

Transcript Ep 24: Thinking in the Grey

Introduction:

You are listening to the UnDeniably Well podcast hosted by the University of Delaware's Employee Health & Wellbeing team. Keep listening to discover ways to be your best self each and every day.

On this episode of UnDeniably Well, we will be talking through the concept of civil discourse. Dr. Timothy J. Schaeffer will talk us through how to engage in deeper listening to have more thought provoking and productive conversations. In our current society where everything is black and white, right and wrong, win or lose Dr. Shaffer will help us learn how to get comfortable with being in the gray middle and understand how to find value in perspectives that are different than our own.

Ryan Shuler:

Hi, I'm Ryan Shuler, the Associate Director of Employee Health & Wellbeing, and welcome to this episode of UnDeniably Well. Today I am very, very excited to be talking about the topic of civil discourse with Dr. Timothy J. Schaeffer. He is the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Chair of Civil Discourse and an Associate Professor in the Joseph R. Biden Junior School of Public Policy and Administration at the University of Delaware. He is also Director of Civic Engagement and Deliberative Democracy with the National Institute for Civil Discourse at the University of Arizona. Tim is author or co-editor of six books, including *Deliberative Pedagogy: Teaching and Learning for Democratic Engagement*, *Creating Space for Democracy: A Primer on Dialogue and Deliberation in Higher Education* and his latest book, *Grassroots Engagement and Social Justice through Cooperative Extension*. He earned his PhD from Cornell University and is fairly new to us at UD. So welcome Tim.

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Oh, it's great to be here. Thanks so much.

Ryan Shuler:

I recently, this article came across that you had written about civil discourse. I saw it come through. Someone had actually emailed it to me, and it really just struck me how badly we sort of need to understand this in a better way with the way of the world right now. So I would love to just sort of hear an overview. What, when I say civil discourse, what does that mean? What when we talk about this and you hear this in the media, what is the basic of what civil discourse is?

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Yeah. I mean it's a great question, and I'll say it this way, as someone who studies this and has spent quite a bit of time in this area, the moment you say some of this immediately, people are like, oh my gosh. There's, you know, the one refrain is like, you seem like you've got some good job security right now, but this, this sense of, of really trying to do something about the larger kind of environment landscape that we exist in, right. If we look at follow national politics, for example, we're just, you know, we're swimming in examples of this not going well, but we can also think about it locally, right in our school board meetings in the last number of years have really become, kind of heated. We can think about it in workplaces. We can even think about it in families. We're coming up on a midterm election

here this fall. That's not quite as intense as we often experience during presidential elections, but something we've seen for the last number of years truly is that the kind of intensity that comes from a political cycle when we see all the signs in yards, and see the commercials on TV or hear them on the radio, we haven't dialed back from that intensity that kind of comes up in those times, right. So usually gets real hot. Thing happens. People are happy, they're mad or whatever. They put their signs away and kind of people move on and go back to their lives. And we haven't seen that for the last number of years. So we're kind of operating at this fever pitch, which is partly why everybody's absolutely exhausted. It's probably worth the say, but your pointed question of what do we even mean by civil discourse is a great question. And my short response to that is there are kind of two ways to think about it. We can think about it in one regard as being nice to each other. Right. We're not interrupting each other. I have little children, right. So are people being courteous to each other when we're sitting around the dinner table. We just had family visiting, right. So grandpa doesn't hear very well. So we're always like, you got to be quiet, you got to speak very clearly and loudly, right? All that sort of stuff. It's holding your pinky up when you're drinking a cup of tea, so to speak, but that's a really thin version of what we mean by civil discourse. There's also this more kind of robust nature of it, right? So it's this relational kind of interactions, the sense of being able to recognize that my views are different from your views, or your values or your positions, whatever, but that's not a reason to step away or remove ourselves from relationship with people. Which can really prove to be very challenging in certain circumstances when, as we've seen, especially in recent years, this kind of intensity around not just I like this policy position, so I'm gonna go vote for this person, but it's so deeply ingrained, which is why I think the continual presence of bumper stickers and flags and all sorts of stuff just never allows you to step away from it. So this difference between this kind of thin versus thick notion of civility or civil discourse is really important.

There's another layer, I might add that some colleagues, who wrote a book called *Beyond Civility* just a couple years ago, William Keith and Robert Danish. They talk about this similar way, these kinds of categories, but they add this third and they call it pseudo civility, right? So pseudo is this kind of fake thing that exists. And so what they write about. And I think it's true. And a lot of folks have experienced this is that sometimes the norms of civility, right? The kind of policing of who's speaking, when and how, and such are used in a way that's detrimental to other people, so marginalized groups or otherwise.

And so for a lot of folks who right now feel like I could give two whiffs about civil discourse, because I need my voice to be heard. I need to be out there protesting and such. That's where the frustration can come from this kind of pseudo civility, right? So people are being policed by others, being forced in some ways to do that. Whereas this more robust, this kind of thick idea of civil discourse is inclusive of both the, the courteousness that comes from people. I mean, talk about zoom conversations, right? When everybody hits their mute button and they come back when they're actually gonna speak or they use the hand raise function, that's being civil. Why? Because it's a total mess. It's a cacophony of sound. If we don't know how to do that well, or even in person, but there's also, a need and an appreciation of having civil discourse also mean civil disobedience and protests, showing up in streets or blockading offices, for example, and university administrative buildings. And we could think about this for a long history in the, particularly in the sixties and, and other times where we need to kind of yell and scream out and to call attention to inequities, to harm that's being done, all sorts of stuff like that. So my view... Here's the short version of this, my view around civil discourse is it's the spectrum, and we have to navigate and appreciate at certain times, sometimes it can stay in that kind of, I don't wanna say

superficial, but that thinner idea. And sometimes we really have to also sit with, wrestle with, and feel uncomfortable with civil discourse in this more robust way that there are going to be moments that you're gonna get called out, or told the shut up or something more dramatic than that, but that's all part of this.

Ryan Shuler:

It's so interesting that you bring this up and, and for our listeners out there specifically, why this is tied to wellbeing is so much of this is, as you said, based on your connection and your relationship and how you engage in these types of conversations can absolutely make or break these type of relationships. And if you, I would venture to guess, have to practice to do this well, this true sense of civil discourse, you would need to practice this, but again, if you're specifically now talking to workplace, we're focusing on Employee Wellbeing. These are people you're going to work with day in and day out, potentially for a bulk of your life, years and years, you're gonna spend with these people.

So, I feel like we have gotten so polarized in our views and so polarized in our thoughts that we don't even entertain. And I bring this back to wellbeing because so much of what we talk about really is just this process of deep listening and really just trying to understand where a person is coming from. So if somebody is to the point where they feel their back is against the wall, that they have to protest or, you know, block an administrator's office. Why? What has gotten them to this point? So it's not just, you know, oh, that's ridiculous. I would never do that. Well, you may have never been put in that situation. So really using a wellbeing tool of really trying to seek understanding and listening. What is it that got somebody even to this point? What are their experience? what has their life been like to, to get them to that? But you don't just wake up one day and decide, you know, maybe some people do, 'Hey, I'm gonna be a troublemaker today.' Usually it's for very good reason why these things are happening, but if nobody's listening to one another, we miss all of that background information.

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think that's a great point, right? The sense of, you know, we could think about social movements, you know, in recent years or long ago in the United States and other places. About, you know, classic examples like Martin Luther king Jr. or Gandhi or others, but there are factors that lead to those moments, right. So I think that's, that's a really good point to raise here and even the beginning of some of your comments, a few moments ago, you know, this listening deeply is, is critical here. That we, I was just saying this the other day to a colleague that the moment that you feel like, 'oh, I've got this new idea, and I'm gonna go kind of speak about that.'

You should probably look around, maybe read a little bit, talk to other people and figure out who else has already been wrestling with these kinds of questions, who's dealt with some of these challenges. And what do they have to say or what has been done? So we're not kind of recreating in some fashion, but the other, the other piece I wanna just say here too, so I don't lose is a lot of this is around practice, right. In a beautiful way, we can think about it, as we do for anything where we practice, right. It improves our abilities, our, our capacity for some of these sorts of skills. And to think about this as like civic muscle, right? There's a real necessity for us to be able to do some of this, the challenges we don't

Well, one of the challenges, it's not the only one, but one of the challenges. Is that, , you know, kind of the joking, like, we don't talk about religion or politics in this house, or, you know, when we get together

for, for gatherings or, or in a workplace. Right. Because I am gonna be sitting beside you for who knows how long, maybe months, years, decades, especially if you like where you work and you're kind of, you know, or maybe situated for all sorts of reasons. So what, what do you do in those environments? And importantly, the workplace is a critical environment. One of the few that exists where we show up with people who are different than us. A lot of us like to kind of step into enclaves. Right. So I would invite your listeners to think about this, you know, kind of pause for a moment. Where do you live? What do your neighbors look like? Do they share your socioeconomic status, maybe religion, race, all these sorts of factors. Bill Bishop a number of years ago wrote a book called *The Big Sort*. And in *The Big Sort*, he kind of looked at the local level, people moving around from place to place and self-selecting into those environments, right? So all of a sudden, you know, the cul-de-sacs at a suburban neighborhood, all of a sudden unsurprisingly looked certain ways, right. And when people left other communities maybe more in city centers and the like, the people who did move, who were quote, kind of left there or not able to make transitions or whatever else, all of a sudden these become these kind of spots. But we could think about it in our congregations, our kind of recreational spaces, our bowling leagues. Robert Putnam wrote a famous book a number of years ago called *Bowling Alone*. And he looked at the middle of the 20th century as this high point where you had a bunch of people working in factories and other spots getting together on Tuesday night at the bowling alley, sharing a pitcher of beer and talking about life.

They were talking about work, but they were talking about their families, you know, whatever's going on. So we don't have some of the social fabric in some of these ways. But the workplace is one of the few spots, where with all of those factors, we all show up. Walking into my office today, there are people, a bunch of people walking around with PhDs, right? Cause we're a University, so go figure. But there are also amazing people who have spent decades working in administrative roles, support staff, others who are making the facilities wonderful and useful and clean, right? We have this whole kind of mix of people in a workplace. And so when we think about the health of a democratic society, the workplace is one of the most important ones because we are showing up together with people who are different. That's where the invitation, if we can do this in a good sort of way, we don't have to be absolutely quiet with one another or step into conversations that may feel challenging if they reach a certain point, right, that begin to affect our work together. If we have kind of mission critical obligations, and I can't do that because you're always kind of spouting out certain kinds of statements or whatever else it might be that would be kind of experienced as being overtly political, for example. So these dynamics are super relevant to all of society, but especially a workplace because those are also places where you don't easily kind of, you can quit a job, right. But there are lots of reasons we don't want to, and so, what do we do with that?

Ryan Shuler:

Yeah. And it's, I love that you brought up the different dynamics of a workplace, and this is something that we focus on quite a bit in wellbeing is sort of looking at like you said, you're walking into a setting where people more than likely are different than you, especially at a University. You have people coming from not only all over the country, but all over the world to work here. So it takes a lot of conscious effort to understand that people have grown up differently than you, different religions, different backgrounds, different life experiences, and all of that shapes what people think about certain things. And I think in my experience, one detriment to all of this is people very quickly get into this concept of right and wrong. Instead of that it's just different. It's a different perspective. It's a different point of view, not I'm right, and you're wrong. It's that you have a different take on this than I do. So, I have

found myself, especially as, as I've gotten older and had kids to really try to... like the, my kids have just shaped the way I see the world in a different way.

So really trying to understand if somebody has a different perspective, really taking a moment to pause, even though at my core, it may feel like they are wrong. At my core, it doesn't feel good what they're saying, but to pause for long enough to say, 'Tell me why you feel that way' or 'tell me what led you to that conclusion.' And I go back to this concept of listening because a lot of times, as soon as you start to listen, you're like, 'oh, well now I get it. That makes sense. No wonder why they feel that way.' But so oftentimes we don't give people the courtesy of that five or 10 minutes to even explain themselves. We just jump right into, 'oh, well, I'm never talking to Tim again. Can you believe he thinks blank about this?' So it's really, again, I keep pulling this back to wellness, but really being very mindful in your reactions to things, and just pausing enough to really to listen to people. And I would like to bring up the topic of mental health here because I do think when we are always forced into this dichotomy of right and wrong, it, your mental health can really start to suffer. If you are made to feel that your viewpoint is wrong, quote unquote, that can affect your mental health, or if you are in workplaces or different scenarios where you are always made to feel unheard, or you are always made to feel that you are sort of in the dark with all these things, it really can take a toll on your mental health. So I'll ask the question to you, You know, in all of your research and your work, do you see ties between this concept of civil discourse and mental health?

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Yes. I mean it, and it's a great point. You know, one thing that I might speak a little bit to some of the work that I'm doing here at UD joining the Biden School, leading an effort called the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, SNF for short, Ithaca Initiative. And so it's been framed in these bigger ways around kind of democratic citizenship with civil discourse and civic engagement, and even this idea of kind of, how do we navigate this kind of mediated environment, whether it's social media, whether it's, I mean, everything is mediated, unless we're literally with one another in person, but this mental health question, within our initiative, earlier this year we gave an award, the first award the Biden School Civility and Public Service Award to two members of the legislature here in Delaware, to the majority leader, Valerie Longhurst, and to representative Michael Smith, for some of their work in the state across parties.

And they've been working on this for a few years, with different reasons to come to this, but they recognized some real shared interest in this bipartisan mental health bill that was signed and is able to hopefully, right, transform opportunities for mental health services, particularly to school-age children and middle schools, there were some reports, there were some great research done that Delaware school districts, 86% of elementary schools do not employ a school social worker, right. And these ratios between students and counselors, psychologists, really exceeded these national practices, right, that were recognized as like, this is what we should be doing. So this bill really would lower some of those ratios, increased the access to these services, particularly at the elementary level. The importance for thinking about this, and why I want to just say a little bit about it at this moment is we can think about a civil discourse just in this very public way, right.

It's about the school board meetings, or it's about showing up at a protest, if you're advocating for a thing or, or whatever it might be, or you're just yelling at people on social media, right, navigating your, you know, your conversations with your uncle. It always seems like it's the uncle always falls into that category, so apologies to all the uncles out there, but there is a rootedness within seeing oneself as they relate to lots of others. Right. We were talking about the workplace before, but we can kind of keep scaling it out into the bigger kind of social landscape and say if we're not doing well individually, we're not doing well collectively. And I think that's where this mental health thread is a really important one to navigate.

Especially, if you are someone who has been marginalized in a classroom, you don't feel like you can speak up or if it's in a workplace and you are maybe it's not explicit, but there are all these little signals that kind of point to the fact that I really shouldn't say something here, or I don't even have the ability or I don't have the security, to do so, right. So all of these factors over time can accumulate, right? If we don't have some of the processes, some of the outlets to navigate or to, to process or make some sense of this, it can lead us to some extreme, and sometimes really unfortunate actions that are detrimental to, to one's self. Or that are really detrimental to others, right? And so this is where, when we start to think about the mental health question, it's not just about that one person it's really about us all. And so that's one of the reasons why I really appreciated, you know, the, the fact that this first award was given to these two legislators who had worked for the last number of years in these areas.

And they're even building on some of this now to say, how do we think about this through the channels and the institutions where we have influence, right? So for everybody to think about that, what's your sphere of influence. If you're a house majority leader, you might say appropriately, I can work on this from a legislative front, but if your sphere of influence is your network of close friends or your neighbors or the people who share a suite with you in an office, we might think about that. So, you know, taking a leadership role in some of these areas to, to either foster space for these kinds of conversations or invite others or challenge some sometimes it really is that confrontation that that appropriately needs to happen to make some of this possible. Like where can you do that? And we all have some sphere, right. We have some space where we can create an environment that is more conducive to some of these discussions. And I think you made another really good point earlier. This is not about all of a sudden finding some like squishy middle where're like, okay, where do we agree? And then we scale it down to almost nothing that's of substance. Having disagreement, having difference is not bad. Engaging those differences constructively though, that's critical and important, right? So when we think about interests and values, right, what are those kind of positional views that we have on something we might have a, and the elections cycle right now would be a perfect example of this.

We might say, I think we should vote yes or we should vote no on this thing, but what's underneath it. There might be a lot of similarity, but if we actually don't talk to each. Or learn some of those things. We don't know that. Right. So we're only viewing it through that end product, rather than saying I value families and communities, coincidentally, you do as well. So what do we do about that sort of question rather than simply saying I'm opposed to this action, or I'm in support of it? So those little shifts, right. That in the engaging those differences, constructively, that sense of listening for understanding. That most fundamentally, but also this level of empathy and humility, we all know things, whether it's through formal education, through lived experience, observation, but also recognizing we know things, but we also don't know a whole lot of other things. And so having that ability, and we will talk about it as intellectual humility, kind of in the more academic sort of way. How do we recognize what we do know?

And also what we don't, and what do we need to do to, to kind of close some of that gap or at least have a more robust sense of what's going on in front of us?

So there are a number of organizations out there that are really committed to some of this work. One that I'm connected with, that you mentioned earlier is the National Institute for Civil Discourse. They have a great resource called Engaging Differences. You can just go to engagingdifferences.org to find some resources that have been used and found quite useful in a whole host of settings. But there are a lot of organizations out there. Things like Braver Angels, networks such as the Kettering Foundation, the National Issues Forums Institute, resources that are freely available, out there for people to find, and utilize in conversations, whether it's at a community scale that you really want to have some material out there, uh, that you could lean on, even if just how to have these kind of conversations, not even the substance of what you're gonna talk about. Or you know, you can just kind of take a look around at some of this and, and find some elements that could be useful to you.

There's this amazing line from a mentor of mine. He passed away a few years ago. His name was Hal Saunders, and he wrote a book called *A Public Peace Process*. He did a lot of work in the State Department, so dealing with conflict in these major zones around the world. And he, he says this and if I could just say this a little bit, "dialogue is a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen to each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others' concerns into her or his own picture, even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up their identity, but each recognizes enough of the others valid human claims that he or she will act differently toward the other." That orientation to listen deeply enough that we might be changed by what we hear, not necessarily that we are, is a really important practice in any of those, the spaces that we might find ourselves in, especially when we feel like we do have, or know that there are some significant differences to not just politics, but really any, any of the other kind of dividing lines that it's easy enough to retreat from. But I'm encouraging and inviting people to think about how do I step into that? And that's where some of these resources I was mentioning a few moments ago could be really useful.

Ryan Shuler:

I think that's such a powerful quote. And such a powerful statement and really just makes me go back to, we are such a competitive people by nature that we just always want to be right. So when a lot of times we're engaging in these conversations, we're not even listening to what the other person is saying because we're plotting our next verbal attack. Well, no, I'm right, because I know this or you're wrong because of this. And we're missing out on all of that deep listening. And again, I bring my kids up in this podcast quite a bit, but parenting has really forced me to slow down and I use like, I have a two-year-old right now. So we are in the throes of everything as a temper tantrum, everything is stomping your feet.

And if I just say, that's wrong, stop doing that. No, no, no, no, no. I am missing what is underneath that behavior. Why is he upset? What is going on? What am I not hearing that he's trying to tell me? And I, I sort of equate it to this a lot with my colleagues too. If I have coworkers who are upset about something, or if I have someone who's just always telling me, no, no, no, what am I missing? What am I not hearing? And to me, that's a red flag that I've not engaged in this true process of civil discourse. I've just thrown my opinion out there. They've thrown their opinion out there, but we're not actually talking about it. So I encourage everyone listening to review some of these resources that Tim had shared, because I do think this is such a powerful tool for so many facets of your life, your marriage, your family

relationships, coworkers. Again, with this election coming up, there are so many people who have differing opinions. And that's part of life. That's part of nature. And it really does take practice to learn how to have these conversations in an effective way, in a meaningful way where you're not going to lose friends and family and be stressed all the time. They really should be constructive conversations, if this is done in the correct way.

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Absolutely. And it, it makes me think of actually my mother who has long said this phrase, if my wife, ever listens to this, she'll roll her eyes a little bit because we joke about this all the time, but my mom always says, and just kind of in this, like off the cuff 'takes all kind.' And that's it. And it's true, right? I mean, so what makes our workplaces, as we were talking about it, our communities, wonderful and robust, when we're walking down Main Street here in Newark. We got all sorts of folks around. And when we think about some of the state of affairs globally, right, there are some who really don't like the idea that we are kind of this diverse pluralistic society. And I think as a, as a default one, that's just kind of where we are, but how do we recognize that and, and value those, those observations and experiences, those viewpoints. And so it's an orientation, right? It's this willingness to, to step into it. As I was saying a little bit earlier, like I know certain things, there are a lot of things I also don't know. And how do I have that willingness to engage to, to kind of put your foot into the water, so to speak a little bit, and it might feel really cold at first. Right. You're kind of shocked by what potentially is different. But wade into that water a little bit more and be willing to kind of check that out. And then the other kind of related piece to this is, and you, I think you named it well, we are so accustomed to being ready to fire back, like, all right. I know what they're saying. So I'm going to prep my, my mind to kind of react to them or kind of respond in a way that I, you know, my position is what I'm going to kind of argue for. This is where I think sometimes unfortunately we use negative language here, but some of our kind of debating kind of win-loss, our gamification of our shared lives, our civic life is really unfortunate, right? If everything is framed as I'm going to win or lose, and I want to win, that's pretty bad. And without thinking of it, think about the next headline. If you follow anything politics, especially everything's about team red or team blue, did we get this across the line, right? Where in the, all these kinds of images, these metaphors, all of this like gets woven in, and that's not great, right?

We can be, we can be partisan. We can have sorts of views on things that make some distinctions. There's nothing wrong with that. There is I think, and we're dealing with the repercussions of some of this. And we have for quite a while, that if we don't have a willingness to recognize kind of our shared humanity, our health and wellness, right? Here's your health of democracy. If we can't concern ourselves with our body politic it's unsurprising, that things are not well. We're not doing well in many regards that we could if we change our practices, our orientation kind of a disposition, right? How do I engage in more conversations with a question rather than a certainty. Where are those opportunities?

And if you find yourself operating in that way of like, I know what it is, and I just need to say it, then I would invite you to reflect on that. And what is it about that that we're so inclined to do and what would it mean to ask that person, 'well, why do you value that? Where is the meaning?' It's not just about telling you because if, if the, if quote, just telling people what the right answer is and backing it up with all sorts of data, I'm sitting in my office right now with all sorts of, you know, articles and books and things. If that was what one arguments, we wouldn't have a lot of arguments, right. Because we would've solved it, but people have values and meaning attached to all of all, most of what shapes our

lives. So we have to ask those questions. How do we invite people to, to reflect and say, huh? Hadn't thought about it that way.

Ryan Shuler:

This concept you bring up of shared humanity is something that for me feels very personal and something that we bring up quite a bit, on this podcast. I, a lot of it for me, goes back to this shared sense of purpose and, and thinking about it in the workplace to kind of pull it back to that. We all work here at the University of Delaware to advance the mission of enhancing the student experience. And if you are a faculty member and you're directly working with students, you may see that at a larger scale. If you work for accounting, and you may not feel that you have that same true purpose, you really do everything can be tied back to the students here. That's what the University is here for. So whether you are, you know, a football coach, trying to get students rallied. If you are a custodian, ensuring that students have a safe, healthy place to work. We all have this shared sense of purpose here on campus.

And if we can strip back all of those other things, and if nothing else remember that. We're all driven by the same motive now. It really is the shared sense of purpose. And it, it, to me, it goes back to that sense of humanity is that we want these students to go out and do good in the world. We want these students to make the world a better place than it is right now. And if we're all actively engaged in that mission, you know, kind of put your own biases to the side, ask those difficult questions, take a breath and pause a little bit and, and say, why do I feel so defensive about that answer? Why am I having such a strong reaction to this? And can I just ask a question instead of firing back, and you can do this again at home with your spouse, and we're cutting it close on time here, but I do just have to share. If my husband could have the title of like professional devil's advocate, he would. Everything that I say, he has a comeback. Well, did you ever think about this or what did you think about this? And I find myself getting very defensive in the moment, but then I'm like, 'Huh? I never did think about that,' or, 'oh, that's a really great point.' And to your earlier point, it may not change how I feel about something, but it is bringing new perspectives in that I otherwise would not have thought about. And I think so much of this concept of civil discourse really is just slowing down enough to understand and value that other people have other perspectives. And when you talk through humanity and diversity and all of the things that make this population great, we need to show that a little love and engage with that in a more meaningful way.

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Yeah. and that's one of the, the really exciting things to be here at the University of Delaware, leading the SNF Ithaca Initiative is that it's very undergraduate centric. It's about democratic citizenship, but it's about helping to cultivate, working with particularly students to become leaders who are engaged and thoughtful, right. So how, how are they going to function in the world? They're not all going to step into elected office nor should they, right. But when we think about any of the spaces where we go in our lives, whether it's right now or in the future, especially for students is traditionally aged students who are on this kind of path exploration and journey. This is one of the beautiful things about Ithaca. Part of this is kind of this Greek story, right? This Odyssey. And it's all about this journey and dealing with these challenges, these obstacles, sometimes it's a real mess. If you've ever read The Odyssey, you, you, you would know that. And I would encourage some people to maybe go poke around if you've got an old copy of that sitting on a shelf somewhere, but like that sense of recognition of who do I wanna. And

what are the things I need to do to kind of get there? This is where it brings a lot of excitement to me and to a wonderful group of people here at the University who are trying to build some of this culture.

And it's, it's inclusive of, and also beyond the Biden School. So there's, you know, as I'm learning more and more people really concerned about some of these questions and themes. And I think as an institution, if we can recognize this, not just for students, but for all of us, our world is desperately, kind of asking, not always explicitly, but we, if we kind of can read the signs a little bit, like for us to engage differently. If we can do that, then we could be models for others and they might say, 'oh, maybe it is a good way to like, think about these other perspectives, and I hadn't thought about that,' or, 'gosh, Why is that so troubling to me to acknowledge that what I thought was true was is not, or it's at least more nuanced and complicated.' That's a really challenging thing to do. And at the same time, man, it's really important.

Ryan Shuler:

I feel like I could talk for hours about this. I have a lot of questions for you. We may have to bring you back for another episode here.

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Well, you know, where you know where I am. So, we in fact can do this again, but I think, you know, the opportunity to even introduce some of this, if this language is not what people are accustomed to hearing, hopefully this clarifies a little bit.

Ryan Shuler:

Perfect. Thank you so much. And I have to ask our final question that we ask of all guests. What do you do to keep yourself undeniably well?

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

Well, one of the things I do as a practice, not always great about it is to step back from the kind of, the default is how do we do more as efficiently as possible, and just kind of, kind of keep at the grind. And I think thematically, as we were talking about it today, to kind of slow down, and so for me, sometimes it is like I'm doing a lot of work from home right now. So I walk around my house, maybe a strange amount to the point that my, my wife wonders what I'm doing at times, but like this somewhat, I'll say kind of almost contemplative, but like thinking about sitting kind of chewing on ideas is for the work that I'm doing is really important.

So the sense of finding yourself, not being stuck, both figuratively and literally is my real simple way of, of doing some of this, but I'm really excited. I will say this about UD. I'm really excited that there's a gym membership that's included in faculty perks. So, I'm going to utilize that a little bit more nothing against other institutions that I may have been affiliated with in the past, but there are some nice perks that do honestly.

And if the joking aside here, I have come to appreciate UD's holistic view of what it means to value people as employees, and I'm not just saying this because I'm talking to you. I really value this and recognizing that for us to be able to do good work, we need to be healthy people. And I mean that in the broadest sense. So if that's me utilizing that pool or also feeling like I can see a doctor and have

resources to all other things without feeling breaking the bank, makes it easier for me to be in my office doing the other things that I'm charged to do. So thanks so much for the, for the time to be here.

Ryan Shuler:

You're wonderful. We appreciate that very much. And we will link for everyone listening some of the resources that Tim had mentioned, you can find in the show notes. So we'll link those the notes and the books that he'd mentioned. And, Tim, thank you again and welcome again to UD.

Dr. Tim Shaffer:

It's great to be here. Thanks so much, truly.

Outro:

Thank you for listening to the UnDeniably Well podcast. For all things wellbeing at UD, visit our website [Udel.edu/wellbeing](https://udel.edu/wellbeing). There you can access our on-demand library, subscribe to our newsletter, and see what's coming up to help you on your wellbeing journey. Until next time, be well.