

## A Conversation with Dr. Karey Pine

### Senior Director of the RIT Center for Campus Life

Facilitated by Luke Auburn

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**Luke Auburn:** You are listening to the RIT Professional Development pod cast series. I'm your host, Luke Auburn. Today, I'm speaking with Dr. Karey Pine. Dr. Pine started her career at RIT in 1994 while working in residence life. Spent 11 years as Director of the NTID student life team. Now serves as the Senior Director of the RIT Center for Campus Life. She earned her Doctorate of Education from St. John Fisher in 2012. We'll talk a little bit about her professional development and advice for others seeking to develop their own careers. Dr. Pine, thank you for joining me.

**Dr. Karey Pine:** You're welcome.

**Luke Auburn:** So looking back at your career, where you were when you first started, where did you think it was going to lead you? Did you always have your eye set on achieving a doctorate and senior director level position or did it kind of occur organically?

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Well, this is -- it is interesting. I started -- my career thoughts really were in college and when I was in college, I worked -- I went to a very small liberal arts school in the 1980s and they didn't have a very evolved residents life or sort of student affairs area. I, as an RA, reported to the Assistant Dean and the Dean of Student's Office. And there was no intermittent people. So when I was coming to graduation and thought it would be great to do this for a career, I knew you didn't graduate with a bachelor's degree and become an Assistant Dean, but I didn't know what you did in the middle. And so what I found out, I went to my Dean's office and my supervisor and found out that in most places that were a bit larger, there was this sort of this hierarchy of opportunities and they talked to me about both admissions and residence life as entree into the field and I ended up actually applying for positions in both areas. And was able to secure a position offers in both areas. I am more of a homebody. So residence life called to me much more quickly or more readily and so I took the residence life position and that sort of launched my career path. I thought I wanted to be a Dean of Students as the end goal. I've had different times in my life where I'm not sure that may be the end goal. Maybe it's not the end goal. Maybe being a senior director at the campus life level or something like that, that would be the end goal. I think I've always been somewhat open to sort of both when am I ready to go and what sort of presents itself to me.

**Luke Auburn:** Interesting. So sounds like you had a mentor who you were able to sit down with and kind of told you the different options you had to explore and achieve your end results.

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Yes. My actual Dean of the college was who I sought out the day I sort of had this revelation about what I wanted to do with my life and knew I didn't know the path to getting there. And she -- I literally went to her office. She walked me to the reception area and said this is the chronicle of higher education. Let me introduce you to this. And in those days, it was a hard -- it was a paper copy newspaper with lots of job listings in it and that's really where we kind of started the journey though she did certainly encourage me into, you've got certainly a knack for this. It's clear you love this kind of work. So if you're interested, it's something you might want to consider.

**Luke Auburn:** So as I mentioned earlier, you earned your doctorate. How did you find a program that met your needs and would help you fulfill your career aspirations?

**Dr. Karey Pine:** I actually wanted a program that was somewhat structured. I thought the notion of the doctoral program that was sort of the three years of course work, and then you were very independently left to manage this dissertation process, I thought, felt very overwhelming to me. So I looked for a program that was either very structured in a cohort-based model. I ended up in a program that was accelerated, is considered an accelerated program. I enjoyed that very much but I also didn't want an online program. I knew that. I knew I needed to have interaction with people. So the Fisher program really fit my needs in those aspects of sort of who I am as a learner and how I know I'm most successful. The other part of the program that was really attractive to me was that it was broader than a higher education degree. I have -- as a result of my time with the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, I have interests and thoughts about, is there work that I might do within a larger Deaf community some day in my career path? I don't have any plan for that, necessarily, but I wanted a degree that was broad enough that would allow me to be relevant in that arena as well as in higher education. With my experience, I felt like an executive leadership position -- degree would be the -- would be relevant enough in both circles and they also have a very strong social justice focus at St. John Fisher. And for me, that's just a perfect fit for sort of who I am as a human. So it was -- it fit me on many levels.

**Luke Auburn:** So a few times during your career, you've had to switch organizations to move up professionally. What was the inciting force when you made those changes, and how did you handle the emotions that surround and accompany making a career move?

**Dr. Karey Pine:** I have been fortunate enough to love every job I've ever had. I have had great supervisors, great environments. A large part of those jobs have been at RIT, but I've also had jobs in other places and always have enjoyed the good fortune of having just really good supervisors and

colleagues and a good environment. So always making a change has been hard. I am emotionally linked to the people around me. I am a connector by nature. So then the disconnection piece of then moving someplace else is always a challenge. I think what helps me is that I -- I would only ever make that change knowing that I felt like I was excited about where I was going next and that that was just a new opportunity to expand that colleague and supervisor/mentorship base. New opportunities to learn, new opportunities to give, I think are always really exciting. And so I tried to focus my energy on that and less on the, I'm going to miss seeing some really great people every day and doing some really great work with students every day in one arena, I, hopefully, am making that happen in another one. So that's really what kind of has driven me. I always have been a person that believes that the universe kind of works in tune with you and as long as you kind of can be open to that. So I get to a point sometimes in my career, each time, each position where I'm like, I don't know if I can do -- be new at this anymore. You know? I don't know if I can be innovative in this anymore. It's almost like as soon as I think that, something will land and I think, oh, that would be really an interesting next step. So that's kind of how I managed my career path. It's not the most strategic plan, but it has worked for me. So.

**Luke Auburn:** There you go. Whatever works.

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Yes.

**Luke Auburn:** What would you say were some of the most important steps you've taken along that path towards advancing your career?

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Well, I think, certainly paying attention to the credentials needed to move along and to keep yourself relevant are important. I also think -- and I think people don't think about this enough -- paying attention to the job you're doing today and doing it really, really well. Gaining from that all that you can and giving to it all that you can, only opens doors for you into the future. People see that. People notice it. People recognize it. They know you are a reliable employee. They know you are an accountable person. They know, you know, of your caring and your presence and your skill set if you do what you do very, very well. And so I think that sometimes those things land along my path because I have done the job that was in front of me and I wasn't always looking to what's next and how can I get there? It was always about, let's make sure this job is done really well and we leave it better than we found it. If we do that, then whatever comes next, will be a more organic authentic step. And so I think that's an important thing and I think sometimes we all forget that because we get very focused on what's next? And when do I get there? And how do I get there? I think you get there by being really good at what's in front of you.

**Luke Auburn:** So relishing the moment.

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Yeah. Exactly. Stay present.

**Luke Auburn:** Throughout your career, have you had any key figures that you've looked to as mentors or role models? Who do you admire?

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Oh my. So I -- as I said before, I've had the benefit of having some tremendous role models and mentors. Some as supervisors and leaders that I've looked up to and some who have been just good colleagues and friends for me. As I thought about them over the years, they tend to be women, and I think that's for a variety of reasons, as a woman navigating at leadership levels. I would say to name some, I would say certainly Dr. Ellie Rosenfield who was a former supervisor of mine. Over in NTID, I think that Renee Kimerling who no longer works at RIT but was one of my very first supervisors is phenomenal. Certainly Dr. Mary Beth Cooper as a former Senior Vice President, here. I think there are a number of women in leadership at the administrative level at RIT, presently, who I look to and watch how they navigate family life and work life. How they navigate staying current and their present job and so I think all of those are great. And I certainly would mention Dawn Suflaris as a -- Dr. Dawn Suflaris as both a good friend for many, many years and currently my supervisor but really just again, somebody who we've navigated this journey together. And so I think those are all individuals who I have admired and look up to and have cherished the opportunities to interact with them. There's a million more. So whoever I haven't named, please know, you're out there.

**Luke Auburn:** [laughter] So what do you see at your next step for career development? You've earned your doctorate degree. What comes next?

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Well, part of what comes next is do what's in front of me very well. But part of what comes next is, you know, to start looking at, is it a next step in higher education? So would it be an Assistant Vice Presidency or a Vice Presidency at a small school that would be the best fit for my next step? I also have a little bit of a pull to human services work. I am currently doing some more volunteer work in the community. My daughter is in college so I have more time at home, a little bit. And so I've started working doing some volunteer work with the center for youth. I'm likely going to be getting involved with our Teen Empowerment Center in the city of Rochester. I really like working with youth. I know that's a strength that I seem to have. I also, though, have lived in the city of Rochester for, now, 21 years, and have always said that it's beyond living in the city by choice that there's more that I could do. I love Rochester as a city and I know yet it's full of challenges and problems that need people to come in and think differently and help solve them or commit to that, to the resolution of those things. So that's a thing that's kind of in my brain. So I don't know if that might be a next step. I've been fortunate enough to be a part of Leadership Rochester this last year so that has given me yet more insight into what the city of Rochester both has to offer and faces in terms of challenges. So I'm not really sure where my path will go. I'm trying to remain open to all of it. But I think the Executive Leadership Degree really did, it gave me -- first of all, it gave me some colleagues across the city of Rochester in many of those areas but

it also gave me some insight sort of about how to think about leading in a different context than only higher education. So we'll see.

**Luke Auburn:** So what is it about volunteer work that you think helps with professional development?

**Dr. Karey Pine:** Hmm. Well, I think that first of all -- and I don't know that anybody -- I don't know if it's the most noble thing to say, but I will tell you, it is the best -- I don't do a lot of volunteering. I'm not volunteering every week. I spend about three or four hours a month in the Center for Youth. I work with the New Beginnings House, which is a home for 18 to 22-year-old men who would otherwise be homeless. And so I cook dinner and go and have a conversation and spend some time with the house. I've done some things where they come to campus and it's probably the most humbling and re-centering three or four hours of my month. So there is a benefit to me just as an employee. I come back with a new appreciation for what this place has to offer, a new appreciation for what students might be facing because some of the students that we have here have come from very similar backgrounds in many instances, I think more than people would want to admit or recognize. And so I think those have all been fabulous for me, as a person. I think it also gives you perspective on, you know, what is transferable in terms of skills? What are skill sets that you think you have but might only have them in this very privileged place and they're harder to employ in a place where you might have more distance from someone or at least a perceived distance from someone and how do you bring yourself closer to them. And I think those are skills that I have to struggle with and use and employ every day in my job. I need students to feel I'm an approachable, relevant, concerned person. If I can prove that to a group of young men who might look at me and say, what are you even doing here -- which they have -- and I can make a connection with that, that community of young men, I certainly then can use those skills in this place and hopefully do so. So I think it's honed a lot of different pieces for me, I think. It's also opportunities to network and get to know other resources. Think about the ways our college and university can support a community as we already do in many, many ways; but are there other ways that I have some control over that I didn't realize I had? And in fact, there are. So you know, those are some things that I think have helped me in doing this volunteer piece.

**Luke Auburn:** Well, thank you very much. I appreciate the insight.

**Dr. Karey Pine:** All right.

**Luke Auburn:** That concludes another edition of the RIT Professional Development pod cast. For more information on how you can develop your career, visit [RIT.EDU/CPD](http://RIT.EDU/CPD).

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