**Julianna Asperin Barnes**

Learn about leadership to support the student success & equity work.

**AS** [00:00:00] For today's podcast. It's a pleasure to have Dr. Julianna Asperin Barnes. Julie joined the South Orange County Community College District as Chancellor in August of 2022 wiith 30 plus years of experience in higher education. Prior to her appointment as Chancellor, Julie served as President of Cuyamaca College for seven years. Under her leadership, the college emerged as a leading college in equity and innovation. Early adopters in developmental education reform, the college was awarded the John W Rice Diversity and Equity Award and was recognized nationally by Excelencia in Education. Julie is known as an inclusive and engaged leader who has fostered strong internal and external relationships, providing the foundation for equitable student outcomes, a positive campus climate, and a healthy organization. Welcome to the Student Success Podcast, Julie.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:00:53] Great, thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here, Al, thank you.

**AS** [00:00:56] So Julie, I start every podcast asking guests if they wouldn't mind sharing a hobby or story or a special talent. Could you share something, please?

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:01:06] Sure. Well, something that not everyone knows about me, some people do, is that I actually trained in karate for 20 years and earned a second degree black belt in karate. I was part of my dojo. The name of my dojo is Aoinagi Ken Shu Kai and my sensei is Neville Billimoria. And yeah, I trained for many, many, many years. I'm no longer actively training, but I still really embrace the values and the principles of karate as a leader and practitioner in the community colleges. It kind of really defines me. It just it just runs in my in my veins.

**AS** [00:01:46] So when I first met you some time ago, it was in Long Beach. I remember, because I like to look up. Oh, who are they? What's kind of their background, and I saw, ohh karate, and I reached out and I said, Hey, I'm a longtime practitioner also in a Japanese style. And that's kind of how we initially connected. It was these, just that shared experience. And the benefits of karate, right? It's more properly said, KARA-TE. Right. But we'll just say karate. Anyway, you already alluded to its benefits and how it's benefited you. Can you unpack that a little bit?

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:02:32] Yeah. For example, in karate, kind of one of the central pieces that we do what are the practices is called kata. And basically it is a nice series of karate movements with an imaginary opponent. So it's hard to explain. But kata is kind of really central to karate. So at the end of the day, what really, what really resonates with me and really those principles that I talked about in those values. One is definitely focus, because in karate you have to be very focused and very present. And just those two things alone, in the community colleges, for example, focused and keeping our eye on the prize and the beacon, which at the end of the day it's really about our students and it's about equitable student access and actual student success. So focus is definitely one of those things. And kind of related to that, I alluded to that to presence, not being distracted by the noise and just being really present with the individuals with whom you're working, our students and obviously in the community colleges, it's a very social position and you're, you're always interacting with internal and external constituents. I would also say respect and related to that kindness, and I know that you are a big, big advocate for kindness, as am I. But respect and kindness of others, not just, you know, obviously in karate we have a sensei. And so, it's respect of your sensei, but it's also respect of your of your fellow karateka members in the dojo, but likewise in the community colleges. It's respect of those who you report to, but also those who follow you. Right. And just all of those with whom you work. And so I think respect and kindness is also really big. Another thing too, confidence, and it's tough. It's hard. I mean, 20 years of training is is a big thing. And so just really having confidence in your ability to do the training in the work that is required. And that is also a big thing in the community colleges, particularly, when you're sitting in positions where you're often the first one sitting in a particular position and having confidence in yourself, I think is really important. And then a couple of more. So you got me going here. You know, no exchange for hard work and karate training is hard work. You make a commitment to train regularly and be there and follow your sensei work with, again, your your fellow karate club members. But likewise, in the community colleges, it's hard work and doing what's right for students and the community that you're serving. So that's another value and principle that I bring with me. And then the last, this is kind of a squishy one, but I think so important. And that is this concept of energy and understanding how energy flows within you and how is exchanged externally into the world. So I think understanding your own energy flow and your external energy flow I think is really an important consideration in all aspects of the world, not just karate, but community colleges and just life in general. So I would say those are some of the areas that I learned in karate that I continue to carry with me as a leader and practitioner in the community colleges. Thanks for asking that.

**AS** [00:06:08] That's beautiful. Thank you for sharing that, Julie. So, Julie, developmental ed reform is really taking hold now nationally. Finally, it's beginning to be scaled not without challenges, but at least it's so much better from even five years ago. We're seeing in the data more students of color, especially completing math and English than ever before. It's so exciting. What an equity impact! Are there's still some equity gaps in some campuses, absolutely, but it's still so much better than it was years ago. And in California. Unfortunately or fortunately, ultimately, it took a law, assembly bill 705 to say, look, stop using a test to dump students into essentially having them repeat high school English and math all over again, sometimes from the very beginning. But you were in a situation and climate and I, and this I mentioned this in your in your bio, but you landed as a president but you've had a few math faculty who didn't need a law, who saw the data, who knew that we can do better to improve our craft, to be more equitable. So can you please tell us that story because you are a president who lands there, now you have some faculty who want to change and tell us their story and how you as a president were able to support that.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:07:37] Yeah, thanks for bringing up this matter that's really near and dear to my heart, and that is developmental education reform. And I'll backtrack a little bit. I had the good fortune of focusing on developmental education as part of my doctoral studies back in 2007. And at the time in California, what was happening is that there was a level of focus on developmental education, which we call basic skills in California. At the time, there was investments of dollars in the state to the community colleges to revisit basic skills. But it really wasn't reform. It was the way I describe it, it was putting kind of lipstick on a pig. It was kind of making it look pretty, but it was still putting all the responsibility on students and it was still the old paradigm whereby we were saying, our students are not ready. We were putting the blame on students and not taking institutional responsibility for our work. So after millions of dollars of an investment in developmental education in California and there was a booklet that folks who were in California might remember, it's called the Poppy Copy, and it was kind of like best practices and basic skills. But again, it was like lipstick on a pig and it was really well-intended and there were some good practices in there. But at the end of the day, those practices did not lead to reform and they certainly did not lead to the closing of equity gaps and successful outcomes. What we knew to be true is that we needed something more transformational, and that was complete reform of developmental education. And so I had already had an interest, had already done some research as part of my doctoral studies. And so when I when I got the position at Cuyamaca College as president, I was really thrilled because I received a document from my math faculty a week before I started. And they said, We want you to read this, this document. It's a proposal and we want to meet with you in your first week at Cuyamaca College. And I said, I would love to. So I read the proposal and it was all about developmental education reform in math and how they wanted to bring to scale these reforms in the way they place students into math and the way they support students in math and so forth. And it would mean eliminating anything below college level math, which is, you know, which is monumental. I mean, nowadays we're talking about it more and more. But that was that was beyond comprehension at the time. And I remember marking up that document. We actually added it to our artifacts for that institution. And it marked up the the document with amens and exclamation marks and smiley faces and hearts. I remember I was like, Oh my God, look at what they want to do. And I was so excited. And I met with them and all they needed me to say was, let's do this, let's go. And I'll tell you that there was some fear at the institution previously that if we were to remove all of our developmental education math courses, that we would lose enrollment and our funding is tied to enrollment. So there was a fear of losing enrollment and losing funds, but it was the right thing to do because we already started to see other states engage in this reform. We were seeing some early results that were successful with regard to the closing of gaps, particularly for students of color. And so I knew it was a right thing to do. And so all I had to say was, let's go, let's do this. That was the best thing ever. Now it's a dream for college presidents to come in and to have faculty be the ones to come forward with with a proposal. It doesn't always work that way. But I was very, very, very grateful that that was the situation at Cuyamaca College and it just happened in math. It was also happening in English. And so at the end of the day, the college ended up being early adopters of development of education reform that even preceded assembly bill 705, which was the bill, of course, in California that required colleges to reform their developmental education programs. So I was super excited about that. We saw some pretty drastic results early on with regard to students accessing college over math and then English as well, and then making it through successfully through those college level math and English courses as well. So it was just a beautiful thing. At the end of the day, I think it's the ultimate equity imperative with regard to supporting our students of color. So and again, it just warms my heart just to see that we are now bringing that that work to scale in the California community colleges. But beyond that, really across the nation, we're seeing that reform happen.

**AS** [00:12:49] As a leader, symbolism is so important. And I love this story. I know many people know it here, but fortunately, we have a national audience. And I'd love to for you to tell that story because it goes back to your martial arts roots where you have a few faculty that are willing, but it didn't mean that 100% were ready. And as you said, there was fear. So you wanted to do a demonstration and and can you just tell us how that went? Because it ended up being, I think, very symbolic.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:13:23] Yes, yes, Yes. So thank you for that. Yeah, I think some folks have heard this story, but I think it's worth telling for a variety of reasons. And so what it is, is that in my in my first year as college president of Cuyamaa College, I wanted to be sure that the college really knew who I was kind of personally and professionally and what I was about, who they hired, what my vision was moving forward. And so my very first opening session, we call it convocation, I shared some data, looked at various momentum points with regard to student access and success and disaggregated the data and and showed where we had equity gaps along these various student momentum points. And I said that we see these gaps and it's no fault of our students that really we have an institutional responsibility to remove barriers, practice policy barriers, to be sure that our students are making it to the finish line. So I said, as the new college president, I wanted to demonstrate my commitment to breaking through institutional barriers to success and equity. And so after I gave my spiel and showed the data at the end of the of the convocation address, I took off my my suit jacket. I took off my high heels and I put on my karate gi (uniform) and I put on my black belt. And I had two of my administrators come up and hold a wooden board. And the wooden board actually had written on it institutional barriers to students success and equity. So I said, I, as your new college president, will demonstrate my commitment to breaking through institutional barriers to student success and equity. And so you could hear a pin drop in the room. There's like 250 people in the room. It was crazy. The energy was crazy. And I proceeded to try to break that board. And I did not break the board the first time. And so I realized that was I was nervous and my energy wasn't focused. And I underestimated how I would feel nervous in front of 250 people. I had broken many boards before, but not in front of that many people. And so I said, okay, one last try. So I beckoned all of my energy beckoned my focus and went for it a second time and did not break the board. But I broke my hand and I knew I broke my hand. Immediately my hands start to swirl. The the nurse from our health center came up and she looked at it and she said, Oh, you definitely broke your hand. So I had to leave my convocation and my luncheon and go to emergency. And I remember actually going to the emergency room and the doctor said, you know, normally young men who are 18 years old and who are really pissed off and punch a wall, come in and break their hand in this way. It's called a boxer's fracture. And he said, How did you break your hand? And I go, Oh, doctor, it's a long story. But he put the cast on and I thought to myself, I could never return back to that college. What was I doing trying to show off breaking board. I didn't do it, but I arrived back to the campus, opened up my emails, and there was just a pouring of love and messages in my inbox. The gist of it was there was a theme in those messages and what they basically said, the college community said, is that institutional barriers to student success and equity are so entrenched that one person alone cannot break through them that will take a team, it'll take a village, and that they were behind me. And so it was the unintended but beautiful consequence of breaking my hand at that opening session. And it really painted the picture and the vision for the work that was before us. And again, it was that paradigm of shifting it from the student. Obviously that's a shared responsibility, but it removed the fault from the students and turned it to the institution for again, taking care of what needed to be taken care of to facilitate the success of our students. So thank you for asking that me to share that. And so clearly this whole piece on developmental education reform at Cuyamaca College is related to that, because I think that was the ultimate breaking of a barrier, right, of an institutional barrier whereby we were putting faulty assessment tools into the hands of students that any of us, even with doctoral degrees, if we were to take the math placement exam, we probably, and I'll speak for myself, I probably would be in pre-algebra, and I took calculus in high school and college. And so, again, it's the ultimate, taking responsibility for these policies and practices that we put in place that prohibited students from from progressing and succeeding. So, yeah, I don't recommend that. I always say I'll never do that again. So just kind of in concept, I break through these boards now, but but not in reality.

**AS** [00:18:42] Thank you for sharing that story. I've always enjoyed it very much because, you know, you did have a supporting community. I also liked your response to it, reinforcing that we can't, the president alone, we cannot break this. That we need everybody to be in. And so I thought it was just so symbolic in so many different ways. And I just I love that story. I want to go back to two things that you said. I want to go back to energy.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:19:14] Sure.

**AS** [00:19:14] And I want to go back to fear. Okay. Because everything that you mentioned about karate and what you learn and how to be is, in a way, that is what builds a culture.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:19:29] Mm hmm.

[00:19:31] And especially a president who has a particular, I feel like it's an energy.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:19:40] Mm hmm.

**AS** [00:19:41] And so, as you know, I work with a lot of colleges. I work with a lot of presidents, and they're human beings, right. And so there are some that I have to remind that self-awareness.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:19:55] Mhm.

**AS** [00:19:56] Is really important because what you say and how you say it can create a certain energy, if you will. At the same time I say don't be too concerned that you're speaking up in a meeting because, oh well, the president's talking now that's all top down or you say too little and then that's not good either. There's a balance. Right. But the key is that over time people begin to feel your energy. They know more of who you are, your authenticity. And that energy trickles down to the VIPs, to the deans, to others that you're involved with, the academic Senate president and so forth like that. I think that energy and building a culture over time of trust is critical, right. Because it's related to what you said about fear.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:20:51] Yeah.

**AS** [00:20:52] Higher ed in general is, I've seen it's just a very, it's very institutionally conservative.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:20:58] Yeah.

**AS** [00:20:59] It it doesn't like change. And so can you elaborate more about kind of rethinking leadership? Because I feel that since the pandemic, since all the unrest, this is actually the most exciting time in higher education. Because we see changes that we've never, we're having conversations that we've never really had before. I work with teams where they're reimagining grading, for example, something that would they would never touch it's my academics, I want to grade however, no, they're having conversations about pedagogy about nowadays, and especially in light of what I mentioned about energy and and fear.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:22:06] Yeah. Thank you for that. Recently I had the opportunity to engage with about 20 new CEOs in the California community colleges. There's a lot of turnover, and that sounds like a lot, but there's 116 community colleges in California at the largest system in a community college systems in the US. So there were about 20 new CEOs, and I was able to engage with them on rethinking leadership, because what we are acknowledging is that it's a new day. We are not the community colleges of yesteryear. And frankly, we're starting to see kind of a new kind of CEO. You know, we're not your grandma's CEO of yesteryear, you know, and there's nothing wrong with grandma. I love, I love my grandparents. Right. That we're different. And so I did have the chance to engage. But let me go back to the whole piece on energy. And I think what it is now is that I think it's just really important and you alluded to it, Al, is that it's really important to know yourself and believe in yourself and understand yourself and how you're being perceived out in the world. I think a lot of times when we're thinking about CEOs in or just any any leadership position or any practitioner position, sometimes it's easier to focus on kind of what we need to do externally. We need to gain these knowledge, we need we need to gain these this set of skills. And so it's easy to kind of focus on on the external piece of it, and that's important. But I think equally as important to lead in this day and age. I think it's so super critical for us to understand ourselves, feel good about ourselves, understand our own past traumas and trials and tribulations and work through those things. And you have to understand, I also have you know, I have a degree in counseling, so I'm very much a counselor through and through. Right. But but whether I'm a counselor or not, we're all human. We all have traumas, we all have past experiences. So I think it's really important for us to understand what those things are, work through them, ground ourselves, feel good about ourselves. And then you used the word authentic. And I know that's often overused, but I really believe it. And then bring your authentic self to the table. And then that energy then really kind of comes through, right? Because we are our authentic selves when we come to the table. I remember when I first entered into administration, I was a dean and that was in 1999. So I've been an administrator for many years and I was a young administrator and I even looked younger and I thought I had to be someone different than than who I was. Right. I thought maybe my voice needed to be deeper. I thought maybe I shouldn't have long hair. I thought I should look differently, sound differently, act differently. But I realized I only knew how to be myself, my of my authentic self. And I realized over time that my authentic self was received well. And, you know, going back to that energy piece of it, people kind of felt that authentic energy and then folks would respond to that also in an authentic way. So I do think it's important to understand that energy and what you're putting out there and then how then that kind of then opens up for kind of a positive exchange with with other people.

**AS** [00:25:51] But something that I have noticed and I'd love to get your take on this. So when you're a woman of color, and you're trying to be authentic. I have found that sometimes you have to be able to know how to play the game. You got to know how to play chess behind the scenes. I've seen males say, Well, you better go out there and you better tell her how it is and you better do this and you better be unapologetic, which is true. But there's a certain luxury and privilege to be able to do that and even have a support system to back you up when you say things like that and you get the backlash right. Whereas a woman of color, especially so many are are, look, again, presidents are human beings. You got to pay the bills.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:26:48] Mhm

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:26:48] You got a mortgage, you got to take care of family. And there are, you know, leaders who are single moms or they're dealing with so much stuff in their private lives, right?

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:27:00] Yes.

**AS** [00:27:01] And so they don't have the luxury to be put on some Board's target to be fired in the next six months.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:27:08] Yeah.

**AS** [00:27:08] Because you're way too so-called pushy. Right. I've seen women. They have no choice, but gosh they become so good at it, I think, in my view, you tell me if I'm right or wrong. I'm going to do my thing. I'm going to be authentic. I'm going to push for what I believe in. But I got to do it, my pedagogy, if you will, my approach has to be different.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:27:30] Yeah.

**AS** [00:27:30] I got to know how to play chess behind the scenes. What are your thoughts on that? Is that, does that jibe with your experience? Do you want to elaborate on that a bit more?

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:27:40] Yes, definitely. Yeah. You know, interestingly, I was recently reading a report and it was came out from the Community College League of California last fall, 22. And it looked at the tenure and retention of CEOs, and they disaggregated the data by gender and also ethnicity. And for female CEOs, the average tenure in the California Community College is about 3.5 years. And for men, its range is 5 to 6 years, depending on if it's a single college district or multi college district. So there's something there to be said about the the tenure, the shorter tenure for women. And you're right. Well, I think, you know, I often say you have to find the sweet spot. Right. Certainly it's important to be your authentic self 100%. At the same time, you have to understand the rules of the game and like you said, be kind of strategic behind the scenes with the rules of the game. And, you know, kind of related to that, what's really interesting. I'll come back to what we're talking about, but related to that, many of us who are stepping into the CEO roles were the first ones. We still read about it like it's the first woman that's been hired in this position or it's the first person of color or it's the first woman of color. I mean, we still hear it. In fact, in this report, it was saying that there's still several community college districts in California who have never hired a woman in the top post. Still in this day and age, many times for us as women and women of color included, we are the ones who are paving ways, paving way for the people who come behind us. So oftentimes we hear, make sure you pick an institution where you fit. Well, Many times we are entering into institutions where we don't fit, but we're creating the fit for people who will follow us, right? We are the ones paving the way. There is no path before us. We're the ones creating the path, right? And so in order to do that, going back to what we were talking about 100%, we absolutely have to find the sweet spot with showing up as our authentic selves. But understanding the rules of the game behind the scenes and kind of pushing the status quo little by little to do what we need to do for our students and for our colleges and our community. it is a little bit different, but there's a lot of superpowers and being being a woman. And not to say that men don't also do this. But, you know, I think a lot of us lead by way of the building of relationships, For example. Obviously, we know that in the building of relationships and in collegially consulting with different constituents in decision making and the like lead to successful, sustainable outcomes. And so there's super power, so to speak, that we have as women that we bring to the table that I think kind of provide the opportunity for us to be successful in these roles.

**AS** [00:31:01] Yes, I've always been a big proponent of empowering women, and I grew up in a single parent situation. So I'm very aware of that. And I have two daughters and a son, so I want them to be successful. Now, I'll be honest with you too. I mean, as much as I, I understand and I want them to be successful, we also have to remember, I think that diversity alone in hiring is insufficient because assholes transcend gender and color and race. So you got to, it's not only the diversity, but also do they bring that energy you are talking, do they bring those values that you talked about? Because I've actually seen, not a lot, I've seen it more in men, I've see some really shitty female leaders. So I think we just kind of foot noting that. And unfortunately some of them, yeah, they think that pave the way but they actually make it worse for that female leader that does come in and is authentic and kind and etc. It makes it even more difficult.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:32:15] Yeah.

**AS** [00:32:16] So what would you say, let's say you have, you said you were a counselor, right, for a while. You have a, there's a counselor, a young counselor, a female counselor, especially of color. And she's like, You know what? I think I want to be president one day. Or maybe they're faculty. Instructional faculty. Given your experience. Gosh, Julie, you've been a counselor, Dean, VP, president, now Chancellor, what advice would you give them as they journey through their career and they still want to eye that role that you have. What advice would you give them.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:32:57] Kind of going back to what we were talking about, I would say focus both on internal and external development and we talked a little bit already about, getting to know yourself, leveraging your strengths, embracing who you are and feeling good about who you are and really grounded because these positions require that groundedness, because you get pulled in a lot of different directions. Going back to karate. Interestingly, my dojo, as I mentioned, is called Aionagi Ken Shu Kai, actually means green willow tree. And the significance is that the green willow tree has really deep roots that are really embedded in the earth, and so that when strong winds blow through, the tree blows back and forth. But the tree remains very grounded in the earth. And so that whole piece on getting to know yourself internally and feeling grounded, I think is so important because you will get blown around to and fro and you really have to retain your groundedness. So I think really focusing on your internal development and continuing to to to focus on internal development is important. Going back to the CEO Leadership Academy, where I just presented, a lot of people talk about self-care, but yes, self-care I think is so important. We're focusing more and more and rightfully so, on the self care of students, for example, basic needs, the basic needs that students have. Well, as practitioners and leaders, we have that same thing. And so, we often hear practitioners and leaders say, I work sixty or seventy hours a week and certainly some weeks you are working 60 to 70 hours, but you got to bring yourself back into balance and self-care and do what you need to do in terms of diet, exercise, sleep and that type of thing to get yourself grounded again. So I would say one thing that people would need to do is just to be sure to focus on that internal development and self-care. And then the other thing I would say, believe in yourself, because I think, we have many external messages that run contrary to believing in oneself, right? When I became a college president, I sat in a president's conference room with pictures of all the previous presidents that reminded me that I was the first one that was a president like myself at that institution. And so but even before that,the external messages were that I wasn't really cut out to be a president because I didn't see a lot of presidents like myself. So I think it's important to believe in yourself, in your own ability so that you just have to really embrace that you can do this. And I think we know that imposter syndrome is a real thing and it's alive and well, but really kind of doing what it takes to mitigate those sentiments and believe in yourself. I think that is another thing that I would say and I, I would also say leverage your own life experiences and use them as your superpower. I joke around and say, at the end of the day, I'm just Julie from the block, right? And so people call me Chancellor Barnes or Dr. Barnes or what have you. But at the end of the day, I am just Julie from the block. I grew up, like many of our students, as a low income first generation college student, and I used to not see that as a superpower. I used to see that as a liability, that that wasn't a value. But more and more, I know that that is one of my superpowers, right? And being Julie from the blok and all the trials and tribulations that I had as a first generation low income student, I learned resilience, I learned courage, and I learned determination. And I use all of those things in my profession. So I would say to folks as well, leverage your own life experiences and use them. Use your social cultural experiences as capital and as your superpower, because they really are, especially, again, as we're starting to see the beautiful diversification of our colleges. Right. Embrace change and new paradigms. As with you, you brought this up a little bit earlier, but clearly, we all know we're living in a post pandemic reality. And what we once knew is not what we are creating for our students in the future. We know that people have changed, our students have changed. We have changed, our students in our community. They want something different from their educational experiences. So whether it be in the classroom, in support services or the way we design our buildings, it will require an embracing of change and new paradigms in the way we design our student experience at our colleges and districts. So I would I would say that and clearly this whole piece on artificial intelligence and I don't have a lot of expertise in that, but I'm starting to dig in. That is going to change the way in which we work and design our colleges and districts. And so, again, embrace change because there's a lot of change happening. And I think it's easier for us to work with it versus against it. Right. And then I would say at the end of the day, always keep students as our beacon. I think sometimes when we're grappling with so many things, sometimes students get lost in the shuffle, unfortunately. And at the end of the day, student success and equity, that is what we're here to do. That is our mission. That is our vision. So I think as long as we're making decisions that benefit our students, we're doing we're doing we're doing the right thing. So that's a few things that I would say with regard to tips for those seeking to take on these kinds of positions.

**AS** [00:39:02] Thank you for that, Julie. As we wrap up, I want to go back to change for a moment. So, you were fortunate. You landed at Cuyamaca and had faculty hand you this and you were able to write happy faces and your hearts. So wonderful advice, right, for those right now, what happens, I think you've heard of my three month rule, right? Just how hard changes in higher ed and my three month rule is that there's really, for the typical campus, three months in a year to really get priority work done.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:39:36] Yeah.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:39:37] The committee structure more often than not tends to be dysfunctional, unproductive, slow, and really slows things down.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:39:47] Yeah.

**AS** [00:39:48] One person on the campus, not necessarily who has a title, but has influence to really ensure that vital change. That gets us to more equitable outcomes is either slowed down, obstructed or outright sabotaged. So you have this wonderful advice and they get to be the president and now the realization of, oh my gosh, I'm actually within a participatory governance structure, there's this three month thing, there's this committee committee structure, and then I have some really loud people that don't allow for change to happen. So using all of your karate powers and influence using that as a metaphor, if you will. How would someone then handle that? What would you recommend? What is that kind of chess playing behind the scenes? Or maybe front facing or a combination of the two. What are some things that you would recommend to move toward change when it's so darn difficult in higher ed, especially if you land in a place where the culture is quite toxic?

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:41:03] Yeah, it's a it's a tough one, you know, and I think there's short term, long term solutions. Right. And I do like to play the long game as well. And so, what I would say is that let me go back. I remember when I was leaving my my previous position to enter to the chancellorship here in South Orange County. People would ask me, like, what was your greatest accomplishment? And certainly all the developmental education reform work was one of the highlights of my my career. So that certainly that was one of them. But the other one related to what you're talking about right now is that I was able to build institutional capacity to do the good work that needed to happen with regard to student success and equity. And that was the long game, right? And that was honing in on decision making structures. Like you were saying, the governance structures, my former place, we went through a governance redesign. It took two years long, but we went through a governance redesign. Also, during that time, we changed hiring practices. We were really focused on professional development and learning and elevating practitioner and leadership mindset where it needed to be to do the work. And so going back to institutional capacity, when I left the place, there were structures in place, there were practitioners in place who had particular mindsets, right? There was, it was like an orchestra happening where then I could be there and work in harmony with the orchestra to have that work happen. And when I left, that orchestra was still doing its work and playing this beautiful song. Maybe that's a bad analogy, but so yeah, I think that's a long game. But in, in the short term, you're right. These decisions still have to be made. And as you said, there is some behind the scenes kinds of discussions that often happen. And I think as long as we're making decisions because at the end of the day, you know, there's collegial consultation, but at the end of the day, there is the authority for particular individuals, typically the CEO, to make the decision at the end of the day. So I think so long as the CEO knows that they've exhausted all the avenues with regard to engaging in collegial consultation, the CEO at the end of the day has to make the decision that that benefits the student. And again, there is some behind the scenes work happening where you're kind of aligning with with other key individuals with the decisions that you're making. But but I think at the end of the day, I know that I could rest, peacefully at night when I know that I made a good decision for the student, even if it runs contrary to, say, a couple of loud voices. Right. So it's a tough situation. I often say that I have an imaginary bag packed at my door in my office, and I have to be willing to leave if I'm not able to effectively make change and make the decisions that need to be made. But again, you're doing it with strategy because at the end of day, you still want to be employed, right? And you have your family in that kind of thing. But in the day you are making decisions that are to be beneficial for our students.

**AS** [00:44:32] Thank you for that, Julie. There are informal and formal settings. The informal is the behind the scenes. You know, even having cafecito with someone or lunch with someone. The formal is when you use those committee structures. And it still amazes me to this day, Julie, of how some people rely almost exclusively on the formal going cold in to a committee crossing their fingers, hoping that it'll have the outcome that they want without doing the work that leads up to that committee meeting.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:45:02] Yeah.

**AS** [00:45:02] So absolutely having a strategy and I really love what you said. Because you can often go home and pull your hair out and the grays start coming because you're so frustrated with certain individuals and processes. Right. And I love what you said, which is play the long game. Outlast the obstructionists. Don't let them out fatigue you. You out fatigued them, which is hard. It is hard. It's so difficult. But I think that is a solid strategy, Julie, if you do land at a place like that, it's very toxic, is to outlast the, alright, I won't use a curse word. I'll say just outlast the obstructionists. So today, you know, we talked about a developmental ed reform, that Cuayamca is one of the places that got it right. I mean, you were there and as a leader, it could have gone the other way if it was another leader, by the way, who said, Oh, what? No, enrollment! Enrollment! I've actually seen that a lot. It's sad, Julie. Where all they care about is I'm here about the money. I got to bring enrollment. I'm like, oh my gosh, you don't really get your role do you? Don't even get that retention is an enrollment strategy, right?

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:46:26] Yeah.

**AS** [00:46:26] And you talked about this authenticity, the energy that you bring in and then being able to work behind the scenes. And on all this advice, beautiful advice you give to someone that wants to be a president one day. And then I love this play the long game. So as we wrap up now, is there anything else you would like to share? You have any questions for me or any last bit of wisdom you'd like to leave us with?

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:46:52] I think it's tough work that we do, but it's important work. I would say that it doesn't always have to be hard and stressful, I would say. Also, imagine, enjoy the work. Have fun with the work. You know, find. Find joy in the work, even through the tough times. Right. And again, I, I feel like I generally am a glass half full type of person anyway. But, you know, I'm human as well, and I get beat up. I experience trials and tribulations. But I think at the end of the day, I still feel very honored and privileged every single day that I get to wake up and get to do this job right. And so I think just find joy in the work that you do every day, because there's there's joy to be found every every single day.

**AS** [00:47:45] Yes, Julie. Levity, Right. Have some fun. Have some fun. Have some levity.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:47:51] Yeah.

**AS** [00:47:52] Sometimes we can get too serious in meetings and it's okay to have some levity. So. Julie, I've been wanting you to participate in this student success podcast for a while. Wanted to get your insights on educational leadership. So glad you made the time. Really appreciate you. Thank you for participating in the Student Success Podcast.

**Julie Asperin Barnes** [00:48:14] Great. Thank you so much for having me, Al. I appreciate it.