Welcome to Bush School in court. We're doing something a little bit different today. We were coming to you live from Facebook Live on our Facebook page with no announcements. So, we are surprising them today. We have a wonderful guest today at the Bush School, the student government associations diversity and inclusion committee brought us in a wonderful guest speaker and she was kind enough to give us some time after the event to chat with both myself and Kenny Taylor, Professor Kenny Taylor who has been on the podcast before now you get to see what we look like here together.

Yes, they have the website.

I'll introduce ourselves. So, just give us the, if you would, just a brief background about you and how you ended up here with us today.

Great. Well first of all, thank you all for having me here at the Bush school. It's been a really exciting time and it's my first visit at Texas A&M University and I am impressed.

And you've got a t-shirt.

And I got a t-shirt. Yes. Howdy! Well, so, my name is Zillah Fluker and I was born in Zimbabwe, Africa. I grew up in London, England and in Birmingham, Alabama. I went on to Alabama State University, undergraduate and finished up two master's degrees at Purdue University. I spent the first half of my career, I've been working for about 18 years now, in corporate America with Motorola, United Technologies Corporation, Carrier and Honeywell. And then in 2010, I had an opportunity to shift gears and go and serve at my own [inaudible 00:01:52] where I was hired on as chief development officer, and subsequently promoted to be the vice president of institution advancement, and I was there until 2017.

Okay.

I took another institution advancement position at another HBCU. But in the midst of that, I understood or got a chance to learn about this whole student engagement thing. And, typically you don't think of advancing officer's focusing on student engagement. But, I would say my biggest take takeaway from the HBCU experience. And in 2016 I started getting really active in social media. I started a PHD program at Alabama State University in Ed leadership and I decided to focus my research on social media as student engagement. So, it brought two of the things I was interested in together. And I'll be finishing my PHD hopefully this semester if things go well. But in '16 I also started my own company Activate Elevate, which is a digital content social media marketing firm, basically managing individual organization, colleges and universities and nonprofit social media platforms, building strategy in some cases doing the day to day. I'm actually working with a couple of elected officials right now as well. But, then I also have a mentor who wrote this book and the book, "Why Not When"...

[inaudible 00:03:20]

Sure. "Why Not When", you can get it on amazon.com, Barnes and nobles and Books-A-Million. But, "Why Not When" was something that was a great set of lessons that Larry Dorington shares his story. And, from that I recommended that we consider launching a nonprofit, basically the leadership institute. And, we did that and actually started this past January at the University of Alabama in Birmingham with out first [inaudible 00:03:45]. And, hopefully we'll get a chance to take that to colleges and universities across the country. And those are my two things. I'm married to my college sweetheart, Kwame Fluker and we have two amazing little roommates, Colon Fluker and Anderson Fluker.

Okay. Nice. So I have two questions and I'll let you decide which one to answer first. I'm interested in kind of a unique experience both being an immigrant and then working in a variety of different fields. So, you've worked in the private sector, you've worked for higher Ed and you're in the midst of doing some nonprofit work as well. So, one of the things I'll be interested in is some of the different challenges for, say, our students as they go from here trying to navigate the spaces between private sector companies, nonprofit and working for a university. Because, one of the things we know, at least I think, is those environments aren't exactly the same. They are organizations of course, but they're not exactly the same. And, so I would be curious about that. And, then I'd also be curious about your dissertation. We've been trying to ramp up our student engagement efforts through social media. That's how we're broadcasting as podcast right now. It's our main source of marketing for our podcasts, so any free tips that we might have on things that students do like or platforms they're using or things we could do to better engage our students through social media?

Sure. Definitely. Let's talk about navigating across the different spaces. You have to be completely out of your mind, and I'm convinced that I'm out of my mind, because you can't be married to any ways of doing things. Okay? You think moving from institution to institution, that different ways of doing the same thing, you factor in moving from industry or environment to environment. The private sector I think tends to be very definitive as to how you enter it. I think they're starting to be a little bit more flexible around that now, but it used to be I've go my MBA or an engineering or a finance degree to get into the private sector and that that degree usually had to be tied very much to whatever that industry or that organization is. But, the piece you want to talk more about is the movement in between.

I spent time in human resources, and I studied organizational behavior at Purdue University. And, what I would say people need to spend time focusing on is the transferable skills and being able to apply those skills regardless of the setting. Because the truth of the matter is a nonprofit leader, a CEO of corporation and an entrepreneur, all have pretty much the same daily agenda, right? To save or reduced costs for things to happen within a budget and for those things to have a level of impact. And, so the fundamentals are the same. What's different is the kind of talent that you bring in, as well as the norms, if you may. It may be the dress code might be a little bit more flexible or a little less flexible. And I think if I were giving someone advice around their career, I would say don't limit yourself. And, that it can be done. They would navigate across all three, I would argue, effortlessly.

Don't get me wrong, when I was applying to higher Ed, I had this very corporate resume and because I was going into a fundraising job, I had to show that I had done some fundraising before and all the fundraising I had done before was in a board capacity. So, I had to modify my resume to highlight the fundraising results and all the boards that I had served on just to give context in my experience versus, you know, just kind of having my board experience at the bottom, you know, boys and girls club and so forth. So, you might have to shape yourself a little differently.

But in this day and age, there's so many great examples that people can pull to make those transitions. I think it was easier going from corporate into higher Ed. I've seen people do it the other way and I've seen challenges, and that's just because the rigor tends to be a little bit more so on the... And let me be careful with all my higher Ed friends out there, I have not in any way, actually to my dissertation committee, in no way saying that it's not rigorous, but it's just the time is a little bit faster there with the quarterly financial reviews and so forth because you're dealing with Nasdaq everyday saying how you're doing.

So it's very different.

Yeah, the pace is different. Yes. Thank you.

We're still doing a lot in the private sector at the executive level and we have good laughs about... I'll start a project and I'll say to them, you know, I might have this funding in six months, we might have a paper in two years. And they're like, what is wrong with you? Like our deadlines or tomorrow and yesterday. We don't think years out for like an individual project for one person. We have to adapt and adjust. And I think that's a good highlighting difference between private sector and universities because they have different missions, right? The private sector is always fighting competition, always trying to increase their profits. Where one of the universities functions sort of maybe like some government entities is to be there for a while, right? We don't want the president of A&M running around fighting, taking on every innovative thing, if the risk is so high that we might lose the organization.

Absolutely.

Whereas the private sector, now this isn't true of all when you think of larger entities like some of the ones you've worked with and they probably are a good bit about maintaining as well. But I I think the pace is one that really we could highlight as being different. What do you think some of those transferrable skills are? Just a couple of them.

Well, communications. You know, there's this category of skills that people call soft skills. I don't think we should ever refer to those school skills as soft skill, but rather the essential skills. I mentioned in my talk earlier in my years of being in HR rarely did people get terminated, or bad reviews because they didn't technically understand. They were great electrical engineers or amazing finance professionals. It really boiled down to those things that we're calling soft, those critical skills, how they communicated with each other, how they related to other people, how they operate in a team setting. I think when you can be certain that you're strong as an individual in those areas, you interviewed differently, you have had different results professionally and you can speak to more interesting scenarios. You also have to, I think, take the time to come to contextualize what that organization you're trying to enter values and figure out a way to align what experiences you have to be able to spend time talking about and showcasing those things. And, that way you can better shape your story.

We all do a lot more than we're able to put on a resume. The purpose of our resumes to highlight what we think that particular audience wants to see or wants to understand. The value of the interview is being able to put context and color behind that. So, I think being able to identify those critical skills, which have historically been called soft skills, as an emphasis, you have to have some basic technical aptitude. But beyond that, I think those are the two primary areas you want to focus on and being able to package right and present those in a way that's relevant to the organization's mission here.

One of the things that I really liked about your talk today that I agree with that you're highlighting here and that I also hear from friends in the private sector and see play out with my students. You know, almost everyone that gets that position, at least a lot of these levels is technically qualified to do it. Where they really ended up getting tripped up as their relationships and interactions in the workplace. And one of the things that you highlighted that I have been spending time working on in my own life is not being reactive. When something happens rather than jumping up and down and saying, why would someone question me, who do they think they are to tell me what to do, to pause and think a little bit more critically about, okay, maybe this is about something else, maybe this isn't about me personally and whether or not I'm weak or not. Maybe, it's just someone's trying to be helpful or maybe someone has identified some weakness that I don't have. As a young professional here, I've run into this before and I'm like, you can't tell me what to do. I'm my own boss.

I'm going to die on this hill today cause I'm so frustrated and how dare you question me. Right? And as I realize some of the negative consequences of that, I've tried to develop my own strategies for when something's happening rather than having these strong reactions, be able to have enough kind of presence of mind, to be aware of what's going on in the situation rather than having my immediate response. And, one of the questions that you got today was how to do that better. And just since we're talking about it, one of the things that's worked for me is mindfulness. And so there's a decent amount of evidence on this as well. But if you can sit and be quiet and practice being present, that in those moments when you're likely to be triggered or likely to have a strong reaction, it's like a skill. It's just like your brain's just like a muscle and you're just training it. So, then there's moments you can have that presence of mind and be aware because I can struggle with that.

So, let's talk a little bit about social media since that's another interest to learn words if you don't mind. We're trying out Facebook live, which is still a relatively new phenomenon. I've done some of these with my own podcasts that I have and for some of our professional associations. But, this is one way of trying to better use social media. Any basic tips for us at Bush School In Court cause we're trying to be engaging with our students more?

Yeah. One of the things that I've learned through clients on the social media side, specifically in higher ed, is that consistency is key. Social media platforms offer so many different tools and so many different components and new things are rolling out all the time. But, if you have a target audience that you wanted to engage and you're wanting to engage and you want to see that engagement increase, one of the most critical factors is to be very consistent. Not suggesting that everything be uniformed, but what happens with social media is that people started to buy into it and they start going to certain pages looking for certain information and in their minds they start developing a prescription or a specific subscription to a certain kind of content come from a certain source. And, the way to get into social media game as an organization or as a professor or as a department is to develop something that you do consistently.

Not to say that you can't stray away from that on occasion, but guaranteeing your audience that you're going to be able to get, I don't know, public policies, statistics every single Thursday. And that's why you have successful campaigns like Man Crush Monday, Throwback Thursday, Women Crush Wednesday, all these different things. They kind of come from the fact that people go looking for certain things and that helps with engagement level. I think on the higher Ed side, it's also important to understand the audiences that exist and why some of our students are on certain platforms. The current college student today, maybe not the graduate student with a current college student today for example, has a presence on Facebook, but their why is because they want grandma to see that they got good grades. They want grandma to see the graduation pictures, right? That's how the gifts come in, aunts and uncles. But that's not really their social media platform. They'll spend a lot of time on Snapchat doing really cool and fun things there because in their minds they think that's going to disappear. Which we all know is not true. Once it's digitize, it's permanent. But, I think it's important on the faculty side is to be sensitive to all the different platforms and to be willing to try to meet the students where they are.

Because you know, I was just reading, we keep talking about millennials, they're not the audience anymore. It's this generation Z and it talked about how the millennials are technology dependent. And, this next generation is technology reliant. They were talking about the difference. One being, just a little more intimate, you were born at a time when the things that we view as new technology we're already here. And, so they've gotten to a point where they have a certain level of expectation and I think we will all have to evolve in our communications platforms to be able to engage that individual either there's a student or as an employee.

Yeah, one of the things that I've certainly noticed now that I still think of myself as 19. Right? So I still think... My nieces and nephews have dissolved me of that illusion by spending time with them. And I think that's exactly true. We've been actually talking with a couple of students who help us with the podcast and just over the past two weeks we've been having this debate, which platform should we be on? And then one of the big things that we've talked about is if we're going to be on them, we need to be using them regularly and in an organized way rather than if you have a Twitter and you use it once a month or three days in a row and then don't use it again, that's not particularly helpful. And, so we've been trying to figure out what's our bandwidth, you know, cause people were, helping out. And so we don't want to put too much on any one student. So we don't want to do five social media platforms when we really only have the capacity for two.

Sure.

And then there's this, so Facebook started in '04 and I started college in '05. So for me, we're using Facebook, Facebook's the one, right? It's the one that I use. Its the one that I'm comfortable with it. And, so it's been really hard for me to adapt to Instagram and to Snapchat. My wife is much better. I learned Snapchat from my wife, thankfully.

Another thing that I didn't mention is, along with consistency, and I see organizations do this a lot, is they'll create the platform and they'll be consistent. They'll provide a lot of content, but they don't interact. They don't respond. Something as simple as acknowledging a comment when a like, means a lot. One, it tells audience that their feedback is valuable even though there's no real commentary on it. They say that all of us are, if you're on social media, you have some level of a mental addiction. So, I think there's some truth to that because we do often will post something and then minutes later we're going in to see if anything is helping. And so, I think that people sort of want to get some kind of reaction. And I think when big organizations can react, it's valuable and add value to engagement.

But it can hurt us as organizations and/or maybe as a faculty member, with a particular audience, if you get something as simple as a question and no one ever responds to it. I saw a post just this morning. There was a university that started a new partnership with another university, with current students, and a former student from [inaudible 00:19:33] university just wanted to know that it applied to all students and there was absolutely no response. And then someone responded, we'll probably not. And it just went into a very negative arena. And so, now you have lost control of his great announcement because you didn't choose to engage your audience. So, engagement is key.

I know one of the things that we get responses or questions from many nonprofit organizations and definitely here locally is where do you start? Because the number of requests that we get that are specific to, we have no social media going on a local nonprofit organization and it's tough for them. And the reason why they reach out to us is to ask if students can help. And a big part of our culture here at the Bush school is for enriching students experiences while they're here. So, any recommendations as to if a nonprofit organization is literally doing nothing, zero on the social media side, where can they start?

Wow, I'm in the middle of the series right now on my social media. It's called Start Somewhere.

Okay.

And, it's really more for individuals who have these great ideas and want to be entrepreneurs. But I think the formula applies the same. I call it the five points. The Simba points, in my native tongue means being strength. And the S stands for sacrifice. So, if a nonprofit is limited resource, they had to figure out how they are going to carve out some times. Someone's gonna have to carve out some time, even if it's one hour from your daily schedule or two hours from your weekly schedule as the executive director that you're going to devote that time. So find where you're gonna make sacrifice.

The second is invest, and it's a similar one to sacrifice. Oftentimes when people hear invest, they think money. It's not always money. I can be the time. It can be choosing to redeploy a resource in another direction to help gather content. It can be investing that extra minute. At the end of our talk, I said hey everyone let's get a picture, but just asking, people that understand that they can be information gatherers or the content developers.

The M stands for mentoring. If I'm a nonprofit, there very few nonprofits that are completely original, right? There are others who are kind of doing something similar or close to it. So, find someone who's doing it. Call up that person and say, Hey, can you share with us some thoughts as to how you all got started on your overall social media platform.

And then the B, mentoring and benchmarking. With an organization its sorta the same thing. Maybe don't pick up the phone and call. You can just go look and see what are they doing, how was it successful? You know, I think one of the most successful branding components in social media with nonprofits is a Susan G Komen Foundation. I mean, just go take a look at their story. I mean, the Huffington Post has written about it so many times. Just go and see what people have been doing that was successful.

And the last one is awareness. And that is taking a step back and taking a look at it, okay, so we're out there, is it working? Does it make sense? Is one in every seven post valuable to us? If not, is seven posts necessary? How do we restrict that? So I think that Simba effect that I'm using now for entrepreneurs applies in the same setting. But the key is that you start somewhere, even if it's just having the shell, the organizations logo and sharing one simple quote that ties into whatever it is and he stand for everyday and Pinterest will help you do that pretty much automatically, so. Right. Yeah.

Yeah. I appreciate that. One of the things that we encourage our organizations to do is find ways to work together and with no disrespect to any one individual mission. If it's youth development it's youth development. If it's cancer research it's cancer research. Find ways to partner together, because that way what we've seen is that you can leverage more dollars in doing so. But, I've never really thought about sharing social media platforms for costs for the ecosystem of what's going on and how collectively there can be a larger impact.

Well, at least with Facebook, you can denote several people, administrators. Then you can have one person who is ultimately in charge, the creator, I feel like the term for it is right now. But, you can have several people who have different responsibilities or they can post certain things or have certain responsibilities associated with it. So, that's a helpful...at least with Facebook it is. Yeah. Okay. Well, let's see. We talked a little bit about relationships in our talk today and one of your first quotes was from a Zig Ziglar and it triggered in me a quote from when I was a little boy at my elementary school. And when I was little, this will probably not surprise anyone at this point, but I would write down quotes. I was writing down things that I thought were important at like 10, and then I would read back over the best quotes and tried to remember to, in part, those lessons in life. So, I was that 10 year old.

You were destined for [inaudible 00:24:57]

I was writing it down and revisiting the word. I still have one spiral notebook.

Oh wow! Wow!

I had a coach who told if you want to get to where you want to go, the only way you can do that is by helping other people get where they want to go.

Absolutely.

So, I'm a first generation college kid. I grew up in rural northwest Georgia. Wonderful family, wonderful community. It was very insular community. And so, trying to get from there to Texas A&M as a professor, I was always lost. I went to UGA. UGA was great, but it's such a large university that if you didn't go seek the help there it wasn't easy to find it, at least for me as a first generation student. And so, one of the things that I noticed in my own life that seems to be very true of what you said, is that if you take the time to help others and genuinely invested in them, take a sincere interest in what they're doing and try to help them along, it does seem to be one of the most foolproof ways or the most likely ways of helping you get where you would, where you would like to go. So I think that's spot on.

Kenny, I have a question for you?

Sure.

So we're talking a little bit earlier about differences in work and different types of environments, private, nonprofit, higher Ed. You come from the nonprofit world and you've been dealing with us here for almost 20 years now. Any reflections you might offer that, either for about transferrable skills, things that you found were transferable from nonprofit role or some things that as you look back where really you kind of clear needing to be done in the nonprofit, but that's a little different now that you're here with us at the university?

Well, I've thought about it several times. I worked for a big brothers, big sisters for 12 years, left as the executive of the organization right over in Austin and things are a bit different in nonprofits. My experience was every day is urgent. So one of the points that was made a little earlier about versus a corporate environment, the level of urgency when you're working on behalf of people in some community is really truly a daily grind. In and academic environment, I think to your point, but certainly well taken because you know, we talk about things on maybe we can do it next year and a couple of years. So you know that part, quite honestly, I appreciated it. It gives you definitely more time for personal development and as one with a leadership studies background, I look at the leadership literature quite a bit and being reflective on decisions that you made and what you would have done different or what you would like to do more of.

All of that seems to be extremely important and I think that crosses over into the nonprofit sector, the corporate sector, and also into academia as well. One thing to you all's point, just something that I read many years ago, it was talking about the role of nonprofit executives and would nonprofit executives transition well into corporate environments or would corporate leaders transitioned well and to nonprofits say higher Ed environments. And quite honestly, the literature is a bit mixed. But one point always stood out to me, which I think about even still to this day, and that is nonprofit leaders tend to be more legislative in their approach. So, on a daily basis they're really looking at building consistence toward some goal. And in this case, the study spoke about more nonprofit executives being able to transition well into corporate environments versus top down for profit environments being able to transition well into nonprofit organizations. Where really, as a leader, you're more in the center because you have a board above you and your staff below you. So, I always thought regardless of whatever kind of skill that is, whether hard or soft, it was definitely meaningful.

Yeah, that was good.

I'm glad you brought that up because we talk about accountability and making you look back and see when you owned it [inaudible 00:29:33] I think, you know, one of my biggest struggles and maybe limitations when I transitioned from corporate into higher ed was in corporate, because we were more aggressive with the performance management system, I was accustomed to holding people accountable. All right. And so in, in Higher Ed, at the east and I worked at, we did performance management, but we didn't have hard goals. I was accustomed to being able to sort of give the direct feedback and keep moving, but I had to be a little bit more diplomatic and I probably should've done it sooner than later.

But, I had to be a little more diplomatic. And you had to be sensitive to this thing called legacy and tradition, because of who the person was. Just because the person is not great at their job, but you got to understand that this person is tied to XYZ donor or the part of this family has been more of this community since. And I had to really make a shift. I don't think I made the shift entirely. But, it was a real struggle because the culture was very different. And I think that that cultural shift is one that someone would really spend a lot of time doing and understand it before making, making that transition.

It's honestly one of the worst experiences I've ever had. I mentioned being with big brothers, big sisters over in Austin. Literally what happened in that case, I went to that organization from the National Office. So we're talking early 2000s. I started with the organization in the mid 90s, and when I was at the national organization, we talked so much about performance management and performance metrics. What do we track? And that was so not the culture of our organization at the time as a nonprofit, but everything that was coming out from a research standpoint said we have to professionalize as nonprofits. We need to focus on metrics and data to make those decisions that will lead us into the future. And quite honestly, you know, looking back now, it's really mixed in terms of the results were so many social workers transition out of the nonprofit industry based on it becoming too much like a for profit management environments. So, I remember during that period where we lost several folks, but we definitely had to come back a little bit. And that's not to say that many of our best nonprofit organizations rely on data today, but there certainly has to be some balance there with mission based work.

Absolutely.

This is something that I've actually studied, believe it or not, and one of the things that we learned about folks that work in public sector organizations and nonprofits as opposed to private is they are very much more, this is a surprise, but they are very much more mission driven, right? They're very much more...

Hopefully.

But, on average they are. On average they seem to be. And one of the things we found globally, and someone kind of looked at with a couple of coauthors, was that people that work in government and nonprofits do report that they are more motivated to serve others. That's part of and how they see their identity. That's part of how they view their positions. So, I thinking about this with academia because now I have been in academia in some shape for 14 years. Where does the time go? But you know, we have these initiatives at Texas A&M, for example, where still by we have to have certain objectives and we have to have measurable ways that we achieve those objectives. Professors get a ratings from their students at the end of every semester. Texas A&M, right now, is doing this fairly comprehensive measuring of schools and departments on a bunch of metrics.

And the idea is that you should be doing well on each of those metrics. They do it kind of like a circle and you know, whether your organization compares to others. So, I have really mixed thoughts about this too 'cause I studied management and there's certainly room for...clearly a need for accountability for actions and behavior, accountability for performance. We need a mission, we need some ways of assessing that mission. But, I do retain a little bit of old school academia mindset with this where it's also like but you know halfway through the semester if something important is going on and I'm the expert, maybe I should be teaching them what I think they need to hear the expert rather than what the syllabus says I should be teaching. Which is some of my own problems with authority.

But also it's like, to your point, the business world has a balance and it varies across different businesses. Nonprofits have to find a balance and it differs by nonprofits. And the same thing within universities. And I think it requires a real delicate balance. We don't want what we call a dead weight. You don't want someone that's quit contributing to your organization without any tools to either encourage them or have them exit. But you also don't want to micromanage so much that professors don't get to do the thing they're good at, which is share their creative knowledge. So I think that brings up some really interesting kind of concern and trade offs.

I think on the academia piece, you have to look at the fact that academia has two sides. There's the administrative board staff side and then there's the faculty side, which I would argue and just as a person who's benefited from that straying away from subject matter, let the expert do when he or she does. I think there's a requirement for greater freedom in that space because of what your ultimate goal is. Whereas the business operations side of things maybe can mirror more so that corporate standard.

That's a really good point that the context not only matters by organization, but even tasks we organization. Yeah. So I'm trying to be cognizant of time. So I just gave an hour talk to our students, which we are very thankful for. So much has now spent another 35 minutes being live, recorded it with us. So, what I would like to do though is give you an opportunity to mention any social media that you're active on or anywhere the listeners could follow along to some of the work you're doing.

Yeah, no, definitely. The easiest way to stay connected to me is, and we'll put my name I'm sure, is @ZillahFluker on Instagram, on Linkedin, on Twitter and on Facebook. So, that's the easiest way. And, of course, my website is activateelevate.org which we can put it in there as well.

Yep. Happy to post all that. For those that are seeing this on Facebook Live, you've now seen it on Facebook Live. We're also going to be taking the audio and publishing it on our Bush school in court to podcast where we will for sure have all of the extra details for how they can stay in touch with you. Thank you so much for taking the time.

No thank you.

Thank you so much.