

9-1-2019

9 Things to Know About Ken Peterson

Ron Wagner '93

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

Wagner, Ron '93 (2019) "9 Things to Know About Ken Peterson," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 62 : Iss. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol62/iss2/6>

This Regular Feature is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.



Around the Lake

“I describe Furman to newcomers as a highly relational place, and I continue to be surprised at the goodness of our faculty, staff and students.”

KEN PETERSON, PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS



9

THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT KEN PETERSON

BY RON WAGNER '93



Ken Peterson, a professor of economics, served as Furman's dean of the faculty before becoming provost and vice president for academic affairs in August.

1 As you see it, what are the chief responsibilities of the provost and vice president for academic affairs?

The provost is ultimately responsible for the strategic direction, composition, implementation and assessment of all academic programs (for-credit, co-curricular, certificate and otherwise). None of this can happen in a vacuum, and it requires effective collaboration with the president, faculty, staff, administrators and others. The provost needs to help inform and explain to the Furman and external communities where we are trying to go, what we are doing to get there, why we are doing it, how we know it's working and where we need to make changes in order to be successful in a very competitive higher education environment.

In the era of The Furman Advantage, the provost, in partnership with the vice president for student life, is responsible for ensuring that the major components of the vision are implemented, assessed and adequately supported. The provost must also look carefully at our resources – where they come from and where they go – to ensure that they are

being used to create value for students and their families.

2 What do you see as the top quality or skill Furman develops in students to prepare them for the world?

As they become more knowledgeable about their academic disciplines, Furman students also begin to understand and develop their strengths and values through reflection on their classwork, experiential activities such as undergraduate research, internships, leadership activities, study away, and community engaged learning and interacting with people who are not like them. With the help of great faculty and staff mentors, we help students align their strengths and values with appropriate post-Furman opportunities, whether it's graduate or professional school, a job or an extended service activity.

3 What was your very first job?

I delivered the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette on foot and eventually on bicycle. In high school, I made pizzas and pizza dough and worked in a factory. In college, I worked in the university mail room and in the serials department at the Iowa State library. In



grad school, I had this cool job that paid me to learn how to use popular software programs for the newish IBM PC and then teach them to faculty and staff at Stony Brook University. That turned out to be a very useful learning opportunity.

4 What do you wish Greenville had that it doesn't?

Greenville has become more diverse and inclusive since we moved here in 1990, but I'd love to see that continue to expand. It's what we missed most when we moved here from Southern California. Our street festivals, international companies and affordable cultural amenities have helped a lot in this regard.

I'd also like to see a more expansive ecosystem that supports innovation, entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship in Greenville. Many of the elements are here and expanding, but a more mature network would create opportunities for a growing and diverse population, including our Furman students who settle in Greenville after graduation.

5 What keeps surprising you about Furman?

The people.

I describe Furman to newcomers as a highly relational place, and I continue to be surprised at the goodness of our faculty, staff and students. It manifests in very visible ways during difficult times. Ours can be an amazingly supportive community, which is the part of "old Furman" that I hope we can keep and extend to members of our community that perhaps didn't feel it so much in the past.

Our faculty and staff are also exceptionally talented, hard-working and engaged in all the ways that matter for a university. It's hard to describe in a manner that can be appreciated by people outside Furman without sounding like hyperbole.



Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Ken Peterson and President Elizabeth Davis discuss strategy during a recent meeting.

6 Which book changed your life?

Alan Blinder's "Hard Heads and Soft Hearts" probably had a lasting impact on my thinking about economic policy and politics. Jane Jacobs' "Death and Life of Great American Cities," Ed Glaeser's "Triumph of the City," Cavalli-Sforza and Feldman's "Cultural Transmission and Evolution: A Quantitative Approach," and Putnam's "Bowling Alone" deepened my interest in urban economics, the social transmission of behavior within and across generations, and social capital.

More recently, I've been taken by Adam Grant's "Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World," which has been useful in thinking about innovation and organizational behavior. And he sort of justifies procrastination, which is a bonus, right?

7 What did you want to be when you were growing up?

1. Veterinarian (junior high school, until I discovered what they had to do in rural Iowa in the middle of a sub-zero winter; spoiler: it's not pleasant)
2. Lawyer (college)
3. Economic development researcher/policy consultant (grad school)

4. Professor (after teaching a few semesters in my first real job, I fell in love with it)

8 Who would you invite to your dream dinner party?

Nancy Koehn has a neat book titled "Forged in Crisis: The Power of Courageous Leadership in Turbulent Times." In the book, she develops five leadership case studies, which focus on Abraham Lincoln, Rachel Carson, Ernest Shackleton, Frederick Douglass, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. That's an unusual group of people, and I think I'd enjoy having dinner with them. I'd add Mahatma Gandhi to the mix, too. As a new attorney, he was so nervous he couldn't speak in court when a judge first called on him. Years later, he played a pivotal role in leading India to its independence in an era when communication was exceedingly difficult. That's quite a transformation.

9 What is your earliest memory?

A neighbor kid pushed me off of a picnic table when I was three, and I had to have stitches in my head. It made quite an impression (pun intended). My three older sisters think that my head injury explains a lot about my behavior when we were growing up. They might be right. ♦