

07:54:55:22 - 07:55:17:15

Monica

I'm delighted to be with you today. You have been our chancellor since 2019.

07:55:17:17 - 07:55:20:02

Donde

Correct. And thank you for inviting me.

07:55:20:04 - 07:55:29:20

Monica

Our pleasure. I am a UT grad and now a professor of practice at Haslam College of Business. So go Vols.

07:55:29:22 - 07:55:34:01

Donde

Go Vols is right. I wore my orange today.

07:55:34:03 - 07:55:49:19

Monica

Exactly. As a faculty member, I've been able to hear your vision for the university, this flagship campus. Tell us just in a couple quick sentences for the audience where you want to take UT Knoxville.

07:55:49:21 - 07:56:13:12

Donde

I see us as the, I talk about it as modern land grant University. So what does that really mean? What we're trying to do here is two things that nobody else is doing the way we are. The first one is undergraduate education that's unparalleled. Haslam College of Business does that. So many students as freshmen want in this college. And by that I mean what is unparalleled.

07:56:13:14 - 07:56:36:22

Donde

You come here to be a volunteer. You learn to lead, to serve. And our support for students has just skyrocketed our retention rates. We want students as the land grant to get through college in four years. So we want to be fabulous in undergraduate education, which I think we are. And there's something distinctive about the way we do it. We really rely on Clifton strengths finder.

07:56:37:00 - 07:56:39:00

Monica

We're going to talk about that in a minute.

07:56:39:02 - 07:57:01:02

Donde

And then the other thing is our approach to research is focusing on high impact research. What do I mean by that? Research at the state of Tennessee, and really the nation, need. So it's, that's the other part of our access mission: is making our discovery accessible to the people of Tennessee and around challenges that they're experiencing.

07:57:01:04 - 07:57:15:12

Monica

This goes to a theme that you have of next level. You want UT Knoxville to be the next level. And one of the three points that you make also is Athletics to be the best Athletics school.

07:57:15:14 - 07:57:35:11

Donde

We have three strengths that we're trying to leverage because we want to move to the next level. We know we do something very unique in student success and student life. So we're going to continue to build that and let the world know. If I was a parent these days sending a kid to college I'd want the experience we offer. Number two is this high impact research, the way I'm talking about it.

07:57:35:13 - 07:58:01:23

Donde

You know the world right now- nuclear energy, AI, information sciences, all of that is supply chain management. Those are things you hear talked about every day. Health, cancer. Those are things we're focusing on 'cause Tennessee needs it. And then the third is we're trying to be the best athletic department in the country. I think we already are. Our athletic director would say we have a little ways to go.

07:58:02:01 - 07:58:28:01

Donde

Our athletes have the highest GPA they've ever had, it's higher than the average student. And our students make pretty good grades here. So we're doing something right and we're winning the right way in athletics. I'll say this, that we've had, several years where every single team, every sport competed in the postseason competition. I don't think there's any other university in the country that can say so, proud of that.

07:58:28:03 - 07:58:49:14

Monica

Well, let's talk about just thriving in the modern era of higher education. There's, it's no secret that the trust in higher education and even in the value of a college degree has decreased. So how do you answer that? And what's your opinion on the state of higher education?

07:58:49:15 - 07:59:13:09

Donde

The state of higher education has come under criticism. Some of it of a bit deserved to be honest with you. I don't think as as an industry, we've focused enough on what students and families need and want. They want good jobs. And we, we, we as an industry have acted as if, oh that'll come if you get a good degree.

07:59:14:05 - 07:59:43:00

Donde

I think we're doing some things here that have really addressed that very directly. Of course in addition to a business school and an engineering school that have more of that focus, we started a new college called the College of Emerging and Collaborative Studies. We call it CECS for short, because it's too long of a name. It's a college that really doesn't have any faculty per se, but it is created to help students stack together modules from across many colleges: College of business. College of Engineering. College of Arts and Sciences. And what? Why are we doing that? Because industry tells us that's what we really care about. So that college, for example, has 400 corporate partners that they are meeting with regularly to say, "okay, what's the latest on on your need level?" So those two things are a really, really important parts of what we're trying to do.

08:00:08:01 - 08:00:30:11

Donde

And I think I gave a talk last year at Ohio State on the modern land grant. And one of the things I said there is, if you take a walk outside on the street, and ask the average person walking around, "So what do you think about higher education?" They'd probably roll their eyes and go, "oh, you know, it's too expensive" "I don't know if I can get a job."

08:00:30:13 - 08:00:31:08

Monica

Exactly.

08:00:31:14 - 08:00:43:01

Donde

But if you said, "What do you think of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville?" They say, |I love that place. I hope my children can go there. I graduated from there. I want my kid to be the first to graduate.| They love the place. They smile. They beam.

08:00:44:16 - 08:00:48:15

Donde

Same thing in Ohio, when I gave that talk. When you ask about Ohio State? People love it.

08:00:49:15 - 08:00:56:15

Donde

The narrative doesn't, the national narrative doesn't necessarily match the local situation.

08:00:56:16 - 08:01:19:06

Monica

I'm a graduate as I said in 1980. And I was the first in my family to go to college. So it was so exciting to be a first gen student here and propelled me for all my, you know, four decades of career. Yeah. Okay. How do you handle the pressure of this, though you personally, because it is a high profile, high stress job, Donde?

08:01:19:06 - 08:01:22:20

Donde

Is it? [laughs]

08:01:22:20 - 08:01:24:01

Monica

Not to you.

08:01:24:03 - 08:01:45:10

Donde

No, it is. And especially right now, I think just with just a lot of, uncertainty ahead of all of us. But I think the first thing is having a great team around me, I have I would put my cabinet, which is the vice chancellors, up against any in the country. I trust, they're trusted advisors. We talk things through. We've been very imaginative and creative. I think that helps.

08:01:49:16 - 08:02:07:22

Donde

When you're out there and you feel alone- I also have a tremendous boss. Randy Boyd is president of the UT system and we have a great board. And so I don't feel the, I have friends who are at universities and, "I don't know, my board chair. I don't think- we have a new board chair- I don't think she likes me."

08:02:08:00 - 08:02:19:22

Donde

I don't, I don't have those pressures. So, for example, when we've gone through some tumultuous kind of situations, Randy Boyd is one of the first people I talk to.

08:02:20:08 - 08:02:39:11

Donde

And I want his input. You know, I make the decision but I don't really make any big decisions without talking it through with him. I think that's really important. I want to be that same kind of

boss to the people who report to me. I want them to feel like, wow, I have access to her and she can help me if I need her.

08:02:39:13 - 08:03:05:02

Donde

So I think that's a big part of it. I think the other part is just having a really clear sense of what you're trying to do, and, and being able to articulate that. And I think, you know, talking to folks about moving to the next level about leveraging the strengths that we have, we're very popular. I don't know if you know but every 17 year old country about wants to come to school at Tennessee.

08:03:05:04 - 08:03:19:15

Donde

So we don't face the same challenges that other schools are facing. The threat of declining enrollment, Tennessee's a growing state. We're one of five states that are going to have, double digit growth by 2040.

08:03:20:04 - 08:03:43:22

Donde

Now that creates different problems because every state in the country is coming here for our students. But we want them to stay here. But we're really well-positioned for this time in the history of higher ed but we've got to be bold and we've got to, you know, make decisions that are good for the state and good for the citizens who fund us.

08:03:44:00 - 08:04:00:22

Monica

After four years in the corporate four decades, excuse me, in the corporate and media world, I see you as a CEO of a public institution practically. But what's different from a public university and a public company?

08:04:01:00 - 08:04:24:05

Donde

Well, you know, I've been on boards of public companies, and I see their focus. And in some ways, I think public universities, I think we do a better job in some, you know, we could benefit from really constantly thinking about what are our stakeholders want? Because in public companies, what are the share holders wanting? What are they talking, you know, what are we returning?

08:04:24:05 - 08:04:45:10

Donde

What is the ROI? What is the value? What's our value? Contribution. I think that kind of focus helps bring public universities, a little more accountable. And, and so I think, you know, Randy Boyd is an entrepreneur, I was dean of a business school. I think we sort of have that language going.

08:04:47:07 - 08:04:55:00

Donde

I think as a public university, we don't have the degrees of freedom in terms of just we have more constraints in some ways.

08:04:55:02 - 08:04:55:12

Monica

Right.

08:04:55:16 - 08:05:18:04

Donde

In terms of hiring, firing that kind of thing. But I think there are a lot of similarities. The fact that I'm the CEO, you know, I, I have lunch once a month with Jim Haslam. Big Jim, some people call him, Mr. Haslam. He's 95 now. And I talked to him about, okay, when you were a CEO, you were a CEO, your whole career.

08:05:18:06 - 08:05:32:04

Donde

What would you have done in this situation? It's like CEO to CEO conversation, because these jobs can be, a little lonely, you might say. I just get tremendous insights from him about the CEO part of the job.

08:05:32:06 - 08:05:52:14

Monica

Exactly. And let's look at you as the CEO here. You have a huge budget, almost 2.5 billion, a workforce of 11,000 staff and full time faculty and a student body that's basically 40,000 customers. So what does ROI, since you mentioned it, mean to you?

08:05:52:16 - 08:06:23:19

Donde

So to me, it means a couple of things. One is that students and families feel like the experience here was worth every dollar they spent. That the value we added to that young person at a period when part of the challenge of going to college is growing up. And and, you know, did we deliver on that? I think we also need to continue to think about what are the kinds of jobs our students are getting when they get out of here.

08:06:23:21 - 08:06:32:08

Donde

We recently did a survey, and we do it every year, about what percentage of our students are employed or on their way to graduate school within six months of graduation.

08:06:32:21 - 08:06:53:19

Donde

And that number has come up from where it was seven years ago- it was 90%. Now I'd like that to be 100%. But I, I'm really proud of where it's at and I think that means that we're, we're delivering. But we can always do better.

08:06:53:19 - 08:06:56:05

Donde

They can't just be, "I got a job." I got a good job, I got a meaningful job.

08:06:58:06 - 08:07:09:17

Donde

I think the other thing is do we deliver for the state? You know we need more teachers. We need more nurses. We need more engineers in this state. So it's paying attention also to where the need is, industry needs, in the state of Tennessee. So that's something we've got to always keep our eye on.

08:07:17:04 - 08:07:24:13

Monica

One of the hot topics right now. You're in the throes of several hot topics. Is the business of college sports.

08:07:24:17 - 08:07:26:07

Donde

Yes.

08:07:26:09 - 08:07:58:15

Monica

As a child growing up in Knoxville and then as a UT student. The UT football and basketball games were highlights. Always. So this is, though, facing an unprecedented transition right now. College sports. So you became a legend in '24 when, you took that epic stand against the NCAA on an NIL investigation. Did you realize you were going to get so much notice nationally?

08:07:58:17 - 08:08:13:04

Donde

Well, first of all, let me just remind you that I was upset with them. There's no doubt, let me be clear. It had only been a previous year.

Loch and Key

I'm sorry. Can you reset? There is construction.

08:08:13:06 - 08:08:17:17

Monica

Ah, construction. Okay. No. Okay. Okay.

08:08:17:22 - 08:08:21:04

Loch and Key

So back up to the business of sports. You started there.

08:08:21:06 - 08:08:46:07

Monica

Oh, do I need to talk about the business of sports all over again? Oh, okay. All right. You were in the throes of several hot topics. One being the college. Now, let me start over. Okay. All right.

Okay. Sorry. Okay. You were in the middle of some major issues that are very hot topics across the nation right now.

08:08:46:13 - 08:09:07:01

Monica

One is the business of sports at the college level. You became a big newsmaker in '24 when you took an epic stand against the NCAA. Tell me about that. And did you realize that you were going to become such a prominent face of this?

08:09:07:03 - 08:09:35:09

Donde

Okay, so first let me just remind you that, yes, I did, make public my concerns about what they were about to do, but only a year ahead of that. The previous year, we had just completed, an investigation of our football program, which our university did, handed the entire investigation results to the NCAA, but they barely, they barely conducted more than a handful of interviews after that.

08:09:35:11 - 08:10:10:00

Donde

And we went to the infractions committee and we, we turned ourselves in. That didn't make me popular this side of the house. Well because I became aware of violations. Now in retrospect I think that was like the only case before NIL, where impermissible benefits was issued. But they were against the rules at that time. So we cooperated and, and we were recognized for our exemplary, exemplary cooperation.

08:10:10:02 - 08:10:16:21

Donde

So then less than a year later they came back with, you know everything changed, NIL was out of control.

08:10:16:23 - 08:10:19:19

Monica

Let's say what NIL is

08:10:19:21 - 08:10:32:05

Donde

NIL is Name, Image, Likeness, is what it stands for. It is the notion that student athletes, which I agree with, should be compensated for their name, image, likeness.

08:10:32:06 - 08:10:33:03

Monica

Okay. Gotcha.

08:10:36:14 - 08:11:04:15

Donde

So, you know, the Supreme Court ruling came down 9 to 0, saying basically the NCAA position in the conference just had been wrong, that we had been violating anti-trust. And so it just unleashed of what the wild West, there were really no rules, no guidelines if they were coming from the NCAA anyway and they revised and then there weren't, you know, they changed [them](#). It was just confusing.

08:11:04:17 - 08:11:28:09

Donde

And so I was not happy with what they were threatening to do. And one of the things that happens when you get involved and get officially charged by the NCAA, is then you can't talk about it. You're bound to confidentiality until the entire investigation is finished. And the history of the NCAA, those things take years.

08:11:29:06 - 08:11:53:20

Donde

And so we asked for a meeting with, Charlie Baker and to discuss what was happening. And, you know, challenged him with another approach to this. Didn't get any answers. So yeah, I wrote the letter. Did I think it would get 6 billion engagements in one week on social media? No. Every time I say that now I think, "Oh, gosh, if I had known that would I have still done it?"

08:11:53:22 - 08:11:56:03

Monica

But yes, I think so.

08:11:56:05 - 08:12:17:13

Donde

Most of those engagements are very positive. And I hit a nerve. And some of what I said in there is, you got to be honest, you got to, we got to have some sort of rulemaking system we can depend on. And you can't go back and retroactively chase somebody down for a rule that didn't exist at the time.

08:12:17:15 - 08:12:30:23

Donde

So anyway, not to get lost in that. No, I had no idea it would be that big. But I, I still I don't regret doing it. Well, we still haven't really adjusted to all of thah.

08:12:31:01 - 08:12:55:00

Monica

That's exactly what's going on. There's so much transition right now in the industry of college sports. So how do you manage the athletics at UT in a way that doesn't clash with our competitive pressure that we want to win versus the compliance risk that you have to watch out for?

08:12:55:02 - 08:13:07:20

Donde

So the first thing is have an athletic director that you have 100% confidence in. And I picked Danny White at a time when what I was saying was, we're gonna win with integrity. We're going to do it the right way.

08:13:08:09 - 08:13:32:15

Donde

And so I hired someone I knew would do that. He's also very smart, very futuristic. And that's one of his top strengths. Very, very focused on what the industry needs to do. So I don't have to, I don't spend five minutes honestly thinking about how well-managed is our athletic department? I have total confidence. So we got a lot of reliability systems in place there.

08:13:32:17 - 08:13:47:15

Donde

I meet frequently with Danny, he's hired great coaches, a lot of confidence in our program. I spend a lot of time on all of this above. So for example I'm the chair of the Southeastern Conference. That's a two year commitment I just started it this year.

08:13:49:00 - 08:13:49:18

Monica

Well that's big.

08:13:49:21 - 08:13:54:11

Donde

That is big. I'm also the only woman in that group. Isn't that interesting?

08:13:54:13 - 08:13:56:15

Monica

No surprise actually.

08:13:56:17 - 08:14:01:08

Donde

16 schools. But I love my colleagues and we all want this to [change](#). We're all frustrated.

08:14:01:10 - 08:14:07:05

Monica

What is the biggest change that you want Donde?

08:14:07:09 - 08:14:35:02

Donde

Well there's a lot of specifics. But we need the payment of athletes. We need to be sharing revenue with them. But it is out of control. It's unsustainable financially. No school can sustain this longterm. And then there's other things like this transfer portal, that's ridiculous. I understand how it came about, but it's created so much roster instability. The job of the coach is now changed to, I gotta recruit back all my players every day, every year.

08:14:35:02 - 08:15:00:02

Donde

And I think now we've got these concerns about eligibility like we don't really know what the rules are. So like those three things right there. I think fans want the transfer portal thing resolved. Athletes ought to be able to transfer it without penalty maybe maybe once or twice. But transferring every year?

08:15:00:04 - 08:15:01:10

Monica

Yes.

08:15:01:12 - 08:15:07:11

Donde

It's not good for student athletes. I heard of an athlete the other day, I don't know how this is possible, transfer to seven times, they'd been at seven schools.

08:15:07:13 - 08:15:08:16

Monica

In college?

08:15:08:18 - 08:15:12:17

Donde

Yeah, I can't picture how it's happening.

08:15:12:19 - 08:15:14:07

Monica

Yeah. Yeah.

08:15:14:09 - 08:15:19:23

Donde

They can't be getting a degree that way. It's just, we want to be a rule bound system, rule based system. So we need to agree on some basic rules, which we are trying to do in the house settlement. But the house settlement has not been that easy to implement. And I won't get lost in the weeds of that, but yeah, there's a lot going on there.

08:15:33:14 - 08:15:50:18

Monica

Yeah it's huge. After all this and all the effort you put on it, and trust in your athletic director, do you sometimes get in the room when they're picking their coach there? Who's going to be the coach of the teams? Are you involved in that?

08:15:50:19 - 08:16:20:23

Donde

Let's see, I'm not involved as Danny's brainstorming, thinking about things. He'll call me and say, here's what I'm thinking about, I want to bring this person. On two different occasions, when he hired Josh, when he hired Kim. Those are 2 big hires. I interviewed Josh during Covid. So, you know, we did it over Zoom. Kim I came down and met with her and so I'm involved in terms of giving my input. But it's not my decision, it's Danny's decision.

08:16:24:13 - 08:16:44:15

Monica

And I think that the university is always so big on Athletics, but sometimes, the teams don't have great seasons. No matter everything you're doing with all the great coaches and athletic director. So how do you navigate that, when we have a bad season?

08:16:44:17 - 08:16:58:15

Donde

You know, I think with social media, it is kind of worse than it used to be. Because I'm on social media, I see it, you know, we have, Danny says, the best fan base in the country. I believe that.

08:16:59:08 - 08:17:10:11

Donde

There's a small, very vocal group, that want to let you know about every little. Danny manages it quite well. But I think, you know, I asked Rick Barnes that question recently, so how do you help our players in defeat?

08:17:10:13 - 08:17:13:23

Monica

Our basketball coach.

08:17:14:00 - 08:17:35:09

Donde

And he said something interesting, he said, "I treat wins and losses kind of the same. What do we learn from it? Let's go. What's next? Where are we going and what's the next? What's the next challenge? What's the next thing we need to do?" And I thought that was really interesting. "I treat them basically the same." And he said, "In fact, I might even be harder on them when we win."

08:17:35:11 - 08:17:41:06

Donde

So yeah if you stop and think about it every weekend there's only a 50% chance you're gonna win at what you're playing.

08:17:41:07 - 08:17:41:23

Monica

That's true.

08:17:42:00 - 08:17:43:09

Donde

We all want to be the winner.

08:17:43:11 - 08:18:09:10

Monica

And we, you talk about the portal. The UT football team did not get a quarterback through the portal. And then we had our eligibility issues on the last quarterback. Then we have inconsistent seasons in even basketball and occasionally and then your championship coach in the, baseball left to go to the pros. You got a lot going on there.

08:18:09:12 - 08:18:34:17

Donde

Exactly. Well, you know, you just I think, it's the athletics is different. There's a lot more going on. You know, I mean, coaches have always come and gone anywhere. I think all the things going on right now with the lack of rules makes it complicated. But I think my job is to stress the importance that athletics is for the university.

08:18:34:19 - 08:18:48:21

Donde

I think it is for the state. It brings people together who, you know, if you're sitting in the stadium, Neyland Stadium, you don't know if the person next to you, you don't know what their politics are, you don't know where they go to church. You just know you both love the Volunteers. That's a good thing.

08:18:49:20 - 08:19:05:14

Donde

It's a part of what's attracting students here. There's no doubt about it. When we have 43 million viewers in one year of our sporting events. Well it's not surprising that we have almost 70,000 applications for the freshman class. So it helps us in a lot of ways.

08:19:05:16 - 08:19:12:18

Monica

Is it true if we win on a Saturday for example, that then on Monday you have more applicants to the school?

08:19:12:23 - 08:19:23:00

Donde

There's been periods where we track that. And the weekend we beat Alabama two, three years ago. I had the number in my head, but yeah they surged over the weekend.

08:19:23:02 - 08:19:49:16

Monica

Exactly. Let's talk about another hot topic, which is sports betting. A student was recently fired, from the sports broadcasting team for betting on college football games. You know, that raises an interesting question for you, Donde. What is your position on betting at the university by students, athletes, and employees?

08:19:49:18 - 08:20:12:05

Donde

Well, you have to remember, I grew up as a methodist minister's daughter. And all betting was bad of any form, anywhere, anytime. So there's that. But, you know, I'm very concerned about sports betting in some, in some ways if you stop and think about it. Why? I mean, it's here. It's where we are.

08:20:12:07 - 08:20:17:23

Monica

And it's legal in Tennessee and in the nation, in many states.

08:20:18:01 - 08:20:43:04

Donde

I just don't want it getting close to the university. I don't want there ever to be any kind of question about the university's integrity with any of that. You know recently the SEC made a very strong stance. The NCAA is about to okay, student and student athletes I think on pro sports. And we said as a conference, you got to be kidding me.

08:20:43:06 - 08:20:50:23

Donde

That seems like the next step towards making it okay to bet on our own team. So we made a really strong statement and actually got that changed.

08:20:51:01 - 08:20:55:16

Monica

The NCAA changed its position or didn't take that position it was about to on betting.

08:20:55:20 - 08:21:12:18

Donde

It wasn't easy because at that point we had to go back and sort of like, get a bunch of votes. But we did it. I think it's really important to take a position on those things and really draw a bold line between us and that as possible.

08:21:12:20 - 08:21:36:10

Monica

I get it. Another hot topic you're in the throes of is AI. What is its application? Artificial intelligence. What is the application here on campus? As someone from the corporate world, I have learned academia does not really move at the speed of business or necessarily technology. So how are you changing that at UT?

08:21:36:12 - 08:22:00:17

Donde

We're working as hard as we can to get faculty up to speed on what it is, how to use it. There is an interesting article in the Chronicle not long ago about higher ed in general that they've faced this, thought about it, incorrectly was the assumption. They thought about it as, "oh, this is dishonesty, this is cheating." As opposed to how do we help students understand what it is and be ready to use it in the workplace.

08:22:00:19 - 08:22:04:16

Monica

And they need to be leaders in it, actually.

08:22:04:18 - 08:22:33:22

Donde

So AI is changing how we do everything. So we need to be part of that, and part of helping our students be prepared for it when they leave here. I had lunch with an alum, lawyer, about a year ago, and a year in this timeframe is like decades. And he was saying, he's changed law firms. And if your lawyers are graduating and they're not using AI, like, really fast with it, they're not going to be employable.

08:22:34:00 - 08:22:49:19

Donde

And so I, we've got a lot of things going on. And for example, in CECS, the new emerging collaborative studies, we have been conducting seminars trying to integrate and I think Haslam's doing a good job of it in if every discipline that they can.

08:22:49:20 - 08:23:01:01

Monica

What about though, your ability to make sure there is academic integrity and that students really are getting the skills and truly learning?

08:23:01:03 - 08:23:25:19

Donde

Yeah, I think that's a great point. I know there's exercises that go on, say for example, in the English department where, they generate an article with AI and then use the criteria that they have been taught for what makes a good article to evaluate the article that the AI generated. You can tell what's AI generated when you start really looking. And helping them learn sort of the difference. See, to me, I think that's a really healthy way to think about it.

08:23:29:07 - 08:23:41:07

Donde

It it can do some things for you but it doesn't take the place of your voice, and what you know is standards for writing, for truth that kind of thing.

08:23:41:09 - 08:24:03:18

Monica

Let's talk about you for a second. Your scholarship is on leadership. So you were an organizational scientist on leadership, change, management, strategic decision making. If I got that right. Okay. So big question. What is the difference between researching and teaching leadership and actually doing it?

08:24:03:22 - 08:24:24:16

Donde

You know, that's a great question. I have a presentation that I do every now and then that I did just last week in a class I'm teaching with Governor Haslam, not to be name dropping, but he's so amazing. This is our fourth year to teach a class on leadership, and one of the things that I, I have a little slide that I go, what I thought I knew, and as a scholar, none of it was wrong. It's just it was incomplete. And now what I know. So, for example, I used to think that leaders really, people look to them for the solutions. You gotta have the plan, you gotta have the solution. You gotta have the answers.

08:24:37:00 - 08:25:02:11

Donde

I now really see that my job is to surface the answers surface the questions, even. That's where you start. I used to think leaders did, you know, they talk, told people stuff. So I used to think that leaders did stuff. This is really technically speaking. Actually my job is to enable people who work for me to have the resources they need to do the things and get their folks to do the things.

08:25:02:13 - 08:25:30:06

Donde

My job is so much more helping people see the potential and then supporting them to do it. So I thought, for example, that I did think that planning was a bit out of date in some ways. I wrote an article about the emergence of big change. It doesn't have to always be planned, but once, once you decide this is what we want to go with, then you need execution abilities. And implementing is so much harder than dreaming up ideas.

08:25:36:01 - 08:25:58:18

Monica

I noticed on campus, you are everywhere. I mean, which is one reason that the students here just know you and love you, but it takes a lot for you to make the big decisions and also appear at everything. And then you're in social media so everybody sees it. How do you pull that off?

08:25:58:20 - 08:26:23:01

Donde

You know, when I first came here, we did some conversation around... and I was asking a lot of questions. I was on this listening tour to get started, and one of the things I heard people saying is, we want to be proud of the Chancellor. We want to feel more connected to the Chancellor. And of course, when you stop and think about that what does that mean? There's 40,000 students, as you just said, there's thousands of people. There's a whole state.

08:26:23:06 - 08:26:44:17

Donde

So how do you think about that? And so that's what we've started. I think we've been very strategic about social media. We have an agenda with that. We want people to feel connected. We want people to know what a Chancellor does. We want people to feel like this is my university, even if they never went here, never will go here.

08:26:44:19 - 08:26:57:01

Donde

So that's been a real driver behind some of the social media. Just the other day somebody messaged me, I do read this stuff, while my family's going, "quit looking at the comments, Mom!"

08:26:57:03 - 08:27:11:19

Donde

There was a comment that said in response to a posting I did, meeting with people doing this. Doing that. They said, you know, Chancellor, we love feeling like we're part of your day to day. It's like wow! We're actually getting there.

08:27:11:20 - 08:27:23:15

Monica

But that's true because I will see you in a cafeteria line sometimes. I'll see you at some, not just the big events, but just things on campus. You just pop up everywhere.

08:27:23:17 - 08:27:27:14

Donde

Social media makes it look like you're in more places than you are.

08:27:27:16 - 08:27:44:08

Monica

But you almost are. If I were to look at you on a daily basis, you're somewhere and I know where. You know what I mean? Because you're letting us know. How do you pull that off at our huge campus? Do you have your own golf cart? Do you have your own photographer? Tell us the logistics.

08:27:44:10 - 08:28:04:08

Donde

Yes. Yes. No, We have a great central communications and marketing team headed by Tisha Benton, our vice chancellor of communications and marketing. And I would say, this is another thing I've learned, everything we're doing in that space is strategic. It's never just, oh, hey, this will make a good picture. I mean, there's maybe a little of that, but it's all strategic.

08:28:04:13 - 08:28:24:03

Donde

What are we trying to communicate? What is the message? One of the things I've learned from Tisha, for example, is start with the following. What is it that we want people to take away from hearing this statement? What's the key takeaway? And start there and then write out and think through what you're going to say.

08:28:24:05 - 08:28:32:14

Donde

So I'm so fortunate to have a team of- she's got great photographers, videographers, all that stuff. And it's not just about me. It's the whole campus.

08:28:32:16 - 08:28:38:05

Monica

But you are very visible and I think it's working, you know?

08:28:38:07 - 08:28:51:01

Donde

Thank you. You know years ago when I was dean of the business school in Nebraska and one of my advisory board members said, you know Donde, you are the brand of the college. We weren't an unknown college. This is a branded school.

08:28:52:02 - 08:29:03:17

Donde

And I said I just don't agree with that. I mean it's not about me it's about this college and what we're doing, what we're building. And he really pushed me hard, he said, "what do you think of Apple's brand is?"

08:29:04:07 - 08:29:13:01

Donde

Steve Jobs. And I started thinking about how the leader, not just stewards the brand, but is part of the brand.

08:29:13:03 - 08:29:22:06

Monica

Which, speaking of you, as the brand. You're almost always in orange. How many closets of orange, which is the UT color-

08:29:22:08 - 08:29:41:05

Donde

I have more pieces that are the wrong color than the right color. I order them online and I'm like, that's not gonna work. You know what? It's of the most important distinctions about this university. You travel anywhere in the world with orange on, they go, "Go Vols" when you walk by them at the airport. So I love the orange and I've got a lot of it, I have to admit.

08:29:43:15 - 08:29:58:07

Monica

True. I have a little of it, but not nearly like you do. What about leading as a woman at the CEO level? Do you think about that, or do you dismiss it?

08:29:58:09 - 08:30:19:17

Donde

Well, it would be dishonest if I said I didn't think about it. So for example, I did mention to you in the SEC I'm the only woman. But beyond that, that observation, I just do my work. And I love all those folks where, you know, the issues don't have anything to do with gender. And I feel respected. And I've felt that way my whole career.

08:30:20:04 - 08:30:41:20

Donde

I've been at this long enough to where the first department I was part of there were two women. But to me it wasn't about that, it was about I want to do this job well. I want to get recognized for being a good scholar, I want to get good teaching evaluations, you know, that kind of thing. So, for example, this year, last year, we hired two new chancellors in the UT system. And they were both women.

08:30:45:12 - 08:30:52:08

Donde

So now we have these meetings with Randy and the other chancellors and it looks different. And it feels different. But we didn't go out to hire two women. It just turned out that they were the best candidates, and I think that's the way it should be. It's merit-based.

08:31:01:07 - 08:31:18:12

Monica

I like your answer that the issues aren't male female per se. But as a woman do you find you have to be more involved in, you know, the softer parts they expect you to do that or in sponsorship you have to be strong. But do they? Is there a different expectation?

08:31:18:14 - 08:31:34:09

Donde

You know, I, I every year I get asked to speak to the women of Haslam. I love that student organization. And I do this thing partly about how we use the space we have. And I remember the first time I got on publicly traded board.

08:31:35:00 - 08:31:46:04

Donde

And I showed up for the first meeting. I there about five minutes before the meeting was gonna start. Mistaking number one. The other people on the board had all been there for 30 minutes, they were chitchatting, coffee, whatever. I missed that.

08:31:49:03 - 08:31:58:17

Donde

And they had spread out their stuff on the table. So they were plugged in, laptop, phone or whatever. And I'm like diminished. I mean I thought about this later.

08:32:01:23 - 08:32:25:10

Donde

So I'm sure part of what I've learn is get there, be part of the socializing. Set up your space. You know, declare your "I'm here" kind of thing. Not not in an aggressive way but just I, I learned from observing that there are things about how we present ourselves that can make a difference. And if I'm a new member on that board, and just try to picture those other people on

the board. I show up essentially late, even though I thought I was 5 minutes before the meeting. And I got this kind of space at the table.

08:32:35:02 - 08:32:39:02

Donde

So that was an important lesson to me, so I try to pass that on.

08:32:39:04 - 08:33:02:02

Monica

What about strengths coaching. You are so big on that. The Clifton strengths, and I noticed when I joined UT last year, people will put their strengths in their signature line on their, on their email, or they'll put it, in their bios. And at first I'm like, what the heck is this? What are they putting all these things on?

08:33:02:04 - 08:33:26:14

Donde

I'll tell you where I first was introduced to Strengths. It was at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. Where Don Clifton, the founder of all of this and the CEO of Gallup, was an ed psche professor. And he first asked the question, you know, what would happen if we quit studying what's wrong with people? Like look at organizations. Why do we have so much turnover? Why is there so much toxicity in the workplace?

08:33:26:14 - 08:33:48:03

Donde

And instead focus on what's right with people. And so, I never knew him, he was deceased. But I knew his 4 children who were all involved in running Gallup at the time. And they gave an incredible gift to the College of Business. And we started the Don Clifton Strengths Institute. All of our business students started taking Strengths.

08:33:48:05 - 08:34:01:01

Donde

But we didn't even begin to use it there like we're using it here. Our Student Success Division run by Amber Williams has really honed it. Every freshman has a Strengths coach.

08:34:01:02 - 08:34:13:23

Monica

Really? Every freshman does? So I find it interesting because I would say, what's wrong? What's the weakness? How do we improve it? And you look at what are our strengths, and how do we build on them?

08:34:15:16 - 08:34:20:05

Donde

How do we leverage our strengths to be successful?

Monica

Okay what are your strengths, Donde?

08:34:20:07 - 08:34:28:08

Donde

Strategic. Achiever. Positivity. Futuristic. Maximizer and the sixth I always like to say is Woo. So I can raise money, get in your pocketbook.

08:34:28:10 - 08:34:35:20

Monica

Yes. So I did look you up and you have that on your bio. And I did my strengths too. We only matched on one, Achiever.

08:34:36:04 - 08:34:40:18

Monica

Then mine is competition, focus, ideation and arranger.

08:34:40:20 - 08:34:42:02

Donde

Okay.

08:34:42:04 - 08:34:43:07

Monica

I didn't know.

08:34:43:09 - 08:34:47:07

Donde

I know exactly what all those mean about you. So, for example, start with what was your first one? Strategic?

08:34:47:07 - 08:34:54:23

Monica

No, Achiever was my first one. My next one is competition. I'm a very competitive guy.

08:34:55:01 - 08:35:06:10

Donde

You work for the Wall Street Journal. You came from corporate America. Okay. Yeah. Competition is a great strength. The head of our advancement operation, Brian Boils- It's one of his top strengths. It serves him well every day.

08:35:06:12 - 08:35:12:11

Monica

Oh. Okay. Cool. I was like, I should have it strategic, like Donde. But no, it's a competitor.

08:35:12:13 - 08:35:34:04

Donde

There's 34 strengths. There's no such thing as the best set. It is who is the best at using the strengths they have. So for example Danny White on my team I think is one of the ones, one of the only ones who has Command in that top five. Meaning, he can walk into a room and say if you need me to take charge right then and there I can do it.

08:35:34:04 - 08:35:45:12

Donde

They're all over the place. Two my chief advisors have Harmony and their number one Strength.

08:35:45:14 - 08:35:48:22

Monica

That definitely is not mine.

08:35:49:00 - 08:36:17:05

Donde

It's 32/34 on mine. So it's a great compliment. My husband has Context in his top five, which means very aware of what's happened in the past, what's happening around us, what boundaries they're are. I'm just, I'm often running into whatever, but it is important to me. My head assistant, Context is her number one. So it's a way of complimenting each other's strengths.

08:36:17:07 - 08:36:38:03

Donde

And I love it. It's a tool, a leadership tool I've used. I'm getting better and better at it, I think with, in terms of my own team. Before a difficult conversation with somebody maybe on my team, I'll go and remind myself, what are their top five strengths? And instead of seeing as, oh, I might have a potential conflict here, I think of it as you know what? That is her Arranger strengths, is Arranger one of yours? Arrangers can take an idea and have it in place tomorrow. Getting everything ready, getting everything set up. Now that can drive other people crazy, who are Context people.

08:36:56:21 - 08:37:11:17

Donde

I'm slow to process, I'm deliberative, I'm analytical. And so it's helped me in that way to see things not so much as conflict but as differences in how we function. And so let's make, let's make our functioning together excellent, by recognizing those things.

08:37:11:19 - 08:37:33:16

Monica

Let's also talk about just the future at UT and higher Ed. What is your prediction for 2030, which will be when your second five year term is concluding. So what do you predict for UT and for the nation in higher ed?

08:37:33:18 - 08:38:01:17

Donde

For the nation in higher ed, the trend is that the big flagship schools are going to be just fine. You've heard about the age decline, the change in population, enrollments will be declining. The big flagships are going to do well, however, in some of these southern states or across the country, the difference in the age population of 18 year olds by 2040, it's going to be really hurting many of the states around us.

08:38:01:19 - 08:38:27:10

Donde

So for us, we're going to work with states growing our population to be growing. We're going to have to keep kids interested in coming to the flagship here. Every state around us I can tell you it's going to be coming after them, offering them this or that, whatever. But where I hope that we are in five years some of the next level we're trying to achieve- will we've achieved it all in five years?

08:38:27:10 - 08:38:51:19

Donde

Probably not. But I think we will be well on our way to the world and the country, especially seeing us as a way of doing higher ed differently. I want people to think of us as, you know what, Tennessee, something's happening there because everybody wants to go to school there. We are attracting great faculty. Our problem is how many students are we gonna take at Haslam?

08:38:51:20 - 08:39:19:21

Donde

I mean, everyone wants to come Haslam. How many engineers are we going to produce? The state needs more than, than we're producing or all the universities together. How we going to do that? Those are great opportunities for all of us. So I think I'm, I'm thrilled about being here in Tennessee at this institution at this time, even though some people say, how can you be happy about that, precedents are turning over constantly.

08:39:19:23 - 08:39:40:00

Donde

I think Tennessee is well-positioned to be a leader in the nation for how to do higher education. I think only the flagship, the land grants, have the potential for sort of saving this crisis, if you will, of confidence in higher education. I believe the land grants are going to do it. And I think we can be leading it.

08:39:40:02 - 08:39:43:09

Monica

Let's do some quick fire questions.

08:39:43:11 - 08:39:44:14

Donde

Uh oh, I never do well with this.

08:39:44:16 - 08:39:52:01

Monica

What is your favorite book?

08:39:56:08 - 08:40:01:23

Donde

Anything written by Barbara Kingsolver. I like reading novels.

08:40:02:01 - 08:40:05:23

Monica

Okay. What is your best and your worst habit?

08:40:06:01 - 08:40:24:01

Donde

My best habit is that I think I am good at making other people feel good about themselves. My worst habit is I can fly into over functioning. Kind of like gibbering around at home. My family is kind of saying, "calm down."

08:40:24:03 - 08:40:33:21

Monica

Okay. And also what is one question you're, you ask yourself before every big decision and you make a lot of big decisions.

08:40:33:23 - 08:40:41:08

Donde

What do I want people to think this is about? What is at the core of this?

08:40:41:10 - 08:40:54:22

Monica

Our last question. This show is called Office Hours Business Edition. So if you could pick one person to have office hours with, who would that be?

08:40:55:00 - 08:41:16:04

Donde

It'd either be Barack Obama or George Bush, George W Bush, and I say them because I'm fascinated by both of their presidencies in many ways more after the fact than during it. I would just love to know how they manage the pressures and stress and still maintain fabulous families.

08:41:16:05 - 08:41:17:04

Monica

Thank you Donde.

08:41:17:07 - 08:41:22:08

Donde

Thank you for having me. This was fun.