

0:04 Nia: Ok. So, Willie, first of all, thank you for taking your time for this interview. It really means a lot. And...

0:14 Willie: My pleasure.

0:17 N: (Laughs) And so, (pause) the first question is going to be pretty basic, but you know, like, so how long have you worked at Otterbein?

0:29 W: Ah gosh, I came on board at Otterbein in 1983, so I am approaching that 40-year anniversary. Kind of hard to believe.

0:38 N: Wow. So, a lot can happen over 40 years. Have you noticed any, you know, difference? How much has changed at... at the institution in and of itself?

0:53 W: Absolutely, lots of things have changed. It's kind of hard to give a short elevator response to that, so I won't attempt. Instead, I will say that the student population has grown, you know. As we approach our commencement exercises or spring commencement, I'm reminded of that growth in student graduates. We certainly have those commencement exercises held in the Rike center. At that time, the entire graduating class, faculty included, and their guests were all seated comfortably in the Rike center. We pulled the curtains shut across the basketball floor, and it was a wonderful celebration of their scholastic achievements. As we look at commencement now, we actually have to add hundreds of chairs to the floor and extend another set of bleachers out well beyond the curtain, to hold all of those individuals that now make up the commencement graduating class. So that alone has changed. Thinking about the geography of the campus, certainly I've seen new buildings come online that's been exciting to go from open green spaces to footers being dug. And all of a sudden over time seeing buildings began to take shape on campus. Those buildings then populate with either students or they become admin offices, so Westerville in itself has seen a growth of Otterbein University and, and for me it's been great being a part of that growth.

2:32 N: Wow. (pauses) So, what are some of the roles that you've had at Otterbein over the years then?

2:40 W: I jokingly, (Laughs) I jokingly called myself or to refer to myself as a Chief Chaos Control Officer, and that was because of how disruptive technology malfunctions can be to, to anyone's day. But as I think back to the positions held, coming in the door at the entry level as an AV technician was an absolute joy because truly, I had hands on any and everything that the campus had in its arsenal of AV equipment that was used to teach faculty, that we used to teach students, that were used to entertain guests. So that was an interesting time because you, you really got to know the hardware intimately. And, and I phrase it that way because when we think about technology now, we're, we're more consumers. We touch buttons and interact with devices. When I started you really had to get to know the device in order to operate it. I mean it was beyond just a simple button. I won't get into all the technical details there. I'll instead focus on the various roles. So again, starting with the entry level role of an AV technician was skill sets or skill demands, number one. That position grew as we start to take on more staff within the department. That department was located in the lower level of the library and at the time it was the Learning Resource Center. As our staff grew and my role grew, more individuals who did

what I do came on board. Kind of hard to verbalize that sentence for some reason this time of day. So, I then migrated into a leadership role as an Associate Director of the department and eventually became the Department Director. And at that time, evolution of technology was starting to really take a good strong hold on Otterbein's campus. And we transitioned from the Learning Resource Center to Instructional Media Center, focusing more on instruction and not so much on 'equipment' per se. Time goes on and we began seeing a lot of our devices, new devices that are coming in the door that were almost computers that look like AV equipment. Eventually, my unit was then moved over to Roush Hall to join forces with Information Technology. That department was renamed Information and Technology Services, so it combined the world of AV and IT very effectively. Still the director, my role was still the Director of Instructional Support Services. It eventually transitioned to Senior Technology Specialist within the Office of Information and Technology Services. So, I've seen a number of hats on campus and certainly a number of departments that I've worked with in on campus.

5:54 N: So, I like what you said about like getting to know the technology. It reminds me of an interview that I saw, (pauses) that you did with Tim Albright discussing the importance of emotional intelligence. And of course, like a human and a machine are two different things, but... it still, the (pauses) the process of getting to know something instead of: you ask a question, get an answer, or make a cause. You expect the effects immediately, so.

6:30 W: Absolutely.

6:36 N: I'm sure a lot of people have a pretty vague conception of what emotional intelligence is. So, can you describe what it means to you?

6:49 W: And I'm trying to avoid the textbook answer, so I'll say what it means to me is just being keenly aware of how my actions impact the well-being of others. And I'll explain that and... and... and in this detail. Part of my previous roles here at the university would be classroom design, and indeed performance space design, when we think about spaces such as the Clements Recreation Center or the Library, Roush Hall, The Point. To sit down and meet with architects and to sit down and meet with faculty and indeed students can be very informative. Where the emotional intelligence comes in is really hearing that individuals need, right, of how they'll live and work within the space. You know, it's easy to buy furniture and put it within a classroom environment or add lighting fixtures to a classroom or projection technologies and a screen. It's a whole different science, if you will, to understand how people interact with those devices and what they hope to achieve within those spaces. For instance, if, if we were to take athletics or health and sports sciences, right, faculty teaching in a classroom can have very different demands, spatially, of that classroom that someone, say, teaching English, would have if the classrooms had the exact same physical dimensions. For English and, and this is me guesstimating, so I don't have the specialty in pedagogy, right? But for English you can conceive a faculty, kind of the, the 'sage on the stage', going over literature, students sharing passages from a variety of different works, maybe discussion taking place amongst students; if there were like breakout sessions that were happening within that classroom environment, you go forward or clear that room, and now you bring in a group from Health and Sports Sciences. You may still have the 'sage on the stage.' In other words, these subject matter experts, i.e., the faculty. But

now there's likely a need for a demonstration area. So, if you're studying physiology of, of athleticism, certainly you can talk about that from a textbook standpoint. But often you're going to need to demonstrate what it means from a physical stance standpoint, from a muscular skeletal standpoint. So, you're looking at areas where you have to address usable space. You know, do the desk moves, do the chairs move are they easily slid out of the way? Is there an abundance of demonstrations space there? If you both, push both of those curriculums out of the way and now you bring in an art class, right? And you're studying art and you're going over this granular detail about what's projected on that screen. So now you're, you're really honed in on the visual aspects of it. So, the geography of the classroom may not be as important. In other words, you may not need group breakout or demonstration areas, but what you need are keen visual components within that classroom. You need the opportunity to control lighting in various zones so you're not washing out classroom content. You need higher resolution projectors and screens that offer greater gain or reflective light values coming off the screen that impacts the eyes so that that detail of the image renders a lot clearer. So again, when I'm choosing products, when I'm working with the, I don't want to say clients, when working with the campus population, I make certain that I'm listening to their needs because at the end of the day, really all of our work needs to be brand agnostic. It doesn't matter XYZ brand that you're putting in. What really matters is how "well is it working?" and "how well is it meeting the needs of those who are really relying on it?" And it needs to be user-friendly as well. I do want to throw that in.

11:06 N: I like that. I also would like to, from your interview with Tim, you said that failure is an event and I think that is a very, very important philosophy of life and I was wondering if you have any more philosophies like that.

11:28 W: Oh gosh. They happen with some sense of spontaneity. (Laughs) When philosophies come forward and yeah and, and failure is definitely an event and, and not a person and that's something that I try to share with people. You know, in life we are presented with a variety of learning opportunities. And we never know when that learning opportunity is going to occur. You know, jokingly, I've been known to say that equipment never fails, right? Instead, there are, how did I best phrase it? There are undocumented features that we're sometimes treated to. So, it's not so much an equipment failure. So, it's really about how you frame that experience. You know, you, you can have an incident. Wreck your day. Or it can give you an opportunity to learn more about how you deal with the unexpected, because they happen every single day. I know they do with me. One example would be a conference at The Point, this was about 3, maybe four weeks ago. And I won't mention the client, but they had a great crowd. So, imagine everyone's gathering, they're excited, all the energies in the room. Every presenter's got their presentation, they've test run it, the audio is set, and then the building goes completely dark. And I know there's nothing I can do about that from a power standpoint going into the building. At least there's nothing I can do to turn it back on. But I do know that I have contact information for those who have access to the infrastructure. So, we start by, of course, contacting our Police Department, not because it's a life safety emergency, but I know those individuals have access to the campus network of security cameras. So, by looking at those camera feeds, they can immediately determine whether or not the power outage is isolated to the building that I'm in or whether it's broader to campus, I.e., a larger Westerville issue. Once we determine and talking

with them that it was isolated to just the building, I was in. Then I move on to our facilities group, sharing with them the power outage situation. They then check the grid and realize that it's not within the building, but it's actually outside of the building and they immediately contacted the city of Westerville. So, in a short time interval of making those calls and contacting the right offices I then see a couple of trucks from the City of Westerville pull up and they reestablish the circuit breaker on one of the u..., one of the utility poles near the building, and that got power back up. We were up and running. So again, it was a learning opportunity, right for me, and it was one of those things of recognizing that it wasn't a failure. Because even though those individuals were prepared with their presentations and they had that glitch, they still have the opportunity to address the crowd that was gathered, and they could step down from the stage and do so in more of an intimate manner instead of being at the stage talking through the microphone. So, it's really about adaptability and in some instances and that was one of the, I think, the joys of seeing a group of professionals who really kept their professional caps on and kept moving forward, and then when power was reestablished, we just picked up where we left off. (Laughs)

15:09 N: Wow, that is very, very interesting. So, what made you want to pursue a career in technical services?

15:21 W: I am wired that way. (Laughs) No, truly. I have a curious mind about how things work and as a kid, you know, I feel comfortable saying I got my butt spanked a lot. Because I took apart a lot of things in the household, and I did it frequently, my toys did not last long. Because the curious mind had to know exactly what was inside, how it operated, and why it did what it did when I pushed certain buttons, or why it didn't do what I wanted it to do when I was confident that I changed it or modified it to do step X. So, all that aside it was, I guess, really evident that I had this desire for the electromechanical world, and, and really that's where the passion comes from. I consider myself a, I've heard it described, not me, but I've heard the term "fortunate deviant" described. When I first heard it, it, it... I didn't like the sound of it, I'll be honest, but as it was explained, the "fortunate deviant:" is the one that deviates from the norm and the norm, and my case was kind of despair and loss. So, for me, I excelled because I always asked why. I always asked, you know, why was the sky blue? Why is the grass green? And I know maybe many kids asked that question, but I truly needed to know. And for someone to say, "well, that's the way God made it." While I heard them, I couldn't accept that as the end all. There still had to be an underlying reason. So, to gain an understanding of moisture vapors in the air and molecules of light or bands of light, visible light processing through those molecules, the prisms, I mean, there's so much to this incredible world. It's hard not to be entertained. And much like I've shared with students, if you're bored, it's because you're not looking beyond the surface level.

17:44 N: So how would that relate to your philosophy that failure is an event and not a person or any other life philosophies that you have or continue to, to foster?

18:00 W: Yep, failure is an event and not a person. How does that relate? Well? Gosh, I'm trying to give some practical examples of that. And, and I think for me it would be sitting down in the aftermath of, let's say, an event. And for the person hosting the event, they felt it was a failure.

They felt perhaps they were a failure because the sound didn't come through as cleanly as they would like or as loud as they would like, or the graphics didn't show on screen as brightly or as colorful as they would like, and I basically explained to them what happened during the event. You know "what went wrong" during the event, not so much what they did wrong. One clear example would be sitting down with a colleague recently as they were looking at the graphics on their screen for a PowerPoint presentation that they completed and I said, "well, have you tried it in the classroom" [they], said "no, it looks good here". So well, the resolution, the color rendering on your computer monitor is very different than that from a projector. You know that projector is projecting light onto a screen. The screen is reflecting it back to the eye. There are a lot of dynamics happening there and when they tested it, they found out that visually, there was far less impact to their graphic on the screen than it was on their monitor. So, it's giving, I think, our... ourselves the opportunity to experience life in order to recognize the areas in which we can grow. So again, it's not so much failure of a person, but it is truly an event. I hope that kind of better explains that aspect of the philosophy.

19:57 N: Oh yes it, it does. So, when it came to achieving your goals, you know growing up you were, you were different, you were very techy based the "fortunate deviant" which I actually like that, it's... (laughs) it's very, it makes a lot of sense. So how has the factor of race affected you when it came to achieving it? And you don't have to answer if you're uncomfortable with this.

20:29 W: I am as comfortable with pretty much everything I experience in life. For, for me, race has, has definitely. I wouldn't say it's been a challenge. But it's been, it's never an obstacle. I won't allow it to be an obstacle. I do recognize that there are challenges, societal challenges, right? So here I am, a man of color, entering the arena of technology. So, as I walk into those spaces, whether I'm attending a conference, whether I'm walking into a classroom, even shopping, in a technology store, something along that line, right? The clientele, a lot of the clientele, does not look like me. The employees do not look like me. Going into that conference environment, many of the patrons throughout there do not look like me. If I have the opportunity to visit a factory where the technology is being created or designed, a lot of the staff, the employees, the engineers do not look like me. So, for me I, I don't allow those differences to be barriers to my success and getting out and doing what I desire to do. But I also recognize that for some, it's a barrier for them as far as they're honest and open communication with me. In other words, as I enter into that space and that person recognizes that I am a different color than they are, different ethnicity than they are. That's what they see, predominantly. What I see is a technology opportunity, right? So, what they should be seeing is a technology conversation opportunity, a technology sales opportunity, a technology mentoring opportunity, a technology informa... information exchange opportunity. So, I fully recognize how ethnicity, race and even gender factors into how we interact with people around us, but it need not be a hindrance one other chunk of philosophy: Difference does not mean deficient, and that's one of the things I try to get across to people. It is completely fine to be different. You know, we don't even think about it if we take a bite of an apple and then take a bite of an orange or a banana or grapes, all different, but we wouldn't say one is deficient, right? They're just different. The same thing about humans, the same thing about gender, the same thing about height, you know, the same thing about curly hair, straight hair. Different, not deficient.



23:19 N: So, what other advice would you give to, POC youth who want to pursue a career in tech services because, as you said, it's a very narrow demographic as of now.

20:34 W: (Pauses) My advice would be to be patient in your encounters with people. Now I know I'll get some pushback from my colleagues, particularly those of color and those not right, because, well, there, there are two things. One, as a person of color, and this is something that I've certainly talked about in circles of people of color and, and folks not of color, right? There are times that you feel burdened by the notion of, of servicing, serving as the educator. You know when, when, when it, when my white friends will ask me a question about the black experience. I have no problems with it. You know, it's open. It's honest communication. And there are times that they will preface it by saying, "well, I hope this doesn't make you mad, but I'd like to ask this question" and I immediately respond with "no, it doesn't make me mad, but I am disappointed that you feel that you needed to qualify because I'm honest with you and I hope you always be honest with me." The other piece of that is they're asking me to serve as a spokesperson for an entire race of people, right? You know, not all women are like a monolith, right? Not all black males are like a monolith. I mean, we're all individuals, so there is that unfair weight. Through those interactions as, as we weight people of, of color and I say that based upon my experience. So, I have no scientific proof to say every single question is weighted along those lines. I only have my own experiences and shared experiences by people of color who can, who can have, who have shared that that same type of burden. So, it's to kind of be patient as you're interact and talk, don't let fear push you away from anything that looks attractive as far as a career. Anything you want to dive into, dive into, you know, just be you. There are times where I, I think we all fall victim to the fact that we're human beings. And there are things that are ingrained in us as human beings, right? For instance, the human brain always wants to solve puzzles. If you were standing outside in the library at your car, wherever, and you heard a noise you immediately without even thinking about it, begin to solve "what is that noise?" Right. You're gonna turn and look. You're gonna pause what you're doing. Your brain's asking, is there a threat there? Is that what the cause of the noise? I mean, it's, it's an automatic instinctive piece, right? Which also means as we encounter individuals who don't look like us, aren't sized like us, don't have the same speech cadence, maybe have an accent different to us. We want to solve that in some manner, and sometimes it solving means shifting that person to a different category. That category could be cooperative, or it could be combative and that is one of the things, as I think about anyone of color who's looking for a career and whatever? If you're going into an arena where you're representing a minority of people who look like you, there is that puzzle. That unfortunately, you have to help people solve because you know who you are and what you have to offer and what you're bringing forward. And there are times you are kind of compelled to convince that person to recognize your difference, but not view your difference as a deficiency.

28:02 N: So how would you handle like, I'm going to call it like representative or educator burnout because as you said if you're the minority and no one else in your field looks like you and you, you kind of expect you're expected to be that representative or people ask you, "hey is this OK, did I offend you or how would you handle it?" So, and on one hand it can be very appreciative, but on the other hand, it, it just gets so exhausting. So how would you combat that?

28:48 W: Yep. That's a very good question. Thank you for asking that. At some point you learn when to engage and when not to engage, so that fatigue isn't an issue and, and there's sometimes a, you have to learn to pick your battles. One example would be a gathering with friends in the state of Pennsylvania and one of the persons in the gathering says "gosh, I used to be a big fan of his but when he started speaking up on XYZ issue. I just start to dislike him, you know? I would just wish he'd shut up and play basketball." And yeah, and, and there was the racial tone to it, but there was also... how can I best phrase it? Oh, I'll rephrase it or present the sentence a little bit differently as it's spooling around in my head. So, I turned to this gentleman, and, who's part of the group, and I said, "you know, I, I hear what you're saying. It is disappointing because whether that person's a musician, athlete, movie star, I mean, we recognize them for that role, however, It's a job, right? Just like our jobs. And there's nothing about taking any of our jobs." And I point to everyone in the room, including myself. "There's nothing about taking any of our jobs where we are mandated to give up our rights as American citizens." So regardless of what job we take, we can still speak out on issues we don't like. We can choose to paint our house of color that is appealing to us. We can drive any car that represents our ideals. You know, we can be full people, so we're not really beholden to that role to shape our absolute being, you know, we can be entertainers, but we're still full people. So, I hear you. Yeah, when you say, "gosh, I wish they just focus on basketball," because that's how we know that person. But they're a whole person, you know, and that person just happened as we know, to be married and has a family, you know. So that person is a dad, you know, and, and is probably an uncle because they have siblings and probably shops at some of the same brand grocery stores that we shop at. So, I took that piece of dialogue, that awkward exchange, and just encourage the person to think a little broader about an individual versus holding them tight and say, "this is the only value that you have to me." And I can only hope that what he heard was conversation from me and not confrontation. And it, and it can be a bit complicated to get there with people. But it reminds me of something that someone shared with me many years ago, that when you experience someone saying something that really rubs you the wrong way or you feel it's, I don't know, maybe oppressing the rights of another. Instead of calling them out on it, try calling them in. You know, try to have conversation instead of confrontation with them, you know? In other words, recognize what they're saying and ask for more. You know, ask them to explain why they feel that way without kind of pointing the finger of "why did you say that?"

32:33 N: That's, that's really good advice. I'm glad, I'm glad you shared that so, this question is more or less like from back to our earlier conversation, but so looking back on everything, how has your time Otterbein impacted you?

32:56 W: It's made me crazy, no... (laughs)

33:00 N: (Laughs)

33:02 W: Since day one, really since birth, I feel like humor is, is a must for me and, and that hasn't changed throughout the time here at Otterbein. As far as how it has affected me, the years at Otterbein, I can, I can truly say only positive. When I think about the opportunities that I've had to, to work with and learn from the people around me, things I've been exposed to. It they've really been tremendous how it has impacted me. It's broadened my worldview. There is there,

there are lots of areas that I know nothing about, right? And I think that's true of most of us. But there is seldom an area that I don't know who to ask about, if that makes any sense. And I remember talking with the librarian, and this was years ago, and I used to enjoy silly little game that I call 'stump the librarian', and I never won. I'm still not bitter. I just never won. And it goes like this. Let's say I had a question about flooding and southern Ohio and why it's such a problem, right? And the librarian would provide an answer or point me to a series of books where I could find the answer. So instead of just accepting or rationalizing that Southern Ohio is a bad place to live because it floods all the time, the discussion would actually turn towards geography, right? And it would turn towards the topographical maps. So, you start to see the lay of the land and the fact that water will always take the path of least resistance. And then you start to look beyond that, and you look at city developments and you look at areas that used to be broad, huge green spaces, maybe farms that are now shopping malls that are now housing development. So, when rain pours down, it hits those impermeable spaces. It runs into storm sewers. We all recognize that. But the water still has to go somewhere. So, it hits the small streams and the creeks and the rivers, and since water always seeks the path of least resistance, it's going to go to the lower lying areas and if that is 50, 60, an 80 miles away, that's where it's going to head. So that downpour of rain that, you know 24 hours later, we're still doing fine here in Columbus, but in southern Ohio, they're having flooding issues. And it's not directly because of what happened in Columbus, but it's all of the tributaries and the surrounding areas that contribute to the rise in water levels elsewhere and then you also have the permeability of ground of different areas of soil as well that factors into that, so being at Otterbein means that if you're standing still and not learning anything, apparently, you're deceased. Because there is always something to learn, always something to learn.

36:17 N: So, I guess that could lead to like how the library in of itself has impacted you, because it's both, its own thing, but it's also part of Otterbein, so it's I don't want to say it's at an odd limbo because it's its own identity, but, you know, (laughs) sorry, I'm lost for words.

36:48 W: Oh no, the library, libraries in general are unique places. They are, gosh, they're, they're like [an] Oasis in the in the desert. One of the fond memories that I have is when our first library opened in my neighborhood. I was maybe 10 years old, and I remember reading volumes of Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys. I don't know if I should even share that, (laughs) but, but it was, it was like a double wide trailer with air conditioning. So, one it had air conditioning. I grew up in a house on a dirt road. No air conditioning, no screen doors. So, on the hottest days you couldn't really open the door and get much ventilation because all kinds of bugs would fly in. But all that aside to go into this space meant that I could go into a whole different world, right? So regardless of what I had or didn't have at home the library really didn't care where I came from, right? Because the books will never discriminate against you. You could walk in, grab any volume that you were interested in, and just pour through it. Page after page. You can ask questions of the librarian. You can be excited about something new that was coming in. You could travel well beyond the borders of your neighborhood and beyond the geography, even of the US, by just visiting the library. So just the wealth of opportunities that libraries in general provide to the entire world is just utterly amazing and, and that's what the library has and continues to mean to me. And the fact that I started my professional career seated within that



environment of the Courtright Memorial Library is absolutely great because again, I was a kid that always wanted to know why.

38:50 N: That's great. So, to end this interview on a very lighter note of so we all just came back from a long weekend. A well-deserved long weekend. And this also would relate to how you said about this celebrity who's a whole person, not just someone we know as their job. So, I was wondering if there is any personal interests or hobbies that you like to do outside of work?

39:23 W: Yes, yes. (laughs) 24/7 365 days a year in my vehicle, unless I've removed them for some reason are fishing poles. So, I have my fishing gear with me at all times. There are many times that during my lunch hour I will fish instead of enjoying lunch, and that's my tranquility. There are also binoculars in my vehicle and four birding books. I enjoy birding, which I find to just be a delightful hobby and just looking at the nature of things. Other things would include cycling. I, I enjoy getting on the bike and just kind of being a kid again, traveling far faster than I can if I'm walking, and having the opportunity to see things that I would typically miss if I'm in my vehicle because you're cognizant of the cars around you in traffic and such. On a bike, you're certainly cognizant of cars around you and traffic, but at a slower pace you can really take in all the nuances of the neighborhood. The doors, the landscaping, people in general, things of that nature, and because I have this passion for the physical world of how things work, I enjoy sport shooting. That is, I know it's just a joy of trying to understand the physics of Ballistics, if you will, and how things interact with air around you and, and even the deception of distance, particularly on a hot day versus a cold day. Some of us have probably noticed on hot days, if you're looking down a piece of asphalt road you see little heat vapors rising. Yeah, we don't really think about it. It impacts the world around us, but it does tremendously. One example would be this kind of flips back to technology, talking with a colleague in the field about sound system design. He and his company integrated the sound system at one of the major motor speedways, and he says, "most people don't notice, but a lot of the speakers and the grandstand are actually facing downward towards the audience". I said, "why would you face them down?" Says, "well, heat rises, right? We all agree. So, you have that hot track. And as those air molecules rise, they push the sound waves upward". So, if you're firing down. Sound gets pushed up and into the grandstand. If you aim it at the grandstand, you will lose so much volume because it began shooting right over people's head, because they are molecules are pushing it upward. You know things like that that you just don't think about. But it makes the world exciting when you understand the physics of it and all the things are that are at play around us all the time.

42:28 N: Yeah, that's, that's very interesting. I never thought of that. Like it's so... Well, again, thank you so much for taking your time for this interview. And so, I guess that wraps everything up. So once again, it's been a pleasure getting to know you and talking to you, Willie. Thank you.

42:47 W: I appreciate the opportunity to share. So, thank you for asking.

42:51 N: (Laughs) No problem. All right. Bye.

42:54 W: Enjoy the afternoon.

42:55 N: You too.

42:56 W: Bye, bye