Andrew Brayda: Welcome today to Simon Bizcast! My name is Andrew Brayda. I am joined by my fantastic colleague, LaTanya Johns from our Benet Career Management Center. Hello, Latanya. Thank you for taking time out of your day to join the podcast.

LaTanya Johns: Hi, Andrew. It's always a pleasure to do anything with the awesome admissions team, but especially excited to join you today. So thanks for having me.

AB: Well, thank you again and, this is really, you know, part of my job. I enjoy the most, the interaction that we get to have with my, you know, with our counterparts across the school, and the team that we have here at Simon. So it's, you know, I've really enjoyed working with you and I'm excited for our listeners to hear from you a little bit today and get to know you a little bit better as well personally. And then, you know, of course, we want to talk a little bit about the career management center process and approach here at Simon across our programs. But a bit excited to hear from you and Latanya. I was hoping you could at least start us off just with a kind of an overview, a little bit of background introduction on yourself and then we can go from there.

LJ: That'd be great. Wonderful. Thanks again for having me, Andrew. So a little bit about me. I joined the Simon community back in June of 2021. So I'm about to reach my three year anniversary. Woo-hoo!

AB: Happy anniversary!

LJ: So thank you. Thank you. So, prior to Simon, and in total, I have about 30 years of professional experience with expertise and have made substantial contributions in higher education and in career services, specifically in business school career services and in graduate business career services. So, this is my career. This is my passion. I was very honored and just thrilled to join as the assistant dean of the Benet Career Management Center here at Simon, primarily focusing on overseeing our center's strategic direction and also the daily operations to enhance our career service offerings for our students and our corporate partners. In addition to leading a diverse team here at the Benet Center. I also serve on the board of directors for the MBA Career Services and Employer Alliance, which is an organization that creates the standards for employment outcomes reporting that all accredited and ranked business schools adhere to. So I'm very excited to be a part of the board of that organization.

AB: Awesome. And well, I think LaTanya didn't share as well, is that her and I are both New York Giants football fans. And so, we have, you know, I slightly biased towards LaTanya, of course. But we're in Bills country here in Western New York, and so it's nice to have a Giants fan that I can go to in the highs and lows—mostly lows lately.

LJ: Mostly lows but we're coming back!

AB: Coming back!

LJ: …maybe not this year.

AB: Well, so three years you've been at Simon almost and obviously been in this space for, for a number of years. And I'm curious, you know, maybe you could talk a little bit about how you maybe see the industry change a little bit, but how our approach to, you know, the career management center, you know, the career search process is different at Simon and how we,
how we kind of approach things kind of uniquely here at Simon as you know, compared to maybe some other places you work, maybe not necessarily, we won't want to name names, but just the experience, the different experience here at Simon.

LJ: Yeah. Sure. Andrew. When you asked that question, one thing that popped in my head when I think back to my very first role in career services, we had a job book, like a physical book that sat on a desk in the office and students would have to come in and they would thumb through the book and yes, I really am excited about this job. And so that was, you know, again, I mentioned 30 years I've been doing this. So as I look back to that and how we've evolved, I mean, clearly technology plays a huge role and there are some amazing vendors that have created platforms for us to be able to do the things that we do to connect our students with companies and with opportunities. And so obviously, you know, technology has definitely impacted our industry as it has pretty much our whole world and every aspect of our life.

But also I think that one of the things that I've seen change quite a bit over the last few years even, is just really what resonates with today's student—so different than even pre-COVID. And so it's causing career services professionals to have to be creative. We really have to—I know this is a, a cliché to say—but we really do have to meet the students where they are. We have to really just start with the blank page on how we approach the work that we do because year in and year out, it just needs to, we need to always think about who our end user is.

And so I'm very fortunate that I've inherited a team and also been able to hire some folks since I've been here at Simon who really embrace that year to year. Let's take inventory of what we're doing. Let's let's be informed about who we're admitting from and our awesome colleagues in admissions and really just approach the school year from the perspective of our student. And so programming looks different, resources continue to evolve, how we communicate and how we promote things to students—our marketing changes, and then having conversations with our employer partners because they also have to be mindful that recruiting our students has to change year to year. They have to have a good sense of who are the MBAs of today, not the same as MBAs they recruited four years ago. So I appreciate that we have a strong corporate engagement team that can provide insights to our corporate partners and help them to recruit our students. So I think that it's just a combination of staying up on all of the latest technological advances and also just being mindful of how we should be communicating, how we should be promoting events, and also just what, what really resonates with students.

AB: That's great. And I—we talk about this quite a bit, the personalized approach at Simon. And, and I love that you talked about meeting the students where they're at, you know, and, and that I think your team does a fantastic job of, of that in particular and supporting students kind of every step of the way and obviously we're very proud of that aspect of assignment experience, right? Where, where students are, are known and supported throughout their experience. And, but you, you talked about sort of the MBAs of today, and obviously looking very different maybe than, than what they have in the past in terms of the skills that they need to be successful, the, the, the, you know, the things that they need to be developing in an MBA program. And so I guess are there a few things maybe that you would kind of point to that help a student, you know, be successful you know, kind of in their search—in their career search here at Simon? And I, I am curious, you know, as sort of the, the market has changed as well, technology, what, you know, are there some of those skills that you would maybe point to that help students be successful? Right? I mean, yeah, may maybe it's all part of the same question, I guess, but, but are there some things that help students be successful. So, you know, behavioral skills, technical skills, all sorts of things.
LJ: Sure. Thanks for that question. I'm going to start with something that has nothing to do with the job search or the internship search. The absolute first priority that our students have to really be focused on is self-care. I feel that with the balancing act of academics and then all of the highs and lows of the internship or full-time job search, that self-care piece is so critical. And we see when students aren't putting that first and foremost on their priority list, we see the dark side of that. And so I really appreciate that Simon has such a great emphasis on wellness. Our Graduate Business Council has a wellness vice president and his or her role on an annual basis is to create programming so that students are taking care of themselves.

So that's one. The other thing is there are so many resources here at Simon. Not just in the Benet Career Center, but at Simon as a whole. And students really need to leverage all of those resources and those resources are not just tech technology platforms and you know, just resources to help them with their job search, but resources like their faculty members, their peers, their admissions team, the team in the academic advising office, all of those resources have to be leveraged and students have to—again, it's all about time management and multitasking. Also, just students need to be very comfortable and motivated to set some personalized and obtainable goals. Because I feel that when you don't have a goal that you've set, and it has to be a smart goal, you want it to be something that you can actually measure—something that you can actually attain. When you don't have that, that's where some of the feelings of I'm floundering or I'm uncertain. And that again, it impacts their wellness, right? So setting those goals is definitely key to be successful.

Also being adaptable. We have seen over the last few years that the job market, it's been volatile at some points, it's been unpredictable. It's been very just, you know, wait and see what's gonna happen next. And I think that when you're, when you're looking for employment, whether you're a student or just you or I, I think you have to be mindful that what you have set your sights on may or may not be available at a given time. And so how do you pivot? And that's where conversations with the career advising team is going to be very instrumental. But just being adaptable and understanding that if not now, then later—but what can we focus on now? And then I think the last thing that I would say that it takes for students to be successful: you have to celebrate the wins and the wins are not always an offer. The wins could be that you made a great connection with an alum in the industry that you are pursuing. A win could be that you got some great interview feedback from one of your recruiters and they told you all of these things that you did well, and maybe you didn't get the offer because it was just a numbers game and they didn't have enough spots. Maybe the win is that you have an amazing résumé and you are getting some great feedback, you get, you're getting a lot of interviews from your résumé and maybe the win is that you feel really confident in who you are. You're able to articulate your goals and you're able to confidently promote yourself to employers. Those are all wins. But sometimes I think in this space students equate wins to an actual offer. And of course, we want that for our students. And of course, that's why they are doing all of these things, but you have to look at all of these things as building up to the big win, but these are absolutely wins and definitely need to take out some time to celebrate those.

AB: Awesome. Thanks LaTanya. I am curious, you talked about self-care, wellness is what, what do you do? I guess for self-care, wellness, hobbies outside of work, is there something that you that's your go to other than the Giants, of course.

LJ: Right. Well, yeah, I don't know that that's self-care. That's self punishment.

AB: Very true.
LJ: But I, this, I don't know that it's self-care but it is time that I enjoy. I like to binge watch TV, shows that I used to watch with my daughter when she was growing up because we used to, she was all into the Disney sitcoms and I used to watch those religiously with her and now she's away at, in college. And so I find myself being drawn to some of those same shows that she used to watch. And it's, it's fun because it takes me back to those, those years where she was so, just so young and so impressionable and I just remember, you know, things from the different episodes. Also because it's light and it's humorous content, and I think in our world today we need more things that are light and humorous. So that's one of the things that I do to kind of unplug and recharge. But as far as, self-care and wellness, I do—I'm using air quotes—workout. The reason I'm using air quotes is because I can't say that it's very consistent, but we have we have some workout equipment at home. So from time to time, I will do some cardio, and, you know, I do like to get out and walk when the weather permits. And so, yes, I'm very much focused on doing things that, you know, make me happy and also to keep me healthy. And definitely take my vitamins—and good sleep. Oh, my gosh. That's probably what I should have started with!

AB: Well, listen, these are great tips for our students too, I think. Yeah, I always, I always found that exercising before a class or a final or test something helps kind of, you know, release some of that stress and pressure and, and you can focus a little better.

LJ: Sleep is our friend. Sleep is our friend.

AB: Well, I wanna, I maybe shift back to your role a bit. Obviously you've seen a lot in your years, and, and I'm sure this may be a difficult question to answer but, but is there — what's the best part of your job? I guess if you could, you know, boil it down to maybe one or two things. Are there, are there some things that you really enjoy about your role?

LJ: Absolutely. The, be the absolute best part about this work. It's the network and community building. The other day, I was actually going through and I was doing some LinkedIn housekeeping maintenance, you know, cleaning out and Andrew, I just started looking at some of the people that I've met and I just, I would never have met these people if I were not in this line of work. I mean, one of my connections is the CEO of the Dallas Mavericks. Where, what other role aside from working in sports, are you gonna meet the CEO and be able to say, “oh, I know Cynthia” or Cynth, as she prefers to be called. So I was, I just looked through some of the people that I've met, I've met presidents. One of the, you know, one of the, the most memorable moments I had, you know, cause I, I also love going to visit company headquarters and one of the corporate headquarters campuses that I absolutely love is Nike in Beaverton, Oregon. And when I went there for the first time, I was with a group of students and, and the president of Nike North America, took us to dinner and took us to Voodoo Doughnuts. So, I'm sitting there eating this ginormous doughnut with the president of Nike North America and just thinking “this is my job.” So, I love the people that I have the opportunity to connect with. I love the communities that we build to support our students. And it's just a great feeling knowing that these relationships that I have built will benefit my students, whether now or later. But for me, that's the best part of the job. It really is.

AB: Wow, that sounds like I have been to Voodoo Doughnuts as well. And I can imagine eating a donut like that with the, the president of Nike—that's funny. Well, I, I like to ask everyone that I have a chance to interview on the podcast, a funny or inspiring story from your time at Simon. So, is there, is there a story that you kind of can reflect on that, was, you know, has been impactful to you and your time at Simon?
LJ: Sure, it's not necessarily a story, but it's just a, it's a moment in time that is very inspiring for me, and that is Orientation. I always look forward to Orientation. It's a new beginning, its new students, first impressions goes back to that community building and there's so much energy and excitement and that's the—I think that's the one if I could freeze frame every student during their Orientation week and just remind them “this is the energy that you brought here—let's go back to that.” That's the, that's the one part of the academic year that is very inspiring for me to see that to, to look across the room and see all of these folks who have made a decision to invest in themselves, invest in their career, invest in Simon, and they are just full of just hope and wonder and, it's just a great, great time of year. So Orientation for me is, it's very inspiring. It's the time of year where I'm reminded why I'm here, so, yeah, and that's coming up—gosh, it'll be in a few months. So we've already, you know, planning is already under way. So, again, just really, let's look forward to that time of year and that's when I can really sit back and say, “oh my gosh, we have an amazing Admissions team!”

AB: Oh, well, thank you, LaTanya. I completely agree. I think it's, and I, I think it also speaks to your point earlier about sort of meeting students where they're at and just the diversity that's in that room of backgrounds and, and, and, you know, experiences and life experiences and, and, and, just different worldviews that come together and, and, and, and being able to partner with them in their journey at Simon. So, I've taken up way too much of your time LaTanya. So I really just wanted to say thank you again. I know you're very busy. I, I appreciate you. We appreciate you taking time out of your day to join the podcast. So, thank you again. And, I hope you enjoy the rest of your day. Stay warm. And hopefully we'll see you soon.

LJ: Ok. Thank you, Andrew. It's always a pleasure and go G-Men!

AB: That's a great way to end the podcast. All right, thanks so much!

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