so helpful to be thinking through those things. I have a colleague who teaches in our communication discipline and she also distinguishes between hard and soft deadlines. And it is, I just want to mention this for people who, for example, if you do group projects and in her case she has the groups give feedback to each other and she's preparing people to go out and work in creative fields. And as you mentioned, Seth, there are some soft deadlines in the creative fields, but there are also some real hard deadlines. And in order for her to facilitate the communication involved in giving effective peer feedback, then some of the major project milestones that require that feedback mechanism, either from her or from the other students in the class, then those are treated as more hard deadlines. You also mentioned, Seth, I want people to make sure to hear this, that we need to make sure that we're being empathetic about realizing how many other classes students are likely taking. And this is something that I have to remind myself. It's just it, it's too hard to carry all these different policies around in our heads or expect our students to do so.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:15:34]:

So it's something you need to reiterate often throughout your class and particularly in the, in the corporate training field they call this just in time or JIT training. But it's like when would you need to know the information about that final exam in your case being it that there's no exceptions. I could tell by the way that you're saying that that that's something that gets communicated not only in the syllabus at the start of a semester when I didn't have any real context of what my life was going to look like, let alone this class, but that this is a cadence. And I know you have some tips to give us about student in general, but I am wondering if there's anything else you want to say about flexible deadlines or the syllabus before we get to our final set of practical techniques from you around communication.

Seth Offenbach [00:16:19]:

Sure. I will say that first off, calling it a poop happens extension does help to kind of the students remember that a little more.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:16:26]:

Yeah, I'm sure that they do. Yeah. I wanted to ask you too about the poop is do you track that in any way? So logistically speaking, if I email you because I remember poop happens policy, is that something that you try to jot down somewhere in a system so that you remember how many times it happens? What's the logistics behind tracking if you do it?

Seth Offenbach [00:16:48]:

I do have a tracking system for myself and I change the color of the grade. And you can only get a poop happens extension once because after that I, you know, I need you to start doing things on time because one of the things I don't want you to do, which by the way, just to be clear, I'll let you do this, but I hate what you do for doing it is turning everything in the last day of the semester. Because if you turn in the end of the semester, you're not really learning, you're not getting feedback, you're kind of rushing everything. I don't like that. I don't think that's real good learning. I will allow it. I will offer some penalties about that, but I'm not going to necessarily fail you for that. You're also ain't going to get an A.

Seth Offenbach [00:17:22]:

But one, one extension one time, not a big deal. So I do track it to make sure that you're not doing one. If you miss a deadline after that you get penalized. But the penalty is what I call low. So you lose basically a letter grade. So you know, an A becomes a B, a B becomes a C. You can still pass the assignment if you're doing it a second time. And just to be clear, my students don't take advantage of this and everyone turns things in late.

Seth Offenbach [00:17:45]:

You know, in spring of 23, which is the last time I calculated the stats, 70% of students turn to assignments in on time. So they understand that the deadline is as much for them as it is for me. Right? The deadline is there to get them to turn the material in because they can't do it all at once. But a third of that came in late and of the late stuff, it was actually most of it was turned in without the extent the poop happens extension. Because you have to ask that, like my one catch that I'm like, you have to ask in advance. I will say yes, but you have to ask because I am trying to teach them that kind of level of courtesy and

professionalism of two way communication. Oh, I know I'm not going to make it. Here's where I ask.

Seth Offenbach [00:18:25]:

And so they turn it in late. It's not a Big deal. It's a couple days late. Usually most of the time it's late. It is within a week. But I give them the flexibility to be later. And I will say one last thing about this is that most professors who I know are really, really flexible on deadlines, in which case, if you're putting it on the syllabus, if you're putting it on the assignment, and if you're reminding students of the extension policy and being transparent about it, you're actually being more equitable. So it is kindness, it reduces their stress, and it's more equitable because otherwise the system works of some people ask for the extension and some people just turn it in late.

Seth Offenbach [00:19:04]:

And the people who asked don't get penalized, and the people who don't ask do get penalized. And that's not fair. And so I think that this is also a way to be a little bit more transparent, a little bit more honest, equitable and kind.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:19:15]:

Yeah, so much. You're also reminding me about people whose work I've followed for such a long time, including Jesse Stommel. And he just wrote a piece. I'm going to see if I can find it. But he just wrote a piece about rereading his syllabus. I mean, and again, he's been teaching for a very long time. And that every time his work is.

Seth Offenbach [00:19:35]:

Great, by the way.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:19:35]:

Oh, my gosh, every time he rereads his syllabus, he'll find creeping in there some language that doesn't resonate with his current perspectives on. On who our students are. And it's so easy to you, you can just. If you don't spend the reflective time. And we've all been there, right? But if you don't spend that time to go, is this really like, is there another line in here? Like, I wouldn't say that that way today. And this kindness of pedagogy is, to me, a continual evolution. Will never quite be there because it's impossible to have true empathy and understanding for where students may find ourselves. But it's kind of one of those, once you know, then you are responsible for taking action and how important it can be to reread that student.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:20:22]:

And of course, we also can even think about those faculty who have annotated syllabi. I'm thinking of Raymie Collier's work where we might even find out even more, where there's language that either generates questions that didn't need to be there or perhaps just isn't written in such a way as to be reflective. Of the high expectations we want to have. The. You're mentioning the preamble of, you know, this is me, I'm here to support you. Well, why would you need support? Well, because there's some empathy in that, but also there's the. This is going to be a good challenge. It's going to be something worth your, worth your effort because there's going to be some transformation and learning that happens in our time together.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:21:08]:

What do you have to tell us about student communication and how vital that is throughout your classes?

Seth Offenbach [00:21:16]:

Right. So, you know, as a general background to me is I basically teach two types of classes or two modalities rather. I teach the traditional face to face in person classrooms and I teach the online asynchronous. I actually hate the online synchronous kind because I hate looking at zoom all day and talking on zoom. And then three fourths of the cameras are off and two cameras are on and one of those cameras you have to tell them to turn off because they're not fully clothed or something. You know, I don't like that modality. So I prefer the asynchronous for me, where people can really engage the classroom at their own timeframe. But that's really isolating, right.

Seth Offenbach [00:21:53]:

It's really hard to be a student in a classroom where there's no classroom that you're a student in, where the classroom is your bedroom, your living room, your dining room, your car, library, wherever it is. Right. It's really isolating. And learning is tough to begin with and it's even tougher when it is isolating. And faculty can limit isolation. They can limit it through group work activities, through discussion boards, through online discussion sessions. But honestly, those are all pretty poor substitutes for real world connections. And so one of the things that I do is I have to, in order to truly be kind, you have to create a safe space for the students where they feel that they can come to you, talk to you and list learn with you.

Seth Offenbach [00:22:33]:

And so I actually mandate my students to communicate with me every week and the communication, I will meet them where they are. Right. A lot of students, the majority of the students, they like to text people. They don't pick up

the phone and call you. So I don't make you call me. They don't have a clue what email is. Did you read my email? Oh, yeah, I should check that. No, they prefer to text as their primary modality.

Seth Offenbach [00:22:55]:

But honestly, any one of those things that you prefer, if you prefer calling me, you have my phone number. If you prefer texting me. You have my phone number. If you prefer emailing me, I actually prefer that, but that's okay. You can email me if you want to schedule a zoom session or a chat session, you can do all those, right? Any modality you want is up to you. But you have to reach out to me every week. And the point to that really is 98% of the time it's for you to say, hey, professor, I got all the work done, thumbs up 2% of the time. I'm going to ask follow up questions of, oh, what did you like? What did you learn? Did you have any struggles? Sometimes I'll just get, literally give them a thumbs up to a text message.

Seth Offenbach [00:23:30]:

If, if I really think that they're on track, if I notice their grades on their work is a little bit low, I might ask them, hey, are you happy with your grades? If they say no, let's talk about how we can improve them. What are you doing with note taking? How are you reading? When are you reading, what mode are you reading? Or are you listening to an audiobook? These are kind of different ways where I can ask them what they're doing and what they can, how they could possibly get improved. And it also sets up a foundation of conversation for when the poop does happen. Right. Because something is going to happen to everybody at some point in time in the semester where you're going to fall a little bit behind. And this kind of gives you that opportunity for them to say, oh, professor, you know, I ran into this problem and then we can brainstorm together. And so it's because we already have that foundation of discussion. And so I do mandate communication, one on one communication with me throughout the semester, literally every single week.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:24:22]:

And what mechanism, if any, do you use for tracking that?

Seth Offenbach [00:24:26]:

That is probably the biggest pain in the, you know what out there talking about it. I do, I do. It is logistically a little bit tough. It means during the workday, my computer is always open with my gradebook. So if I get a text message from a student or if I get a phone call from a student, I literally log it with a point to give them that kind of, that point. If I know I'm not going to be around my computer that day, or if I know I'm going out, I have a little notepad on my phone that I

can just add their name to it so I can put it in later because I do have to log it and then I, I do have to log it into my computer. But, you know, that's the online Synchronous environment, that's what it is, is that it requires a little bit more of that. My classes are set up at the start of the semester, right? That you have my recorded lectures that maybe I've made some changes to in the summer.

Seth Offenbach [00:25:09]:

You have my readings that I've set up. You have your work. A lot of it is logistical communication, especially at the start of the semester when everyone's still feeling out our footing and students are like, oh, I actually, you know, the first two weeks, half a third of the students are like, oh, you actually meant I had to communicate with you. Yes, I did. And so it takes a little bit of extra work and logistical work to do that. But I find it really does pay off, especially at the end of the semester.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:25:33]:

I've mentioned a few times over, gosh, over probably a few years now, about really wrestling with the gradebook and struggling with making it work for me. And I wish I had the person's name in front of me. I'm not always able to do what the Internet calls hat tips, as in to acknowledge the person who wrote to me. Someone wrote to me and said exactly what you're talking about you can do. They said, I think you use the canvas learning management system. I think you've mentioned that at some point you can. What I was wanting to do was adopt a form of alternative grading where it's graded not based on points, but based on you did it or you didn't. I can tell by the fact that you just mentioned it being one point for you.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:26:15]:

It's a relatively small stakes kind of communication. I just wanted to mention, though, to people who may have been listening for a while, that the person who wrote to me, gosh, quite some time ago now, I did experiment, rather than experiment on one of my classes where I felt like I wouldn't have known what I was doing. I experimented with a faculty learning community, a book club, actually, that we did on John Warner's More Than Words. And the faculty loved it. They loved this. Just if you go to the grade book and other learning management systems have similar things to mark something as complete or not complete. When you go to the gradebook, it just looks like a check mark and there's, I mean, even though it still turns into binary data, I mean, it's numeric data like ultimately on the back end that is represented not by the character of a check mark, but it is represented by a number ultimately. And I think that's what I was trying to say previously, but it worked really well for me.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:27:12]:

And so I did want to just share with people who would like to adopt something like what Seth is talking about, that you can have specific assignments just be marked as complete or incomplete. Even if behind the scenes they will have points associated. I thought that worked so well. You go to that grade book and there is just something psychological about a check mark over points that I feel now compelled to continue with the experimentation and thinking about it. And I wanted to mention one other thing. It doesn't fit perfectly for what Seth just described. So I don't have a magic panacea for you, Seth. But another colleague does something somewhat similar to what Seth is describing.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:27:53]:

Actually, I think it's more around when people turn things in late or some such thing. But she'll have you start the semester out with the full number of points. You're complete, you're done. And it is only then when you miss a deadline or when you miss something. Maybe you could apply this actually around communication. Then it's a rubric that she can just go in and quickly check. Which eventually brings things down, brings the points down for what have you. It's all on the back end.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:28:25]:

Done. But I kind of think there's something also psychologically nice about you start out and then you're just maintaining that versus that. It starts out with a zero. And sometimes that just that communication isn't as streamlined. But I still agree with you, Seth. There are no magic bullets when it comes to these things. But I think we should all continue to learn from one another what's working and what's not so that it can be more manageable. Yet something like this is just so important.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:28:52]:

I'm hearing so much from you. Your students know that you're there. They know that you're present. And then when the poop does happen, because it's gonna happen for all of us. I mean, it can happen for you too, actually.

Seth Offenbach [00:29:06]:

Absolutely.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:29:07]:

Seth and I had to reschedule slightly today's interview. Cause poop happened in his life. So I think we should all be kind to ourselves as well in recognizing that we're gonna need these kinds of setting a culture, that kind of acknowledgement for people so that we are more approachable to them and

can still have those high expectations, but be doing it with kindness. Well, this is the time in the show where we each get to share our recommendations. And I just have one thing I wanted to share today. I've shared a number of blog posts from Seth Godin over the years. And this particular one is so representative of how I've approached this podcast for all of these years, and I'm just gonna read most of it to you because it's not that long. It's called the one to one method.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:29:56]:

Quote. The reason that most memos, speeches and edicts fall flat is simple. We get stuck on the idea that we're talking to a crowd when we're speaking or writing. The crowd is just an illusion. What's actually happening is that there is one person over there, another over there, repeated again and again until it's easier to imagine it's a mass audience. The alternative method is simple. Find one person, exactly one, and write to them, allowing the others to listen in, embrace the tone of voice, body posture, breathing style and punctuation you'd use just on one person, you and me, here and now. If it's not going to work for one person, why do we think it will work on a crowd? And I like this idea.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:30:54]:

I have had, it's changed over the years, but I've always had kind of the one person trying to think about shrinking an audience down to one person. There's something that, that does to coming across less nervous, coming across more caring, more empathetic, more able to relate. Those thinking with a critical lens right now, though, can realize that that could have its problems. Right? So my one person may not be as reflective of the diverse students that I serve. And so I did just want to mention I'd probably modify Seth's advice to us to be thinking about Personas. And in design, thinking that a Persona is, is a big part of that. And so we could think about, when I was reading something Seth's this, by the way, I realized how confusing this is getting because I'm quoting Seth Godin while talking to Seth off and back. But, you know, we can, we can all handle this, but you can actually.

Seth Offenbach [00:31:47]:

This is impressive because there are not a lot of Seth's out there, but I appreciate it.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:31:49]:

Yes, you could think about Personas of the types of students that you serve. So I don't know, do you? Yeah, sometimes you can start with one just to kind of try to get your feet wet. But does that eventually grow to three to five different Personas of the most types of students that you might serve, but just to be able to help them. And by the way, if you are a user of artificial intelligence, that is

something that it can help you with to think through the Personas of the people that you teach and to begin to define those things that might draw. Then when you're thinking about using universal design for learning and what kinds. I don't know about you, but I'll get lost in that sometimes and feel like universal design for learning is just I have to think about 3,700 ways to do it. So if we can narrow it down a little bit to be targeted to the types of students we serve, it helps for me to really design more effectively. And anyway, his one resonated with me and I thought about all the ways I've used that particular technique over this podcast and in my writing and in my teaching, et cetera.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:32:54]:

So, Seth, I'm gonna pass it over to you for whatever you'd like to recommend.

Seth Offenbach [00:32:58]:

You know, I have to say that that quote really was beautiful. And if you really think about it, it really can apply to the asynchron learning environment too. Right? Because you don't know who you're teaching quite the same way you do in a traditional face to face classroom. But as you said, you don't know who everyone is. And so that's why kindness allows you to kind of be more flexible when you realize the person you're talking to is not the person you had envisioned. My recommendation is going to be something a little bit different. I'm going to recommend a book. It's a book I read last summer and thought about assigning to my students.

Seth Offenbach [00:33:30]:

I didn't end up doing it, but I've been thinking about it for the last year and recommending it to all my friends. So I'm like, all right, that's it. We're reading it in the classroom this year. The book *Master Slave, Husband, Wife* by Ilyon Woo. I hope I didn't mispronounce her last her first name. It won the Pulitzer Prize, I think, last year or two years ago. And it was, it's just this really engaging book about two slaves and how they ran away in the late 1840s, early 1850s, and what their journey was both out of the south and once they got to the north and they were able to escape because the female slave was able to pass as white. And so it really kind of contextualizes a lot of race and slavery.

Seth Offenbach [00:34:11]:

But also you really understand from that book how the US was pulled apart in the 1860s and why the Civil War happened. I think it just kind of gives a whole lot of great context. It's really well writing written, really engaging, and hopefully my students like it this semester. I'll tell you in about four months or so. But it was a really good book. So that's what I'm going to Recommend.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:34:32]:

Thank you so much. I always enjoy getting to hear book recommendations and my book *Cup Overfloweth* and that's such a good problem to have. I love it so much.

Seth Offenbach [00:34:42]:

I agree with both statements.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:34:43]:

Yes. When reading John Warner's book *More Than Words*, he taught us the taught me the Japanese word. There's a Japanese word for having a very large to read book pile. I think I'm not quoting this perfectly, but I was like, I need to memorize that Japanese word because so many of us live that life of absolutely.

Seth Offenbach [00:35:02]:

The book that gets thrown onto the pile.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:04]:

Yes. Yes. Thank you so much for your generosity in coming and joining me on Teaching in Higher Ed for this wonderful article that of course I hope people will go and read. It is chock full of the kinds of advice that Seth has shared with us today. And I just so appreciate your time.

Seth Offenbach [00:35:20]:

Thank you for doing this. Thank you for having me. It's a great podcast. And also, I'll just say about the article, it's open source, which is even better for everybody.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:28]:

Even better.

Seth Offenbach [00:35:29]:

Thank you for having me.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:30]:

Yeah. And thanks for mentioning that. Yeah, I don't think that would have been obvious to people. You got to go click the link. Thanks so much. Thanks once again to Seth Offenbach for joining me on today's episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. Today's episode was produced by me, Bonni Stachowiak. It was edited by the ever talented Andrew Kroeger. Podcast production support was provided by the amazing Sierra Priest.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:53]:

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