

Speaker 1: Welcome. I'm Mary odod for today's episode. We're joined by Rutgers university, president Jonathan Holloway, to discuss the ongoing challenges of realizing his vision for the university amid the pandemic, what guides him and what the past two years have taught us about health inequity. Thank you for joining us president Holloway.

Speaker 2: This is my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Speaker 1: So can you tell us a little bit about how [00:00:30] the pandemic has impacted your vision for Rutgers university and how you plan to spend your time with us?

Speaker 2: So, um, I mean, it's an obvious place to start, right? When I was announced to the university as the next president, it was, uh, late January of, of, uh, 2020. And as you all know, a few things changed in the weeks after that. I mean, at that point, we now know, of course the virus is already in the United States, but that wasn't publicly known then. And so it was this, there was this other thing at some distance. [00:01:00] And so when, um, about a couple, couple weeks later, as it, as it appeared in Seattle and then wa and then I'm sorry, in the New York city, New Jersey Metro, I was still in Illinois and I could knowing it was coming to Chicago, like it was coming into the Midwest, certainly. And I saw my presidency vanished. The one I thought I had inherited, you know, a campus that was in the black that, um, was ready to launch in all different kinds of ways.

Speaker 2: And now was facing, I [00:01:30] knew Rutgers would survive the pandemic, but we didn't know the financial hit that it was gonna be taking. We didn't know the health hit, although that was becoming prideful as we headed into March. So I felt truly, I mean, I'll say it, I felt sorry for myself for about 24, 48 hours. It's like, what did I just do? <laugh> and then of course knew that it's not about me. Everybody else is in the same boat, get over yourself. It's like, okay, well, the presidency, I thought I was inheriting, um, where I could start from [00:02:00] a certain place was gone. It wasn't like it might come back. It's on. And so the question is what in, I was guessing then in a couple or three years, what might we then be able to do now? It's just making up two or three years, but that's, that's the fact, I mean, uh, um, we managed, I think, um, I'll just say quite impressively through the pandemic.

Speaker 2: And, and I came on after the hardest work was already done. So this is not me taking any credit for [00:02:30] it. We managed a really difficult phase. And so now the question is okay, as we come out of this phase, which is taking longer than we thought, I mean, thanks to the folks who are, um, making this as complicated and as political as possible. Uh, how are we going to learn and adjust and be different in, in what is a new normal, um, as this becomes endemic. And, and then how are we gonna figure out our strategies on a financial front, for example, in the wake of this. So [00:03:00] these are things that I'm wrestling with now. So, you know, the vision that drew me to Rutgers hasn't changed. I love the idea of Rutgers and its mission, how we get to back to that as a core function. So that every meeting isn't about COVID in some way, that's the ambition. And that's really about a year from now. I'm, I'm thinking to be

Speaker 1: Honest, yeah, this is one of the always surprises in a leadership role when things don't go according to plan and, [00:03:30] uh, you have to sort of, you know, Dodge and weave with it. And certainly this was a bigger, um, unexpected curve

Speaker 2: For you at this point. It, my career in terms of hired administration, you know, I had six years of experience in different roles prior to this one, I'm used to the curve ball. I mean, the curve ball is just every day because in a community of the first time I, um, someone put it to me, I can't remember who anymore. I was at Northwestern, which is a community of 30,000 people. [00:04:00] And this person said in community to 30,000 people, someone's making a bad decision every day. <laugh> the question is how bad is it? And will it come to my attention? Well, now I'm in a community of a hundred thousand people. So certainly curve balls are coming every day, usually handled by somebody else. But if they're bad enough, they come to me, but no one was prepared for this one. You know, no one in, in the, in the world of enterprise risk management, where you look at a heat map of where are your risks, right. Pandemic existed on the Rutgers heat [00:04:30] map. I know from internal conversation, but it was not the dangerous part is the upper right hand corner. It was not in the upper right hand corner. It was vaguely somewhere down in the lower left, which is like, it'll happen one day probably, but really what's the risk. Not that great.

Speaker 1: You, you know, one of the things that you said was that the hard work had been done before you got here, and I'm not sure that I agree with that because I feel like right now is some of the hardest part when, you know, we sort of see another surge in cases coming, and it feels [00:05:00] like we, you should be beyond this already. Yeah. And you've had to make a lot of decisions about reopening campus that have been equally difficult to how to close campus. Um, and you know, really trying to take that assessment of what are those safety strategies to use, how to balance the often competing challenges of protecting individuals in their health mm-hmm <affirmative> with, um, you know, from, from COVID itself with [00:05:30] also trying to get back to normal or the new normal yep. Knowing that by not moving forward, you're affecting the economic and mental health of so many people in our community. W what are your core principles when you try to make those decisions?

Speaker 2: Yeah. Uh, well, that's a really good question. Just to clarify, when I, when I mentioned the hard work order being done, I'm really referencing the literal health and safety of an unknown environment. When people just, you know, physicians, nurses did not know [00:06:00] how to treat the patients at first. I mean, we know this in retrospect, like there's just everybody's best guesses, right? So that's, I mean, that's the sort of the terrifying, the unknown. When I joined the community unofficially really about April, when I stepped down as provost at Northwestern, I was not in a decision making capacity until July one, sort of the, the scariest parts is what Rutgers was going through. Then it became, when I started to take the reigns, it's like, okay, what [00:06:30] are the programmatic decisions we have to make about moving forward? And in, in the, in the spirit of the question you asked, so the I principal is always the health and safety period of the community.

Speaker 2: Um, and then what makes it really complicated is that when you factor in, when we start with health and safety, like being able to breathe, being able to open your eyes and being able to move around. Okay. But you start adding in things that are very important. And you mentioned in your question, um, [00:07:00] when you start adding in the psychological, the emotional, the mental health aspects of, of health then, and this is where we are now, that becomes a lot more complicated because individual's capacity to thrive are different. They have different sets of resources, different sets of, you know, their, what I'll call their personal five or in a, in a figurative kind of way. And they've had to endure different kinds of tragedies or challenges. So now I think the hard part is that it's messier than before. Um, whereas [00:07:30] it's, it's gone beyond how to get somebody to stay alive to how do we get back towards people?

Speaker 2: Thriving are a Rutgers, a university like Rutgers. I believe this path towards thriving is to get back to being in person as fast, as possible, as fast as safely possible. Couldn't do it last year. There was, I, I feel, I, you know, it was in a sense, a hard decision to go remote because I knew of what the consequences would be, but it's actually quite easy in a, in, in another sense, like this is just science [00:08:00] folks, right? We just need to do this. Um, others disagree and I've heard from them with enthusiasm, um, at every step along the way. And I've had to make some really, really, um, difficult decisions because what makes them difficult is that people either, or don't know, um, are not willing to try to understand the complexities behind it. So that, um, for instance, this semester [00:08:30] Camden and newer campuses are pretty much fully in person and new Brunswick.

Speaker 2: Isn't now part of that is because people didn't follow my directions, which is very of frustrating as a university leader. But part of it is because new Brunswick is so big and so complicated. The scheduling is a, is a, it's a, it's a very different set of data that one has to deal with. And so we couldn't be fully back in person. We start getting into the nuances and weeds on these things where people don't want to go or can't get those [00:09:00] places. They don't wanna believe that all of these decisions are being made with the goal of trying to get Rutgers to thrive, but trying to get Rutgers back to being, um, what we know well, I've yet to experience an in person truly, but what heard Rutgers can be. Um, so yeah, there's a lot of difficult decisions and, and my job is to wear those decisions.

Speaker 2: And, um, and look, I don't, my job is not to [00:09:30] second guess the decision by the time it's made public, we've gone through the iterations. I know the pain that's gonna come my way with every one of the decisions that I make. Um, but that's the job and that's this moment and that's just what we have to do. So anyway, how do you think things will change next semester? Well, that's a real wild card, right? I mean, with, um, every day, you know, better than I, the new is just shifting in terms of the, um, [00:10:00] how contagious this new variant is, how virent it happens to be, um, the true exhaustion. We all feel about wearing these masks <laugh>, um, and also the very conflicting sets of data or information. We, um, kind of inform the right word that, um, oh, and then we're getting great news every day seems about, um, medical interventions that are at least mitigating the nastiness of, of, um, Arian, but we also [00:10:30] are getting conflicting what all CLU conflicting visual data as I move around

the state, different parts of the state feel very differently about masks as I travel to different.

Speaker 2: I mean, as president, you travel different. I mean, I was in Indianapolis two weeks ago and felt like a complete weirdo for wearing a mask in the lobby at the hotel. Like I was the only person doing this. Yeah. So it's, it's, there's all this cognitive dissonance. And, um, and it's hard. I mean, I do think [00:11:00] hats off to Rutgers as a community, we are doing so much better than the rest of the state. Not, not to mention the rest of the country, we're about as safe as you can possibly be because by and large people have done the right things and gotten vaccinated if, if they're able to do so, they don't have an exemption by and large, they're wearing their masks indoors. You know, I, I actually feel quite safe moving about Rutgers, whether I'm wearing a mask or not because of the way the community's performed next semester.

Speaker 2: [00:11:30] Oh gosh. That feels so far away. Even though it's like a it's a month we're in final scale, right. <laugh> yeah. You know what my goal everybody's goal is to get rid of these masks. I find that hard to imagine happening before it starts to get warm again in New Jersey. I mean, frankly, I mean, who, who knows? Right. Um, but, uh, and the data keeps shifting and the data keeps shifting. Yeah. And, um, the outrage keeps growing and, and by [00:12:00] the nature of outrage, there's kernels of truth in it, but it's also outlandish. And almost, it's not, I don't mean comical in a funny sense. I mean, in a, in a, in the way in a sort of a critical sense comic of comical per portions, the outrage, right. And that's deeply unfortunate, but, you know, I can't change a national, the, the state of the nation psyche. Um, I just have to do my job.

Speaker 1: So let's talk a little bit about, um, [00:12:30] what you can do here at rockers and your job as you put it. Many at Rutgers have participated in person or virtually in a series of celebrations recently marking your inauguration as our new president. Congratulations. Thank you. Um, and you know, as you're going through these celebrations, what are you hoping that the people have not yet met you or gotten to know you learn about you and your vision for Rutgers during this time?

Speaker 2: Well, first of all, the inaugurations, I want to thank everybody [00:13:00] who helped make the act, the literal in-person events. Well, actually some of the virtual ones, as I cause the inauguration 48 hours was both, it, it worked seamlessly from my, from my user perspective. It worked seamlessly

Speaker 1: And important perspective though.

Speaker 2: Yes. And, and, and, you know, the inauguration was important. Sure. For me, from the standpoint of feeling officially in the job, although Lord knows I've been living this job, but I think much more importantly it's [00:13:30] for, I believe that, um, um, things like tradition are very important to the way universities understand themselves and articulate themselves. And, and so the inauguration was important for many different reasons to your question though, the inauguration was important because it was giving me yet another platform where I can articulate some very simple ideas. Now, simple is not to mean that they are simplistic. I think they're actually quite nuanced and

[00:14:00] complicated and rich, but they're simple in the sense, if we could just take care of one another, if we can share compassion with one another, if we can be relentless in our pursuit of discovery, we'll do something really quite special.

Speaker 2: And I've been, I believe I've been consistent on those ideas. I'm not the kind of leader, nor will I ever be. Who's gonna say, here are the 14 different ambitions for the university. Now we have scores more ambitions, but they are, they are think of a pyramid structure. They're they are at [00:14:30] layers different than mine. If I were to talk about 14 different goals, it would just light confusion. So for me, it's very simple and I've not wavered. I've talked about the relentless pursuit of academic excellence. I might have articulate it in different ways, but that is all about the pursuit of our academic excellence. I've talked about the strategic importance of reducing the complexity of this university. It is way we get in our own way. So often as a Rutgers grad, I can what's [00:15:00] that confirm that as a Rutgers grad, I can confirm that.

Speaker 2: And some of that's inevitable given our size, but much of it is not. It's been breathtaking for me to discover as an outsider, the things that we unnecessarily do and duplicate, um, never with ill intention, but because of a, of a failure to be collaborative, to communicate, to, um, innovate together. Right. And then, and I've talked about a beloved community. Now, there are the skeptics out there. Who've weaponized the phrase against [00:15:30] me and says, basically saying, if you really cared about a beloved community, you wouldn't do X, Y, or Z. And for me, it's like, well, we disagree about certain things. Disagreement is actually core to the idea of a beloved community, but the, there there is I think, a bad faith proposition that I've seen too often within Rutgers. I must say being quite honest, where that, you know, we aren't gonna trust you, whoever you might be in my case, it's me or the administration.

Speaker 2: We think you're full of bull about this [00:16:00] whole beloved community thing. I'm like, wow, that's an approach. I just don't understand. Cause it talks about a negative outcome from the beginning of a process. I'm not gonna take that medicine. I will be on point consistently. So with the idea of the importance of a beloved community, one that is robust in its ability, willingness to challenge itself, to challenge one, another civilly, um, to push always that's critical to the academic enterprise, but to recognize for [00:16:30] goodness sakes that we are in this thing together, to recognize that we share a humanity for goodness sakes, to recognize that we all want our children. If we have them to grow up in a better world, to recognize that we all want to have food, clothing, and shelter to rec, we have these fundamental needs and we are at a place or a national culture where we are seen to be so willing to not think about that first and certainly social media and other media, not this podcast though, um, [00:17:00] <laugh> are doing their part to fuel all this dissension.

Speaker 2: Why for short term gains, I'm not interested in short term gains that that's antithetical to a leadership of university like this. So, so my, what, what you're gonna hear from me through the inauguration, certainly you heard it, um, through my annual addresses to the university Senate to any, I mean, just my talking points for my presidency are gonna be three points long and they'll be articulated in different ways, but they're about the [00:17:30] academic research enterprise. Um, and the teaching enterprise, they are

about making this place less complicated. And they're about trying to bring a positive, uh, forward looking engagement about what we share in common. Cause it means that our disagreements will be fundamentally different. And that's a healthy thing. One of the

Speaker 1: Things that I have clearly taken away from not just hearing you speak and you've articulated it here as well, but how other people are talking about you [00:18:00] is how important the students and community are to you. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and also how clearly you enjoy engaging with them. And I think many of the student speakers during some of the celebrations, they really articulated and demonstrated that, um, that feeling of engagement with you, um, after these two years of the pandemic nationwide, we, and you've talked about this as well. We are seeing just a lot of, um, exhaustion mm-hmm <affirmative> <affirmative>. And some of that [00:18:30] is presenting in increases of depression, substance use, overdose, deaths, and suicide. And these things are a nationwide problem. They're a statewide problem. And because we are part of those, um, entities, it's a Rutgers problem as well. Mm-hmm <affirmative> what are the challenges that you see in trying to create that sense of community here for those Rutgers students in particular and the strategies to try to address some of those challenges?

Speaker 2: Well, I mean, you've [00:19:00] hit on some really important, um, issues here. One of the great challenges in terms of building a community. And I said this in my opening introduction to the university, the act in January, 2020, going back to the beloved community, that it seems silly to talk about that in a community of a hundred thousand people. And I didn't put it quite this way, but like I'm, if that sounds silly, I'm fully invested in sounding silly, right? There needs to be, I mean, the job of the presidents to set a message and set a tone as much as one can, and I'm [00:19:30] going to be relentless in the belief that it is important, uh, and a critical, uh, aspect to this beloved community is that you recognize all the aspects to it. And I've gone. I've invested myself in making sure to recognize the people who aren't often recognized.

Speaker 2: That's just personally very important to me in my life. It's not performative it's real. Um, but I also think it speaks to the kind of issues that you're talking about in terms of the emotional exhaust and the feeling of being disconnected and, and feeling a sense of, of not [00:20:00] feeling a sense of belonging. I get great, authentic pleasure from interacting with students. I get great, authentic pleasure interacting with staff. I just do, you know, it's up to somebody else to explain to me why that is. I don't need an explanation. It just brings me joy. And what I found, and this is from, this is not new to me in the presidency. I mean, I, this is the way I've just been in my career [00:20:30] is that people even pre pandemic are crying out to be recognized. They're crying out to be seen, you know, to be acknowledged, valued, valued.

Speaker 2: It doesn't mean they're not crying out to be agreed with. That's a nice thing, but actually I don't think that's what they're looking for. They want acknowledgement. So I am very openly. I'm, I'm quite liberal political liberal Democrat during some of the toughest moments. When I moved into central administration as Dean of Yale college, [00:21:00] um, the students who were the most forthcoming in and their surprise about me were



very conservative students because they presumed, I would not listen to them. I'm like, but you're a Yale student. I mean, that's who I'm responsible for all Yale students. And that has carried forward into this my life at Northwestern. And as I get to know students here, I'm hoping that that will carry forward here. And I hope he carries not just to the students, but to the adults as well. [00:21:30] Is that I'm really quite serious that if you have an idea, I don't like, that's okay, it's my job to convince you to change your mind, but I'm still gonna acknowledge you.

Speaker 2: And the, and this is one thing we struggle in the office. Like how do I get out to see students? Because I, it makes me feel better, but I think it's really important. And I think in general, the more that administrators, managers, department chairs, deans, whatever will [00:22:00] take the time to acknowledge people outside of their little tiny bubble, it will help people feel better. In fact, at the inaug, one of the most powerful moments for me was, was, was when a student, Susan BJA, she said, and we didn't tell people what to talk about in her minute and a half. I mean, I, I, I won't get this exactly right. But she said, she, because of, she was a Scarlet grant recipient and, and that allowed her to be at Rutgers. And she said, because of that, I feel scene. [00:22:30] I feel important and I feel, um, respected.

Speaker 2: I, I, it's not quite the right point. I remember. Yeah. I remember hearing, but I'm, I'm listening. I mean, I got goosebumps when I heard her say that little tiny Susan BJA. I mean, she's a te person <laugh> but a powerhouse. Right. And that, what she was saying was really important. And the fact you remember that is speaks to it, right? It's like this really, really, really, really talented person had she not had the [00:23:00] resource that were afforded by the Scarlet promise camp, would've felt rather invisible. Would've been lost in the system might not have made it to Rutgers. And she is gonna take the world by storm. Yeah. Because she has been seen and respected and felt important if we can do for our community, what we have done for Susan, we will see a change in cases of depression. We will see a change in cases of suicidal ideation. We will see a change [00:23:30] of overdose and substance abuse. It won't fix it all. There's no way there's no way, but the more we recognize the value that every person brings to the community, the healthier that community will be. And that will be the Susan BOS of the world. That'll be the faculty of the world. That'll be the person who E emptys my garbage basket. You know, every single one who I did name in my inauguration, by the way, every single one of those people matter.

Speaker 2: Um,

Speaker 1: You know, part of the [00:24:00] community of Rutgers also is the alumni. Yes. And I think you speak to them as well as you're talking to the current students. And, uh, you know, I've shared before that I am of a large family, um, which engages in vigorous debate. So as you're speaking about these discussions of not agreeing, I'm thinking of my grandmother's dining room table, where there was a heated debates constantly, um, of many Rutgers for generation alum, um, debating a lot of different issues. And [00:24:30] I think, I think it's the pathway back that you're talking about. Yeah. This engagement, this acknowledgement of disagreement, not necessarily being negative, but a positive, um, engagement. And so, um, I I'm smiling because I'm feeling, you know,

that I, I agree that this is part of our pathway back. Um, and so, so important, but one of the things I wanted to ask you about is, you know, based on your own research and, you know, your books where you have documented [00:25:00] our, our country's history with racism and discrimination, the COVID pandemic has highlighted significant disparities in the health outcomes around our country and our state, um, by race and ethnicity for just by one example, the result of death due to COVID has so been so much more severely felt by our black and Hispanic communities.

Speaker 1: Mm-hmm, <affirmative> from your perspective, as a historian, looking at these challenges and opportunities, mm-hmm, [00:25:30] <affirmative> for our nation in addressing health and healthcare and equities based on race, ethnicity, what, what can we do to move that forward?

Speaker 2: Um, that is, uh, <laugh> some massive question. Um, but a really, really critical one. So now I'm a, a historian, right? So I, I look backwards for my answers. And one of the things that, I mean, look, the, the health disparity outcomes that we've seen with COVID, um, anybody in [00:26:00] the health industry will tell you, this is not new. It's not new. This is an old story. The scale of it is, is, is perhaps new. Certainly the obviousness of it is new. And so

Speaker 1: The awakening to it,

Speaker 2: Maybe the awakening to it, and, and as tragic as it is, I welcome if that's, if this is what it took to hopefully change the conversation, then this is what it took, which is tragic and horrible, and tells us about who we are. And that's the historian in me speaking, if you look back over the history of [00:26:30] the country, and if you could say, I'll just make up a date. If you can say in 1850, there's gonna be a pandemic in 2020, who's gonna die most. Um, a smart observer could tell you in 1820, who would die most, okay. They could tell you that in 1760, a smart observer, like, I mean, in a way that would be impossible to do. I understand that I'm being fantastical in this. This is a very old challenge. People [00:27:00] with limited resources have harder lives. They are more susceptible to disease, negative public health outcomes.

Speaker 2: Epidemiology has proven this time. And again, it's not even an argument because the way this country has been structured, who are the people who are most likely to be poor in terms of an overrepresented proportion of the population, black and brown folks, immigrant from European countries occupied that space for a while, but then they were, they became elevated certainly through their own [00:27:30] hard work, of course, but also because there are other populations that they could step over in the process, documented, not even worth arguing, arguing about we've got the records for this. This is not to say that every single person who benefit, um, from a social status from a skin color, from a gender from a sexuality is guilty. But it is to say they occupied space in a structured environment that allowed them to thrive. That's different than saying, oh, guilty wa your finger, [00:28:00] but it's just like, let's look at the record and you'll see that you have benefit.



Speaker 2: I know as a male I've benefited from things that I'm not even aware of. Right. I also know that when, even as president of the university who lives in a very exclusive club of presidents, when I walk into a room of, um, non Rutgers people who dunno who I am and a largely white space, which is a lot of my life, I have to navigate it in [00:28:30] a different way than, um, the person with a, you know, from a, a very modest background who has white skin. That's a fact. So if you combine all these things together, you get no surprise that you have this horrible outcome that we're seeing now utterly tragic and deeply avoidable. If this country was more honest with itself, now people will say, this is a, a frequent phrasing from undergraduates in different settings. Like this isn't fair. I'm like, this is the United States of America [00:29:00] who promised you fairness. I'm not saying it's good or acceptable, but let's have, have a real mature understanding of what this country has been built on. Um, and I love this country for anybody who thinks like I'm some sort of hater, like no, quite the opposite, but I'm furious with it. And that's the power of this country that you can love it enough to hate it for the way it has treated people and still love of it.

Speaker 1: [00:29:30] How do you take on that structure and that unknown bias that we all have, that you

Speaker 2: Mentioned, you talk about it. You try to be aware of it as, as, as you walk through space, you know, you try to think of other people. My mother's my mother, um, no longer with us is a kindergarten teacher.

Speaker 2: And I mean, I know Robert Fullon wrote this book, everything he needed [00:30:00] to know in life, he in kindergarten, I've gotten title, something like that. And you know, it was a bit cheeky and, you know, modeling, but it, if it's not true, like you share, share things, you play nicely. You know, the, these are things that I was taught that my mother used professionally, that I was raised in. And like, and, and we aren't all the same people. Some of us are gonna have gifts that are treasured in a way that allows us to move forward in society because it's valued right now. This is a [00:30:30] true statement. Others will be left behind cause they don't have those gifts or they can't have the discipline to structure the gifts, or people don't want to recognize them for their gifts. They aren't curious enough to say, oh, someone named Susan Boge, uh, might actually be able to take Rutgers by storm if we can acknowledge her.

Speaker 2: So you need to have the will to share the will, to be honest with oneself about your privileges and your deficiencies. And you have to have a desire to make things better, [00:31:00] but is not just about bettering my position, but it's about bettering someone else's position people. I may likely never ever know, because if I make their lives better, in some way, my life will be better. I will benefit from a more stable society. I will provide something to a world in which my children will have a, a safer environment because you've tried to create something safer for other people. It's not that complicated. In fact, it's really simple.

Speaker 1: You [00:31:30] know, this is resonating with me because last year I took a kindergarten class virtually with my five year old. Ah, and so I learned many things from miss Bason, um, many songs, but the essence of what you're talking about, the kindness, how do

you treat someone who, uh, makes a mistake and how do you help them figure out how to fix their mistake? Yes, it's it, it's all there in kindergarten. And, and I just relived it. <laugh> [00:32:00] in my

Speaker 2: Forties. I, I, I really think I'm, I'm so glad you had that kind of kindergarten teacher. I think most of them are like that. Yeah. It, it just, it really isn't hard. Um, it's just that we, we get trained up by society to make it more complicated than it should be. We get trained up to try to leverage advantage over some, take a, you know, to find an advantage. And I'm guilty of the, this to, of course I am. You don't become a college president. If you lack for ambition, [00:32:30] you know, you just don't okay. But to the extent that my own subject position, because of the way I was raised in the environment, I was raised, allowed me to be into place where I could take advantage of all these things. That's great. But that the important thing is that I walk through a door. I don't close it behind me. You hold the door open for the next person. Now that may not be kindergarten. That may you be be that may be adolescents manners. When you learn your manners, when your parents saying, what the heck do you just do? Like I walk through the door. Like you didn't hold it open. It starts [00:33:00] in kindergarten. Okay, good. I think so.

Speaker 1: Yeah.

Speaker 2: <laugh> but, but it really, I mean, there, there have been moments and I, I, I say this, um, I'm being quite honest. There have been moments when people have come at me in different settings where I find myself wondering what happened, like what, this is not about me right now. This is about something else it's happening in your past or in this very, very hard moment. And so your outlet is going to be mean. The best [00:33:30] piece of advice I got before I came here is from my former boss at Northwesterns. President said your business card has your name president. When they come at, you remember they're coming at what's after the comma, not what's before now they'll personalize it as the before, but they're coming at you for the after what's after the comma. So that's been a very valuable lesson. And, and, and I just try to remember, or try to keep in mind that this is [00:34:00] not personal.

Speaker 2: Although it feels deeply personal that we are all strung out. We're all exhausted. We're all angry. We're all stressed out and we need to grant one another grace, and we need to care about one another. And I mean, like literally care, like I need to be concerned about your welfare because that's the only way we're gonna get out of this mess. We do not have an apparatus in a cultural apparatus in this country right now that says caring in that way is okay. [00:34:30] And that's heartbreaking to me, but many of our political leaders are not, they're not giving that message are the talking heads on TV are not giving that message. Um, social media is definitely not giving that message. I don't know how to break through it all, but, but at the end of the day, it is, it is simply not difficult. It's not hard to care about somebody.

Speaker 1: Let me ask you one final question. Do you have any new year's resolutions?

Speaker 2: [00:35:00] Um, you know, I'm not a resolution kind of person because, you know, what's the, what, first thing that goes wrong in the new year, your resolutions. <laugh> I mean, <laugh> certainly I have, I have my ambitions. Um, and you know, there are those things that I would want as president in the new year. Uh, there are those things that I, you know, that I've certainly shared and could share again, there's those things that are personal that I refuse to share because, and I mean this quite, and, and I don't take, you know, the question's a very logical one is like, as [00:35:30] president, I have to reserve space for Jonathan like that. No one else gets except for my wife and my family. So all that said, I still don't have resolutions. I've never been <laugh>, but I do hope look, I, I really do believe in the transformative potential of a Rutgers education and a Rutgers working and teaching and research environment.

Speaker 2: I really believe in that the sooner we can get to doing that in person, um, as, you know, what, instead of a hundred percent in person, which is not fully a hundred percent, but cause there's some online aspects, [00:36:00] the better, the sooner that for me personally, that I can see Rutgers in action as Rutgers the better, I mean, that's what for me, the inauguration was so great because I actually saw Rutgers showing its best self to the world and it was inspiring. It was beautiful and it was fun and it was irreverent and it was serious and it was just, it was just sparkling. Um, so I want that for Rutgers and, and I really do hope that people [00:36:30] will take me at my word that, well, I do things perfectly. Oh, heck no, I'm a human being. I'll mess up plenty of times.

Speaker 2: But in all of my work, I am trying to move Rutgers to a place where we recognize the things we share in the community, where we recognize the things we share in common. I'm trying to emphasize the fact that we do so many great, great, great things here already here already. We are what excellence looks like, but we have to believe that and we have to talk about it. It's [00:37:00] not about being arrogant. It's about being confident. It's an amazing institution. Why not feel good about that fact and then why not make it better? These are the things I want for Rutgers. Certainly.

Speaker 1: Thank you so much for joining us here today.

Speaker 2: It is an absolute pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Speaker 1: Thank you for joining us for this episode of on the pandemic. This is Mario owed, executive director of health systems and population health integration for Rutgers university. [00:37:30] For more information on how Rutgers is meeting the challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic, please visit [coronavirus.rutgers.edu](https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu). I.