Episode 3: Gentelligence
with Dr. Megan Gerhardt

Chris Taylor: Hi, my name is Chris Taylor, and I'm the executive director of InterACTT, the International Association for Care And Threat Teams, and this is another episode of InterACTTions, where we talk to leaders in our field and others about topics that are pertinent to our subscribers. And I'm very excited about today because I have a friend and amazing author of a new book, Megan Gerhardt, who is here today to talk to us about the books she's written as well as her coauthors, obviously, and how it might have some applications into the work we do. So obviously I've introduced you, but please tell us some more about yourself.

Megan Gerhardt: Well, thank you so much for having me. As you said, my name's Megan Gerhardt, I am a professor of management at the Farmer School of Business at Miami University. I also serve as director of leadership development for the business school there. And then I have a few other hats I wear. I am, as you said, an author of a new book called *Gentelligence: The Revolutionary Approach to Leading an Intergenerational Workforce*.

And also a consultant in leadership and employee development, of course, most recently, on how to lead multiple generations in organizations. So I wear a number of different hats, probably relevant to your audience, the book that we wrote, actually co-authored with two former students of mine that I met through work I was doing at my university. We try to talk about the value of integrating different generational perspectives and the learning that can occur. And so it seems important that we have generational diversity in our author team as well.

Chris Taylor: That's awesome. Thank you. So I will acknowledge that I have not read the whole book yet. I'm getting there. We've got our copies at home, but how would you – what's a good summary you

can provide for folks. And of course, maybe to entice them to want to pick it up themselves. And then also maybe talk about how you and your coauthors decided to write or why you decided to approach the topic.

Megan Gerhardt: Sure. So the book itself is about how we can become smarter regarding how we navigate generational interactions and generational diversity in any kind of organization. As you probably know most of the conversation around generational differences has been very negative. We see any headline, any given day, you click on the news, you see sort of an us versus them mentality, whether we're ganging up on the millennials or it's the "okay boomer" trend that went viral.

But a really negative contentious dynamic has existed for quite a while around generational conflict everywhere, but the workplace and organization specifically, really have been hit with this. I think we saw it most of all when the millennials entered the workplace, because they were very different in their approach to how they worked and how they handled themselves.

And that difference was unfortunately cast in a very negative light early on. And that negativity has continued to be the way we frame generational diversity. So the book itself is about looking at that phenomenon and sort of calling some attention to the fact that we wouldn't really tolerate that, at least I hope we wouldn't, with any other kind of difference. It wouldn't be socially acceptable or morally acceptable to be really locking into an us versus them conflict with kinds of difference around gender identity or racial identity or any other kind. We're aware that that's unproductive and unhealthy and we work very hard to try to navigate away from that.

But when it comes to age and generation, and we talk about those not interchangeably, but certainly as being importantly connected, we seem to have given that a pass. So we call that the missing link in the diversity conversation. That that's a really important and interesting form of difference that we seem to be locked into sort of despising and challenging and fighting against instead of how best practice would tell us we should look at it with other kinds of difference, which is how do we learn from it? How do we leverage that great difference? How do we collaborate and innovate in a way that's smarter? Because we do have different experiences and perspectives.

So the book is about really trying to change the way people think about generational differences in organizations, and also applying that to some practical solutions. So we have what we call the gentelligence method that I hope will be helpful to your listeners in terms ofthe work that you do, the idea being it's a set of best practices that can be applied to generational diversity anywhere and how it can strengthen teams. It can help us navigate change all of those things that we're all facing, regardless of the work that we're doing.

So that's the book in a nutshell, gentelligence is just looking at generational differences as an opportunity rather than a threat is the quick definition.

And just how I came to be passionate about this and how we came to write the book – you know, I started as a faculty member back in, I was 26 years old. And so I was in this really interesting position where, of course I needed to look to my older colleagues for advice and guidance. There was a lot I did not know and they were wonderful, but I was actually much closer in age to my students than I was to many of my colleagues at the time when I started.

And so it was very natural for me to reach across the generational divide that way as well, to ask for input, insight, perspective, particularly on things we were doing at the university or in class. So it was very natural for me. And when I began working with different organizations, because I was researching how we could really leverage the potential and, and it really wasn't a topic that was going on in academia or in organizations. And so when I started working with companies, I realized my perspective that this was natural and productive and so much opportunity was certainly not shared. Most of the conversations were about what's wrong with the millennials or how do we get these kids to understand the way to do things, you know, "kids these days."

And I was very surprised and I thought, why aren't we using best practices and diversity towards this kind of diversity? And that is really what energized me to see if we could maybe narrate this conversation in a different way.

Chris Taylor: That is awesome. I really, I don't know that you and I have talked about sort of how you came to this work, so that's really interesting to hear. I appreciate that. I think, if you look this up on Amazon (which we'll provide links as part of the podcast here, once it goes on the website, to Amazon and otherplaces you can get the book), I think probably, I know it may not be your intent, but I think a lot of people would look at and go, well, that's kind of a business book and that's a fair statement probably. But how do you see the implications for higher education? I mean, you're in it, you're a faculty member, and have other responsibilities at the university as well. It's interesting to me because sometimes I have seen situations, plenty, where we think in higher ed a) we don't like to talk business terms, although I think we're all pretty quickly having to adapt to that in some ways. Also we tend to think, oh no, we've got that all figured out. We're, you know, we're woke. If that's the term the kids are still using, but we're not. I mean, there's been some very interesting debates, I guess I'll call them raging, on some of the listservs I belong to and Facebook sites that are about higher education, particularly student affairs in higher education, that really tells me no.

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In some ways we don't get it at all and have not paid careful attention. So yeah. What about this in a higher education setting?

Megan Gerhardt: Yeah. I think too, it's a good reminder for me. I think obviously because we work in higher education, and no, not a business, but certainly an organization, right. So I think if we look at it this, let's broaden our perspective and say, a university is an organization and this issue is one we're all facing regardless of the industry we're in. So if we think of higher ed being an organization with stakeholders, that students are an important set of stakeholders, faculty, administrative, parents -- you know, I don't have to tell you all of our different stakeholder interests we're trying to balance. And in higher ed, I think it's maybe even more relevant than other places because of our very strong, intense generational waves that we get in coming through. We were the first people, you know, we are the line of first sort of entry when it comes to a group of young people entering in force together. We knew the millennials were different before industry did because we had them in our classrooms and we thought, oh, this is interesting. Right. Um, wait, hold on. What's going on? We have to adjust. That was very early in my career that was happening.

And so I found it to be fascinating and I think I use gentelligence in my work, not only as a faculty member, but in my administrative role, because students are one of our most important stakeholders. And while they are there to learn from us, we seem to sometimes forget that it is just as important that we learn from them. And some of our changes in higher ed over time, when a lot of us became faculty members, we thought, oh, well, we're the fonts of knowledge and they're all coming here to drink from this font and then we'll go on. That of course has shifted under our feet. Right? There's a lot of places they can get information faster than they can certainly get it from me. They can Google all kinds of things. So, so my role is really to give context and connection and challenge and foster discussions.

When we think about how that works now, right? The fact that we have these very vocal stakeholders that have a very strong interest in how their organization works, you know, how their universities work and why they're making certain decisions, I think we're feeling that acutely that our millennials and now gen Z, they want to know why, why did the university make that decision? Why do we have this policy? Why does this happen this way? And we're not sure how to take that because anytime someone younger than us speaks up, I think for those of us who maybe grew up in an era where it was sort of like, we'll put your head down until somebody tells you it's time to talk, it's just a little bit startling. It's not wrong. It's just different. And so I think in higher ed, the idea that we should be open to not just hearing the input, but using the input substantially to drive some decisions or help us craft decisions takes a little bit of adjustment. And I love thinking about how this applies to higher ed.

So I'll give you an example. I just recently authored an article for *BizEd Magazine*. It's not out yet, but I co-authored it with a student of mine who will be a sophomore and our actual topic was "Gentelligence in Return to the Classroom." So as we return to the classroom, how do we use gentelligence to do so more successfully?

And so what we looked at were sort of, gentelligence has, as I said, four practices and the first practice that you put into place is resist assumptions. So that's important, no matter what kind of work we're doing. And so our article we wrote was really asking what assumptions are faculty making and the university making about students' COVID education experience, what they're thinking post COVID. Do we know? Or are we assuming? And so we gathered data, we surveyed faculty and we surveyed students and just asked a bunch of questions about what was hard, what they were looking forward to, what kinds of policies they thought should stay versus go in terms of zoom or the use of different technology in class, or just different kinds of things that we're all thinking about right now.

And we found that faculty and students were really close together on some issues that we thought maybe they would be very far apart on and they were much further apart in some other issues. And so it was an illustration of the first gentelligence practice of don't assume that all gen Zs love remote learning because they're so text-savvy. And I think when we all went remote, whether it was for work or for class, we all assumed gen Z was going to like sail through this because the *New York Times* wrote the year before that that gen Zs and millennials were pushing to be working remote and working at home and not be in an office. And so it was sort of like, well, they won't have a tough time, but what about the rest of us? And the data now – and we don't have as much as we want to have and we'll eventually have – but the data through 2020 and now showed that gen Zs and millennials have the hardest time doing remote work.

And it was because they need connection. They need social interaction. They want face-to-face contact, with people their own age, with their mentors. People that are older, sort of already have those networks. We've already sort of established our social and professional networks. Our career identity is relatively established, but for people starting a job who never got to step into an office or in our world, freshmen that never got to set foot on campus. We're seeing the melt of students who don't feel like part of our university because they never got to be physically there. And I don't think we thought. We assumed gen Z wouldn't care, and they did. And so that's just an example of how, I think higher ed maybe feels at first and in some ways it might even be more important for us to understand this in a smart, validated way. Because we're going to be trail blazers on how other organizations think about these topics.

Chris Taylor: Now that that is really interesting. And I don't know that I would – I try not to assume things, I mean, I think we all do, and I hope I wouldn't have assumed, but I think it's an easy assumption to make. You know, they're buried in it (they being millennials and gen Z), they are buried in their phones all day anyway. So how would it be any different to be, online learning, but that's really interesting. And we've seen plenty of signs that, at my institution, other places, that you're absolutely on target, that folks are like, no, the online learning thing just doesn't work for me.

Some people, it probably did, yeah. Probably just varies across older populations as well. So that's a really good point and I hope we need to, well, we need to not make assumptions on a variety of things as we come back from the pandemic and we're trying to plan for all kinds of potential needs that connectedness to campus, as you mentioned. Certainly, a probably greater need for mental health services, because the pandemic has had an impact on everybody's mental health, I would argue, so I think that's really, really important.

And that really gets at the work some of the teams that we're talking to and talking about do, and you and I have had a chance to chat a bit about what BIT teams and CARE teams are and I think you mentioned that you kind of knew there was one at your institution and how they do things. One of the things I've been thinking about is that these teams are a little different on every campus, the makeup and who belongs to the team. And sometimes they bring people in as, as they're needed. For instance, we have an international student office and we might bring them in, if there's an international student we're discussing and things like that. But what I also tend to see, and I think a lot of folks would probably agree that, you're going to have the counseling center, police department, residence life. But amongst those folks, it tends to be – not always, but it tends to be – the director of residence life, the director of the counseling center, not always the chief of police, but typically a higher ranking officer. So it really gets at, I don't know that we're necessarily purposely mixing up our teams in such a way that makes any sense to really get at those generational differences among staff, how would you have us or help us think about how do we consider using Gentelligence when we're

forming our teams? And then we'll talk about training them too, because I think that's an important aspect.

Megan Gerhardt: Definitely. I love the question because I think if we go back to the idea that we're talking about a type of diversity, who should be at the table is always the question we ask, right? Who should be at the table that's not. I think this opens us up to the question of what role does age or generation play in this discussion. Whose perspective could we benefit from? And then there's the question. All right, how do we do more than just invite them to the table? Which I agree, I think you mentioned this earlier is, is a separate question, but a connected one. So I think if we go back, so I mentioned the first practice is resisting assumptions. And so if we resist the assumption that we understand what students think and instead say, Hey, you know, let's get them at the table so that we can check some of these assumptions that we're making. And then we have to actually do what I call an assumption audit. Right? What are the assumptions that we're working on? And, Hey, let's just check those before we go any further. I also think what's going to be very helpful here is that it also allows there to be a student voice for what assumptions might be being made on the other side.

I know when we had our safe return to campus committee, I know you were on one as well – and you and I had talked about that, we had a handful of student members and I think the intent to put them there was very good the way it always is, but I don't know that anyone realized how valuable they would be for giving that voice and saying, this is what the students are saying, or this is what students heard when this announcement was made or whether or not you realize it, the reason that students don't want to do X is because of Y. And I don't think we did realize, or we don't necessarily think the same and that's the great part about it.

And the second practice that is connected to that for gentelligence is called adjust the lens. So I like to say,

you know, when you travel abroad, you are aware, or most of us are, that certainly the behavior you see, the norms you experienced are probably going to be different. And you have to pause before you assume that you understand what a behavior means or how people are looking at a situation. And that's part of the sort of cultural adjustment.

So generations are another kind of cultural diversity. And so adjusting the lens is our second practice. We resist assumptions. We adjust the lens and think, is there another way to see this. So for example, we, as administrators, as student affairs people, as faculty, there's a lot of things we inherently know being part of an, higher ed organization that our students maybe don't understand. They may not understand who the key people are that are going to be involved and why. They may not understand what – we can make a very long list of the things that maybe we think they understand that no one's ever stopped to explain or give them the context or tell them why a certain policy is in place. And so it helps them, I think, be able to adjust all the things that might be going on to help them understand the situation. But then it also helps us. So we say gentelligence is very much about two way learning, right? It's about this mutual learning that I say every generation has something to teach and something to learn.

So how might we not only have our lens adjusted by hearing the student input, but how might they adjust their lens to what it means to make policies in a university or provide help in a university, provide support in a university. And just being able to say, how do you look at this issue, or what are some of the biggest challenges you see in doing what we're trying to do?

I was on an ethics committee, and ethical academic misconduct committee years ago. And we had a couple student members – we checked the boxes of student members. And I remember thinking going in, well, I'm sure they'll have input, but you know, I'm sure the things that they want or need, we've

already thought about those and it's nice to have them there as a sounding board, but, you know, I never really thought. And the things we learned from them were so fantastic. You know, we learned about things like panic cheating, right? That most cheating's not premeditated, most cheating is, I thought I had studied and I clearly didn't and now I'm going to fail. And it's as, as you know, a faculty or as an administrator, I would try to prevent that differently than a premeditated kind of cheating, but I didn't even know that was a thing. And so it was so fascinating to just ask what their experience had been or what they thought we had missed or what else they would hope we would be talking about. So that lens adjustment, just having that different generation at the table and being open that their perspective is going to be different, but still equally valid.

So if we want to move to the training conversation, I think that hits the last two practices of gentelligence, which is, you know, the first two are all about breaking down assumptions and they are about making sure that we don't have tension or sort of miscommunication about how different generations think.

But the second two are really about how do we create and leverage the potential of having those different voices at the table. And the first part is about building trust and I think that's part of the training. I think part of the training is building trust and saying, it might be that a student isn't sure if their voice is welcome or they're not sure whether they should be comfortable giving input or pushing back on what a group of administrators or staff talk about or have to say. And so building trust that their perspective is valued and necessary and needed. Asking them for what they think and explaining how that input's going to be used.

I have seen this go in the ditch before where we put students on committees or with good intentions include them in conversations, and then either push

back on the input they give us because it's contrary to what we think is the case is or what we think is going on. And we tend to sort of take the tactic of, well, you don't really understand, or, you know, it's not fair to think that. We tend to get defensive because often students are pointing out things that we could be doing better or things that they wish they had from the university that they don't have. Right. I think creating training around being open to input, that just because it comes from a 20-year-old, it doesn't make it less valid than coming from a 50-year-old. And that we're not only going to be open to what they have to say, but you know, we're going to validate it and we're going to talk to them about how we're going to use it. And we're going to try to involve them in solutions. So I think really gen Z in particular, it's similar to the millennials int that they're willing to work very hard and they're willing to be very engaged as long as it's meaningful and purposeful.

So if they perceive that we're just putting them at a table to check a box or for optics, we want to say we had students involved in this committee, but we're not really listening to that, that's not going to work. That's fake. And so they really are going to want to know and believe that the time they're putting in is going to make a difference. That's a very gen Z, you know, that mission driven and purpose and all of those great things.

The final step of the method or practice of the method – and I can, I can restate these – is to think about expanding the pie. So it's a negotiations term because we've been locked into this idea that, you know, if I have some pie, there's less pie for Chris, right? And in this sort of idea that if we give the students voice and power and impact, then we have as, as maybe if we're talking higher ed, than we have as a university, less of those things. And we don't want that power balance go in the wrong way on us, but it's not a fixed pie.

The idea would be if you empower the students to have voice and have input, What I've seen and what

I was most sort of blown away by was when some of the more successful student experiences I've been on with committees with student representatives, is they feel heard, they get good feedback and validation that their perspective is important, and they see us acting on it or making different decisions because of something they brought up and they tell other students. We realized we weren't using social media as much as we could have, or as powerfully as we could have to sort of normalize mask wearing or those things we were all wrestling with in the fall. And it was, you know, we did a great sort of myth-busting video. We did a great sort of like what to expect when you get back to campus. And our students led the way, and were very clear that sending emails, while our preferred form of communicating, wasn't going to be read, that we should be on Instagram, that somebody should be doing a TikTok, you know, things that we didn't really necessarily think about at the level probably we needed to, to be effective.

And so that's just one example, but they became real ambassadors to other students. So having a few really well chosen students at the table who are influential, who have strong voice or willing to represent their student body, I think has a really big, you know, trickle-down effect in terms of them saying our university cares what the students need. They care what the students want. We've been invited to share our concerns. And sometimes it's as easy – my favorite question is just, you know, how would you do it? Right. And just assuming, you know, you could say to everybody on the committee, our shared goal is, let's say, increased mental health support for our students, our faculty, and our staff, everybody coming back to campus. Here's the things that we have in play. Here's the things we've been thinking about. If it was up to you, what else would you do? How else should we be thinking about this and just that invitation I think is so powerful when we're talking about students, because when they feel listened, to gen Z in particular, they are much more likely to listen to us.

So if they say every student should have unlimited counseling appointments, we might think, yes, we would love that, but where are we going to get the resources to do that? That's then our opportunity to say, oh, we absolutely agree. Like that is the dream. And we would love that, you know? And then instead of saying here's all the things you don't understand, it becomes a dialogue where we say, if that's the dream, here's some challenges that we have from a budgetary standpoint or from a human resource standpoint. Can we talk through how to navigate those? So that's what I loved intelligence is about the fresh perspective and energy that a younger person might bring. And then the organizational experience and knowledge that somebody that's been navigating, university channels and requirements for 30 years has. If you brought them together, what could we do?

Because we tend to stick in all the things we can't do because of constraints and budget and policy and maybe then hold on to things too long that need to change. And yeah, our younger people aren't as hindered by that, which sometimes maybe make some of the ideas, not practical, but that's why we need everybody at the time.

Chris Taylor: Yeah, that absolutely makes sense. It makes me think about where I was headed for a next question. And I imagine some of our listeners probably have the same question. You know, when we think about these teams, they meet typically weekly. And during that meeting, we really are dealing primarily with students, individual students, who are in crisis for a variety of, so that might be, you know, you name it. It might be mental health issues, suicide ideation, housing insecurity, food insecurity, financial jet general, financial insecure, 30, so a wide group of things. And then you also have a component sometimes that has to do with threat, helping assess whether somebody is a direct threat to others at the university or individuals at the university. So there's all that. And for the reasons that surround those kinds of things and also have to do with FERPA and sometimes HIPAA, depending on who's on the team,

we typically don't have students as part of that team that does that sort of weekly talk about, okay, what, what do interventions look like and what do we, how do we do it?

So I'm kind of picturing a situation where perhaps we would need to, you know, front load that information in some ways. And not necessarily – I just, I don't know that it would work for a lot of teams to have a student as part of that. Maybe a grad student who might be working with a counseling center or might be working with residence life. I think that probably applies on some campuses. But I think maybe it would make sense as you're doing a training for these teams, I could even have been just something like a panel of students made up of a wide cross section to just sit down with, for, you know, an hour or two. And just ask questions about, so, you know, tell us what happens on a typical Friday night and you know, what, what does it mean when somebody says X, Y, Z, and you know, if you need help, who are you going to turn to? Is it going to be your friends, is going to be the counseling center? Is it going to be an outside therapist that you've had for years? And that's going to vary.

But that's kind of what I've been thinking about, that everything you said and all that information I think is important to have. I think putting it in the training may make some more sense. And I guess I would ask, are there other opportunities or other ways you think we could do that without, quite honestly, involving students in the weekly meetings where we're discussing other students who have some pretty serious and pretty confidential issues?

Megan Gerhardt: Yeah. I think that's a really interesting question, I think if you could divide what you feel are sort of the categories of the work, right. Obviously we're not going to get to everything, but like you said, mental health support, threat, you know, these different things and you talk about, all right, this is our process we use, like when we're addressing this kind of a crisis, we use this kind of

process. It would be interesting in a general way to sit down with some well chosen students. And I think this is where, you know, you're trusting, on both sides, there's trust that this input is going to be valuable. And so there would want to be some thought about who should we have at that table. Are there students that may, maybe it's student government, maybe it's students who are interested in doing this kind of work in the future, or maybe, I don't know. It depends probably on the university. They'll probably have a good sense of who some of those students might be or nominations I think are great. You know, this would be a great student who's very thoughtful. And maybe just talking about, you know, when we have a student who's in mental health crisis or we're worried about them, suicidal ideation, here's the process we go through. Here's the people that are brought in. If you think about this being needed for yourself or your roommate or your best friend, can you talk to us about what we're not seeing? Do you think there should be other services or are there barriers? I'm sure these are things that most of your listeners have talked about to some degree amongst themselves. You're speculating. What are the barriers to people reaching out to get help? I know, because I'm sure you've all experienced much more frequently, when I have students in crisis and I try to direct them somewhere, there's always questions. Well, are my parents going to see this on my bill or I can't go to that because I don't have the insurance or all of these things that often the university already thought through and has come up with a plan for there to be ways to work around that.

But if the perception is floating around out there, that there isn't. That everybody knows, quote unquote, that you can't go to the student health center because it'll show up on your bursar bill and then your parents will know that you sought out counseling. And we didn't know that they think everybody knows because it's actually not true or maybe it is and we never thought that that was an issue. Just sort of ways. Maybe you pick one, we take it piece by piece and you pick one sort of area at a time and say, what do you wish we

knew or what's a gap or where do you think this falls apart? I wonder, it would be... I have to be thoughtful about the amount of work, but I also think maybe in retrospect using some sort of a simplified case. We had a student, and here's a time that our services didn't work the way that we wanted them to and we're trying to kind of dissect how we could do it different next time. What thought occurs to you? You know, and whether students who have used the service before would be great.

Again, privacy issues being super important to keep in mind, but yeah, I think just the idea of even if we start with a focus group, and saying to them, not only do we want your input, here's how we're going to use it. We may totally redesign the way that we do this based on student feedback. So we really appreciate it and we'll let you know if we do, right. That's kind of the thing that I think they're worried it's just to check a box.

So that makes sense to me. Because I think if we go back to the academic misconduct example, I'm trying to think of some of the questions we asked – what are we not thinking about? What do we have wrong? I think that's a great question. What do we not understand? And for me, I had this discussion this last year about Proctorio and proctoring exams and student privacy and all the things we've been wading through. And one of my students said, you know, it's really easy to cheat on Proctorio. You can put sticky notes all over your laptop screen and your camera doesn't see anything stuck to your laptop screen. And you can put your notes right to the wall behind it's tracking eye movement, right? Like notes here, notes here. If you're looking at your camera or you're looking at me, can you tell that I'm reading something on the wall behind my desk is actually, that's what I'm doing right now. And I thought, oh, and he said it very matter of fact, he said, I don't do it, but just about everybody I know does. And I thought, okay, let me go revisit my testing approach now that I have this. Thank you for sharing, sir.

So it's just that that example is just one. And then when you think about the work you're doing. They might think you guys understand something and are ignoring it as opposed to will that never occurred to us as being a hindrance. You know, so I liked the idea of starting with a panel or a focus group. What a great opportunity to just... best case they say, yes, it's all working great and we think this makes sense, but I think you've really, probably some good nuggets are gonna come out of those conversations.

Chris Taylor: Yeah, I think that makes a lot of sense. And it also makes me think about, I think you mentioned this, but our protocols and our manuals that we use. So I'll think about, for instance, when we have somebody who attempts to self-harm and that happens in a residence hall. Typically, if it's known to the floor, which it often is, either because emergency services have responded or because word travels fast in a residence hall, we will respond in ways that, we're gonna offer counseling. We might have counseling available for a couple of days after, you know, sitting in a lounge for anybody who wants to come in. I don't know for sure if we ever asked, is that what you want as a student? How do you, what do you want, what would help you in knowing if you are aware of a floor mate who, or your roommate who, attempted to harm themselves, what's going to help you with the aftermath of that? And we may have, our counseling center may very well have asked those questions at some point, but I don't know collectively, if we've asked those questions that then we could put in a manual saying, and you never know exactly what you're going to do, but the aftermath might include these three things and hope we're going to add two more based on student feedback. Cause we didn't know. So I think that's a great place to start with those documents that we all typically have as well.

Megan Gerhardt: Yeah, one tool, Chris, that might be really, cause I'm all about, we love the concept, but now we have to do the practical work. And how do you do that? I love the idea. One of the tools we talk

about in the book is doing an assumption audit, and that talks about auditing the connections you make automatically throughout the work you're doing. And what are you associating. In in this case, it would be maybe more interesting. In general, the idea is how often do I assume that the older person on zoom isn't going to remember to unmute themselves or just things like that, what sort of unconscious – or am I thinking that that person has their laptop out and because they're 25, they're probably on Instagram and they're not taking notes. When it fact, they very well may be taking them. Just things like that.

But I like the idea of applying the tool of the assumption audit to what you're saying. I mean, even without, before you get students involved, committees could certainly take policy by policy, procedure by procedure, and just say, let's circle wherever we're making an assumption of what students want or need in this case and then we can have a conversation about, okay, was that an assumption or what was that based on. Cause like you said, very well, our counseling services are amazing and may have already vetted that out and we can put a check next to it. But if there's other circles, what a great starting place for those panels.

I was also thinking, let's say that you have your residence hall scenario where someone's tried to harm themselves and you are doing sort of the post- intervention on that for the people that knew about it. That would be a great time to have, I'm not saying bring them into a focus group, but a question of, do you have any suggestions as to things we could have proactively done as a university that you think would have been helpful in this situation or for this person or for you. Pro or or after the fact, both. You might hear. Well, Jenny was trying to get ahold of somebody at the counseling service and they told her that they were all booked up. And we know that in those cases you have – there's emergency appointments specifically for this purpose. But I would say most students that I see in my office that I'm worried about for this reason, they don't know

that, even though I'm sure they'd been told and it's been communicated. If you don't think you need it, you probably don't pay attention. And when you do need it, maybe you don't remember. And so the fact that you can call and say, I need a crisis appointment or an emergency appointment, or you could have a faculty member help you do that, or your roommate. Where did it break down?

So I love, I think any of those ideas, Chris, and I think the point about this is there's no one best way to do it. The question is where are we making assumptions about what an entirely different age group might need or want or how they would respond to something or what would be effective for them?

You know, one of the things I'm finding really interesting are communication channels, right? Like how do we reach people? And my students are, are really using Slack a lot. And I'm hearing about organizations using Slack for lots of kinds of communication purposes. And so just even asking, if we want to get this information out and remind everybody that there is always an emergency appointment available, if they need it, what tools should we be using that we're not? Just asking the question.

And so I think it could be used in really big ways. And I think even really seemingly minor ways. What are we not seeing? How do we need to adjust our process? Just any of that, I would say is gentelligence – it's any time, you're just realizing that growing up in a different time is probably very valid source of different perspective and we don't want to ignore it. We want to embrace it and we want to benefit from it. I think any way that you can think to apply that in, in the work that you're doing, I think is going to be beneficial.

Chris Taylor: Yeah. And I think the communication is key because it seems like, I don't know, at least for me, it seems like higher ed, maybe a lot of places, are a step behind and embracing those technologies and we're still sending emails or doing Facebook

blast when nobody we're trying to talk to even uses those technologies or sparingly uses them, or uses them when they have to. So, yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Now, the other thing you're making me think about is something we've I had mentioned before is even the makeup of the team, knowing that I like the idea of through the training process, through focus groups and things like that, gaining that valuable information on what these students are really looking for and need, but also within the team, I think we could do well to not always stack it with a bunch of directors. Nothing wrong with directors of offices and departments and yeah, there's probably some egos involved at some places in some points and some people, but do we want to have the person who's fairly new to the office and not too long out of grad school or whatever the case may be. And maybe do a little differently, or I don't think anybody wants to have an extremely large team because any large group or committee, it's hard to get work done, but could two people from that office come to give us a different look at, that's not what I'm hearing from the students I'm seeing every day, where the director of a particular office may not see students all that much. So I'm thinking that too could possibly be something we could look at. How do we pick the team members to get at some of the things we're talking about?

Megan Gerhardt: Right. I think generational diversity, not at the student level now that we've kind of covered that, but at the committee level. You know, when you think about a university's makeup, we have, I would argue, probably within your staff at a university, you have all five generations represented.

So we have five generations at work right now. Our oldest, probably pretty rare, but still we do have our silent generation who are 70. We do still have some of our most experienced university members in that age group. We have our baby boomers. We have our gen X-ers who are born 65 to 1980. So that tends to probably be where we have a lot of our people at

director level at this point, give or take, but even you and I were talking about millennials and gen Z, cause we still talk about them together a lot. And our oldest millennials are 40 this year. So there's also probably quite a few millennials that are at directorship roles. And there's a big difference between, you know, a 28 year old millennial and a 40 year old millennial. It's totally different amounts of experience in life stage and career stage.

And so I love how you're thinking about, and even I would argue, you may even have at the very beginning of their career trajectory, our gen Zs are 24, the oldest ones. And so our very newest members of some of these offices. And so even if it's just for one meeting or an occasional, like bring someone to shadow you from your office who might give us a different perspective, older or younger – I think that's great because I think we tend to overlook that, particularly in higher ed, we think students and we think not students. Whereas we're probably heading a good 45 year age span, and all of the great sort of diversity of thought that goes with that different career stages. And as you said before, often our younger staff are the ones that students see as more accessible, either because they're more front-facing, they're not necessarily in those higher roles or they just view them more as peers. And so they're more willing to go to them with a concern or a question. They view them as more accessible. Yeah. I love that idea of really looking at, all right, if everybody on this team – and you know in academia, we have this very interesting sort of who ends up getting put on committees, ad so often it's sort of like, well, we're going to leave those people alone for a while, but the rest of you, this is important work, we need someone to do this, so even if it's not being a permanent member of the committee, but it's an invited meeting where we're going to try to invite people of different career stages and levels and things that might be looking at these from different perspectives. I think that's a fantastic idea.

Chris Taylor: And I think a lot of teams would

embrace that idea. And again, occasionally there may be some ego issues to get over with it if the director goes to that meeting and it doesn't have to be the case and probably may not be the best use of that person's skills or certainly the other people who aren't attending the meetings skills. So I think that makes a lot of sense.

Are there some key thoughts as we wrap up about any takeaways you would like folks to know about? Again, I think with something that a lot of people would maybe just on the surface say that's a business book, but I think we've said a lot today about why it's pretty important to higher ed or can be important.

Are there other thoughts about what should our takeaways be from this? As we think about CARE teams, what's some good reasons to go out and pick up the book for higher education professionals. That kind of thing.

Megan Gerhardt: Yeah. I think for me, higher ed is where gentelligence was born. I think I learned so much from my students. And of course every day, hopefully we all do. But just realizing how much impact that's had on the work I do, the teaching, my classes. We are in a very unique seat that our audience is sitting right there in front of us and is eager to give us their input.

If we can shift our perspective that somehow letting the students have a strong voice or have a substantial, meaningful impact, that that makes us stronger, that doesn't make us soft or that doesn't make us cowtowing to our customer base or whatever the concern tends to be. When you look at really strong and, I think organizations is the word to use, there's so many different kinds of organizations. So if we look at educational organizations, the strongest ones are the ones that want all hands on deck, right? That giving power to someone younger or someone older than me, sharing power and decision-making, doesn't make me less important. It doesn't make me less respected. It makes me more respected.

Every single one of our students would respect our universities more if they felt heard. And one of things we found when we were researching the book, and there are really great and interesting generational differences and the book, of course, dives into those, but there's also universal needs and all generations want to feel respected. They want to feel connected and they want to feel they have voice or autonomy or agency. And so we can give that everyone regardless of age and in doing that, we don't become, we're not laying down and letting the students run the university. We're respecting the fact that their needs are the ones that we're trying to fill and who better to at least give us input on those.

They may not know all the things that need to happen in order to come up with a solution that will be suitable for the university and all of the considerations that we have to make. But we certainly want to hear those voices. And so I think the book really talks about raising awareness on how we tend to really lock into this idea of viewing it as us versus them, whether it's students versus faculty or just within different age groups at work and tries to shift us. We have big challenges ahead, like you said, our mental health challenges for not just students, but our faculty and staff and our administrators. The relevance of higher ed, how will we make sure that prospective students and parents view what we do as continuing to be important.

We want to hear those voices so that we can stay relevant and make sure we're meeting the needs as they change. And so I would say, just like we're the first line in almost everything as students leave their families and go out into the world, this is going to be a very different generation and how they're different, we're going to learn that before anyone else does. And so, you know, I think we should be role models and we should be modeling for other kinds of organizations that we are remaining relevant and strong and evolving with this next generation by listening to them and responding and showing that we are going to stay – that's how you stay relevant,

right? You listen to what the new needs and concerns are. And so I think that's only going to strengthen who we are to be willing to listen to those different voices.

Chris Taylor: Agreed. And thank you very much for being here today. This has been an awesome conversation. Really appreciate it and your willingness to help apply it to the work we're doing here. And as I said, we're going to have links to purchase the book up on the, when this is posted up on the website. The other thing I'd love to do is post links to your consulting group because there may very well be folks who would be interested in having some deeper conversations particular to their teams and their university or college situation, that would probably love to reach out to somebody. So I think that would be, if you're willing that would be great.

Megan Gerhardt: Yeah, absolutely. We have just for

that purpose started a group called Power the Ages or powertheages.com. And I can give you that link and it is just to, you know, have webinars or workshops or training for people who are in this space.

And that's the goal is to really make an, a movement where we're thinking about this differently. So I thank you. I really, I love thinking about all the places that we can be applying this work. So I appreciate the invitation and the conversation.

Chris Taylor: Absolutely. Well, thanks and have a great day.

Megan Gerhardt: You too.