Amanda S: Welcome to the SPU Voices podcast, an interview show where we hear personal stories that have universal impact. My name is Amanda Stubbert and I'm your host. I'm also the alumni director at Seattle Pacific University, this is my producer.

Kyle Brown: My name is Kyle Brown and I am an alumnus of SPU.

Amanda S: I am also an alum, and a current parent, so we're pretty attached to this place. But the best part of our jobs is when we get to hear these stories that actually change lives. So whether you're working out, or sitting at your desk pretending to work, sit back and relax, let's tell some stories.

Amanda S: Today with us is Dr. Dan Martin, the president of Seattle Pacific University. He came to us in 2012.

Kyle Brown: Which is the same year that I started at SPU, so he was a rookie when I was a freshman. I actually have a mug with Dr. Martin's face on it that I drink coffee out of every morning.

Amanda S: And as a thank you gift, we're gonna give Dan a mug with Kyle's face on it.

Kyle Brown: It's full circle.

Amanda S: Full circle.

Amanda S: Let's jump right in. If you are a leader in your community, or if you want to be, than this is the episode for you.

Amanda S: President Martin, thank you so much for joining us today.

Dan Martin: Great, it's wonderful to be here, thank you so much.

Amanda S: We all love having you as a part of this community. For those who don't know Dr. Dan he is referred to as D-Money by a number of our students because he knows them on a personal level and actually remembers their name and what they study, not something most university presidents do. Which brings me to, why did you want to become a university president? I don't think a lot of children ... How many say, "I want to be a university president when I grow up?"

Dan Martin: Yes, that would be strange if you had that vision and dream as a child. As a child I certainly did not want to be a university president, but as I moved through my high school years and at that time when it's natural to begin to explore what you're passionate about and where you see yourself headed in life, I had a number of mentors through the years that counseled me, mentored me, guided me, asked me questions, challenged me in a variety of ways, and as I began to explore my own set of gifts and abilities and how God created me, it was really through this experiences and through my undergrad experience specifically with the primary mentors that I had as an undergrad that I began to see that serving in Christian higher education was a way in which I could give back, where I could advance the Kingdom of God, where I could leverage the gifts and abilities that God has given me, and some way to advance the Kingdom, make a difference in students lives, so that we can prepare them for what God may have for them in their future.

Dan Martin: So I was actually 20 years old, a junior in undergrad, when I decided that I wanted to pursue a path that would lead me at least to being prepared, to having the experience and expertise that may qualify me to be a university president, and so I set off on that path, again with mentors then, a different set of mentors along the way in my professional journey that as I moved through, they provided me opportunity and experiences across the board in higher education to prepare myself, and my goal was to be a college president.

Amanda S: It's a very narrow niche that career goal, isn't it? I find it interesting that you said, "They asked me questions." Because I feel like those are some of the best moments with my own mentors in my life, when they asked a question I wasn't asking myself, so do you remember one of those questions that really changed trajectory for you?

Dan Martin: I don't know if there was one, probably a lot of questions, "Why are you doing what you're doing?" You know, stop it. They had the ability to develop a relationship and see something in me that provided them the place in which to ask questions and challenging questions yes, about things that I was doing, and where I may need to redirect my life at that certain point in time. So definitely in matters, and this went beyond vocation, this was about life and about faith and about challenging me even in my relationship with Christ to consider what God was asking of me, not only in my profession, but of me in life.

Amanda S: Right, right, because at those early years it's all about getting in the right stream, if you will, right?

Dan Martin: Right.

Amanda S: You don't know what ocean you're gonna end up in, but you have to get in that right stream, which brings me to my next question, you are not a native of the Pacific Northwest, so why Seattle Pacific? How did you end up here at SPU?

Dan Martin: It was God's leading, for sure. In the process in terms of when the position was posted following the long and successful tenure of Dr. Eden, so as that position was posted I was serving as president of another university in Ohio, and throughout my career as I began to understand the landscape of Christian higher education, SPU was always one of those institutions that I envisioned serving at someday as it was a place that was really making a difference in this world and it was at a level of reputation and recognition where I really felt that it was a place in which I could serve and be challenged certainly professionally to stretch myself in different ways. And so as the position was posted, a number of friends and mentors sent me the posting and thought I would be a good candidate, and I should put my name in the process of which I did.

Dan Martin: So you're right, I didn't have any natural connections to SPU or the Pacific Northwest, but certainly expressed and interest and then as God led through the process was elected then in April of 2012.

Amanda S: In come the mentors again. Did I hear you correctly that more than one mentor said, "Oh, this place called Seattle Pacific is looking for a new president?"

Dan Martin: Sure, yeah, they knew me, they knew my path, and my experience to date. But then they also knew Seattle Pacific and thought it could be a good match with the profile in which was posted in what the university was looking for at that time in a university president.

Amanda S: Which does kind of feel like a sign from God sometimes when from more than once person says, "This seems like a good choice for you."

Dan Martin: Right.

Amanda S: So as you're preparing for that role, obviously there are many things that you do to prepare for positive change, to lead in new directions, policies, and choices for the university, but what did you do to prepare for the things you can't prepare for? You know that things are gonna come your way in this role that you cannot see coming. What, if anything, do you do to prepare for the moments that you know you can't prepare for?

Dan Martin: You know that's hard because you're right, you just have to expect the unexpected each and every day when you're leading a university, when it's so multi-faceted and you encounter various laws, various regulations, experiences within even the student experience when you're dealing with housing and food and education and living, there are a number of things that can come into play each and every day, and so you do have to be prepared and have a base and a foundation. For me, as I move through my educational experience in terms of that aspect of preparation, it really, for me, began with the liberal arts in terms of trying to gain an understanding of perhaps maybe not knowing every little aspect of a knowledge base that would prepare you for something, but it's understanding as learning how to learn, it's how to think critically and analytically, how to clarify the complex in a way in which you can ask the right questions to derive the response that's necessary for any given thing that you encounter.

Dan Martin: So for me it was a basis in the liberal arts and then professional education, and then beyond that having a broad base of experience in higher education, so in my early years, I had experience and exposure to almost every aspect of a university and so I draw upon that as I encounter then various challenges along the way.

Amanda S: I like the connection to liberal arts, because that's my background as well, and I certainly believe that that translates to every possible in-road of life, every sector, because it's about story.

Dan Martin: Right.

Amanda S: As human beings, as we were created by God, we understand story, that's how our brains latch onto things. And so when we're trying to see a big picture and understand all the little nuance, we have to tell the story of what's going on because if you're just looking at laws and policy, you will never get to the human beings at the other side. So I love that you say that because that's how I like to see the world as well.

Dan Martin: Yeah and within an academic community where we are a community, where we are journeying together, where we are coming alongside students, the great thing about SPU is that we are large enough for quality in terms of a nationally ranked university, the only private one in the Pacific Northwest, which is all great, but we're small enough for community, where we have faculty that want to invest in the lives of our students, that want to be mentors for our students and walk with them and journey with them. So it's important to hear stories, to hear perspective and provide that opportunity for that level of engagement that will draw out answers that you didn't know existed.

Amanda S: Again, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but judging from your last few answers, I wonder if we can make a connection to answer the question I just asked about how do you prepare for what you can't prepare for. Maybe some of that answer is knowing the story of your community. If you truly understand who you have with you and where they're coming from and what their dreams are, that might very well be a good step towards knowing how to lead them when things go off track.

Dan Martin: I would agree with that. There are aspects of decisions that have impact on individual's lives, and so to have that understanding of where people are, where they have come from, to know that your decisions have real impacts on the lives of individuals, that's important to know. It's also important to know your community because I certainly don't know everything and don't project that I do, but I need to draw upon this community, and the experts that we do have in the areas in which I do not have expertise or specific knowledge.

Dan Martin: And so there are instances where you have to know the community to know who to draw in, who needs to speak in to this matter or this decision? What perspective do we need to hear? Whether it's a faculty, staff, students, alumni, anyone that's a part of this community has a particular story and expertise that is a wonderful well of resource that we can draw upon. And so that's what makes I think this place special is that we have individuals that are dedicated not only to achieving the highest in their profession in developing that expertise, but they enter into this community with a real heart for SPU, for our mission, for where we want to go, and they help us make decision that align with that, that are intended to be the very best for this place and for our students.

Amanda S: Yes, I agree with everything you just said, and I've been around here for a while. But for those who don't work here, and for those who aren't a part of this community on a day to day basis, how then can we take that model out into our own families, churches, communities, businesses, workplace? How do we use that model to become a leader where we are?

Dan Martin: You have to approach your leadership and your goal with that understanding that you are there to empower and to serve. So as you do that you have to understand what you don't know. You do definitely have to understand your own gifts, your own abilities, your own experience and bring that in to it, but for me leadership is about empowering, it's about resourcing, it's about staying mission-focused and developing a team of individuals that can come alongside the particular objective, whether it is a strategic plan, or encountering operational issues along the way, or making the mundane daily decisions. But to be a part of a team, to flourish and foster and facilitate that so that the mission can be fulfilled.

Dan Martin: So for me leadership is about empowerment and about resourcing, it's about providing a clear focus and vision for where the organization needs to go, and then helping ensure that there's harmony and understanding from individuals that are assigned and carried forward each and every aspect of that mission, because a leader certainly shouldn't know everything that's going on. If a leader does know everything that's going on within any particular organization, there's not enough going on. So they need to foster and facilitate action and activity to fulfill the mission, and so they have to understand that they can't do that by themselves, they can't be involved in every decision, so it's developing a team of individuals, and then empowering them to give them the authority and the responsibility to move forward within their area and their role and responsibility.

Amanda S: So can I back up to a slightly personal question, and say for someone that gets up every day and come to work to hold up a community and the big picture and all the things that happen day to day, and all the things that are handled, sometimes very publicly, and sometimes completely privately, what do you do personally to be able to take that on every day and not just end up so exhausted Friday that you don't have anything left to give?

Amanda S: And I say by Friday, but I'm sure a lot of times that goes all the way through the weekend.

Dan Martin: Yeah, the role of a president at a university is really a lifestyle role, especially for me since I live in university housing here on campus, right? And so there is little opportunity to escape from knowing the responsibility that you have each and every day to care and lead this university community, so it's ever present. And so there are avenues though that you do have to have those personal moments of renewal, of contemplation, of disconnectedness so that you can then lead effectively when called upon. So for me it's leaning into my a faith and my walk with Jesus Christ to ensure that my faith is remaining vibrant in him so that there are opportunities for Christ to speak in and through me, to provide me the care and restoration that I need in my own life.

Dan Martin: Then for me it's spending time with my family and my friends, my community of individuals that may be a part of this place and may not be, where I can find rest and relaxation in moments where I can allow my brain and my activities to be anything but this place, so that I can then come back refreshed, perhaps more creative and more energized, being renewed in my own heart and spirit.

Amanda S: As we look out back to the takeaways for all of us since most people are not going to have the kind of responsibility and the weight that you have chosen to walk around with and lead this community, but, we all turn on the TV and the radio virtually every day these days and hear that things are not going well and that we should be doing more. We should be doing more to save the planet, we should be doing more for our neighbors, we should be doing more for the city of Seattle.

Amanda S: What can we do as individuals to answer that call without just ending up back at home with the covers over our heads saying it's too much?

Dan Martin: Yeah, you know it can be overwhelming at times for sure. But it's like with any role within an organization where there is a broader mission to fulfill. It's the understanding that you can't do everything, but yet you can do something. And so as I talk with students and I ask them to think about their life, I challenge them to think about their life and as they pursue their vocational call, as they live within community with others, to move through their life with an eye to the world that asks the question, "Is this the way that God intended it to be?"

Dan Martin: Within your own community, you can look with that question and have that be a filter to understand what is happening around you. So there are things in the world which we can't resolve, but we can make a difference where we live, where we learn, where we are a member of a particular community. And if we see something that does not align with what we believe this is the way that God intended to be, then look at ourselves and ask the question, "Is there something that I can do to help that situation or that concern better reflect the way God intended it to be, the Kingdom of God?"

Dan Martin: And then assess our own abilities, our own passion, our own interests and then discover for ourselves how we can engage to resolve that challenge, or that issue for the benefit of others in some way. Living a life of service to others is a part of our Christian walk, it's a part of building a strong community, it's a part of helping others flourish in this world which is a reflection of the Kingdom of God.

Amanda S: I wonder if we could add on to that as a means of accomplishing everything you just said, to seek mentorship and to be a mentor. As you started with you wouldn't be sitting here across from me, and I would say I wouldn't be sitting here across from you, without the mentors who spoke in to my life and you in to yours. So I wonder if a way that we can seek to achieve all the beautiful things you just said is to seek out those mentors and then also turn around and use what we've learned to help those around us.

Dan Martin: I would certainly agree with that. There’s a wonderful opportunity for individuals to as they move through their professional career and through their life to impart wisdom, ideas, challenges to those that come before them. And I really feel it's a part of our responsibility to ensure that the future is as fulfilling and as in aligned with God's intended purposes for this world and our lives, for those to take that step and become a mentor to encourage those who come behind us. And to provide opportunities for leadership, for roles, responsibilities, people gave me an opportunity to pursue my calling and what I believed God had for me at a very early age. Others provided opportunities for me at a very early age in my professional career that gave me the ability to pursue what I believe God had for me.

Dan Martin: And so within that I think providing opportunities whether it is through mentorship or through professional roles within your company or organization to those that are younger, understanding that there may be challenges or concerns with that, but giving them the ability to rise to the occasion, I think a lot of people would be surprised, and so I think that's part of our responsibility to grow a future generation of leaders is to look back and bring others along in the process.

Amanda S: And see what those strengths are, right? To go back to the beginning of our conversation, to mind those strengths and realize what each of those team members have to offer to the group, because we all have something that only we bring to the table, even if we're new to that role or that department.

Dan Martin: Yeah, and I think you can see something in someone that they don't see themselves. And I think speaking into their life in a way that helps them perhaps discover something about themselves, or something that may have been latent that was one there to reclaim that, to redeem that, to renew that in their own heart and life as they pursue their professional path and their personal path I think is a wonderful gift you can give to others.

Amanda S: Thank you so much for joining us and for mentoring us, really, and speaking into the lives of so many that are a part of this place and this community and just for being you.

Dan Martin: Well thank you, thank you for the time, thank you for what you're doing in terms of moving these podcasts out into the market, and encouraging others to listen in to all that is happening in and through the life of Seattle Pacific. It's been an amazing story since 1891, and I believe our future is much brighter than our past, which is a very hopeful place to be and one that that I surely believe.

Amanda S: Thank you.

Amanda S: We hoped you liked today's interview and learned something along the way. From Amanda and Kyle we ask you to rate, review, and subscribe so we can keep bringing you these personal stories with universal impact. See you soon.