

# Reflections of an Advancing Professional

Scott Silverman

As I entered into the fifth year of my current position, I found myself waist-deep in files I had collected over the years. My mission: to get rid of unnecessary stuff, update my work portfolio, and prepare materials pertaining to my position for my eventual successor. Granted, I've gone through my files before. In fact, I've referred to them repeatedly: ideas from prior NODA conferences, notes scrawled in the margins of my program books, responses to orientation-related inquiries from students. I skimmed out materials I no longer needed—recycling some, reusing the single-sided paper in my printer, and shredding other content.

Then I discovered a neat packet that dates back to my original, on-campus interview for this position, including the original job listing, a spare curriculum vita (printed on one of ten types of resume paper I had purchased for that job search), the outline for the on-campus interview, my handwritten notes from the committee interview and lunch with senior administrators, and a presentation I delivered on a plan of implementation to support first-year student success. This sparked a great deal of reflection of my career to date and what I've learned in this role.

I value the entirety of my experiences with the students here. I love seeing students grow and develop during their time at the university. To play a role in that growth is a great feeling. I hope that at least a few of the students I have had the opportunity to supervise and mentor may go into student affairs, present at conferences, and work on college campuses. I'd like to think that I've made my mark on campus as a professional, as I did before as a student (yes, this is my *alma mater*). Sure, I've made mistakes along the way, but I've learned from each one. I've also challenged myself to keep a fresh perspective and stay excited about the work I do.

Here are some ways for all of us in student affairs to challenge ourselves and take time to reflect on our own journeys:

- 1) Experienced professionals: Spend some time reminiscing about your first orientation-specific job. What did you enjoy most about it? What did you enjoy the least? How did you learn from your mistakes? What decisions got you to where you are now? How can you help new and advancing professionals move forward in their careers?
- 2) Advancing professionals: Go through your file cabinets. You'll be pleasantly surprised by what you find in there. Some of the resources that you no longer need could be passed on to others in your department or

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campus. Some content related to your program can be donated to the university archives, while other material like payment-related documents, can be shredded (in accordance with your record-keeping procedures). What will you do with the years of materials you find in your office? Perhaps they will inspire new ideas or recall old plans that you want to incorporate in your work.

- 3) New professionals: If you think you're a pack-rat, try not to keep everything in your file cabinet. File and organize what you do keep. Check out what is already in your file cabinet. What did your predecessor leave for you? What has your supervisor passed on to you for reference? What system will you use for filing?
- 4) Graduate students: Find someone you can go to for career advice. It may be your faculty advisor or your supervisor from a graduate assistantship or job. It could even be people you worked with or worked for as an undergraduate, when you first discovered that student affairs was your passion. Pick a person (or two or three) and meet with them to ask if they'll be your mentor. Ask them what they see for you in 3-5 years post-graduation? Do they recommend getting a doctorate? What might your second job after graduation look like?

A wise person once said to me that you can tell a lot about a person's work performance by what they do when they are transitioning out of a job. I would like to think that when I do eventually move on, I will have left this position, and the programs with which I worked, much stronger than when I started them. I hope that the work I did to develop our program and organize our resources will enable whoever comes next to propel this program to great heights for our students.