

*Hello and welcome to COM-Versations, your School of Communication podcast. Here in the School of COM, we know how to make Fell Hall fun. Tune in often to hear the latest COM-versations among faculty, staff, and students. After all, we're the best in the Midwest for a reason. I'm Julie Navickas, one of your hosts, and today I'm joined by Dr. Lance Lippert and Tom Lamonica, Director of the internship Program. Welcome!*

TL: Thanks, Julie...and thanks for joining us, Lance.

LL: Batter up! Old umpire here. How many years did you ump baseball?

TL: Um...42. I started, literally I started as a teenager.

LL: Did the strike zone change over those years for you?

TL: Yeah, it did. When I started, when I started umpiring, I did little league. You know, little kid baseball, and that strike zone was big. As I got to college baseball, it got to be a little bit smaller, but mine was still probably a little bigger than most of my cohorts. But now, I mean, now my attachment to baseball is whenever the star Redbird public address announcer can't make it, I get the opportunity to be the public address announcer for Redbird Baseball. The star announcer of course, being Lance Lippert.

JN: There he is right there.

LL: No, your star is that you're Director of Internships in the School of Com. That's where your big star is. But now every time he sits in and does PA for any sports that I am involved with they always go, *Wow, back already?*

TL: You know that's not true!

LL: No, Tom is invaluable. And this is his like, second career.

JN: Yeah, it is.

LL: And yeah, so let me, okay, so why does...when Reggie Redbird, he pitched the other night, you weren't there, but he pitched, why does Reggie Redbird lift his leg when he throws the ball?

TL: Because that's how you have to throw the ball?

LL: Well, if he raised both legs, he'd fall down, wouldn't he now? We can't have Reggie fall...what was that like a pop fly over his head?

TL: I didn't know the choice was one or two. I mean, you can throw a ball standing flat footed, it's just not the recommended way. And I gotta practice because tomorrow on Friday of this week at the Redbird softball game I'm, for some reason, I'm throwing out the first pitch.

LL: Excellent.

JN: Oh, that's fun!

TL: So, I've got to get a...

LL: Under? You're gonna do an underhand?

TL: I'm gonna do it underhand—

LL: Fast pitch style?

TL: Well, fast pitch...I just wanna get it *there*—

LL: Okay.

TL: —You know, this is just like, *don't hit the bull, don't embarrass yourself*...Yes.

LL: I'm sure you'll do a great job.

TL: One of my students who's on the softball team, Bella Wilkerson, she's wonderful. And she said, *Oh, you know, you could do this right? You're a baseball guy!*

LL: I got to do that a few years ago and I scared Melinda. I was gonna...actually I was gonna throw it in the dugout. But my sister was a fast pitch player and so I knew how to throw and actually got a little rise on it. It was a real strike.

TL: Wow!

LL: So, you got...

TL: I just wanted to get it there on the fly.

LL: That's all I did really. And...but get it there in one motion. That is cool because people that get asked to throw out the first pitch are recognized that way. It means they're good teachers and they're making a big difference in students' lives. We could talk sports all day because I love talking with you about that. But I just got, I was talking to a student, and she was saying, she wanted to show me her portfolio and we were talking, and one of the things that came up, she said, *Tom Lamonica and I sat down and brainstormed, and we came up with this branding statement*. She's already on her third internship, Madeline Isham and Maddie's terrific, she was in COM 380. But I've heard this from so many students, *I sat down with Tom, and we did this, and we were going to talk about this, but we did this*. So, Julie, we're here to talk about internships, I guess, but he was saying that he's been working with internships ever since he was over in the athletic department. Former sports information director known nationally. And a troublemaker, according to his mother, but. Who joined us many years ago, beautiful woman. So as an internship, our internship program and advising, it's probably one of the better things we do. I mean it's just something to be really proud of.

JN: Without a doubt, without a doubt. I can't even quantify how many times I've said, *You need an internship and you need to go talk to Tom Lamonica. His office is right down the hall*.

LL: And they usually do so Madeline and many other students have said, *I've talked with Tom*. So. You've been doing internships with us here in the School of Communication. How long has it...

TL: 15-16 years in the School of Communication, yes. And it's been, it's been really great because the support that our internships, internship program and our interns get from faculty is tremendous, and from the academic advisors particularly. I, you know, students have, over the years have come to me and said, *My advisor Julie says I should come and talk to you about an internship*. And I tell them, *You should always do what your advisor Julie says*.

LL: Well, which is funny because I say, *Well do this*. And they go, *But Tom or Julie said do this!* So...

JN: They should do what we say.

LL: But we talk to each other, and it is, what do you think we, the value just briefly of an internship is for college students?

TL: Well, it starts them on their career I think first and foremost. But it has several values. The first one is, you get to work in a professional environment with professional people. The second thing is, you get a chance to build your portfolio, you were just talking about portfolios, people like Madeline that you know, that portfolio can be a huge difference maker and it's also an opportunity to network. And I know that Lance, as you brought along, the communication studies capstone class, which is just wonderful in helping students with the process of finding a job and the process of finding an internship is very similar to finding a job.

JN: Without a doubt. I can even speak from personal experience, that the internship that you helped me get as an undergraduate student turned into my very first job.

TL: Well, I'm excited about that. But I'm even more excited about the fact Julie, that you're one of more than 100 School of Com majors, internships or not, that have come back on campus to fill many, many different roles to help Illinois State be a better university. And only about five or six of those are full time faculty members. So that's a good part of us.

LL: Settle something for me. I've always heard, did you give him his, does he get 10% commission on every internship that does well is, how does that work?

JN: I don't know. Can we share that information?

LL: I mean he gets nothing for that, are you kidding me? Except the satisfaction. Long story short one time I was, I was in Indiana over the summer, my son was playing basketball. Indianapolis, right?

TL: Yes.

LL: And for a tournament. This was when my son was in high school four years ago and we, for some reason ended up at this, it was north of Indianapolis. We ended up in the south part of Indianapolis at a hotel. As we're checking in, it's like, I look up and there's Tom Lamonica.

TL: I walked in the door, and I heard a voice and there was no mistake about it, it was Lance Lippert. I don't know what you were selling that desk clerk, but I'm sure she was ready to buy. But yeah, the travel part of it in the summer is a lot of fun. In the summer I don't have to be here to teach classes and I like to travel. I like to meet new people and we go and visit as many interns as we're able to at their environment in their place of work. And we also get to make a lot of connections with other professionals. We've got some of those professionals come back to campus and help us with things like COM Week. So that's, that part of it has gone well. The pandemic just kind of threw a monkey wrench into it for about two or three years. But I'm, I'm excited that this summer I'm gonna, I'm gonna load up my minivan and hit the road.

LL: And that in itself is a sight, let me tell you. Tom's been around ISU for a number of years. Take a guess how many years you think Tom's been associated with Illinois State.

JN: You know I just read a feature story on you, Tom and I should know this answer. 37.

TL: Okay that's that. She guessed 37. Do you know?

LL: I'm guessing it's closer to 45.

TL: You're, it's in the middle. This is year 44. We, we've been here since the '79-'80 school year. And I say we, my wife Claire Lamonica is retired, she was the director of the teaching center here and had lots of different positions on campus. But you know, besides family and faith, Illinois State is the most important thing in our lives and it's just, it's given us back so much more than we could give.

JN: Well, Tom, tell us a little bit about your history. I know that you just mentioned obviously 44 years here on campus. You didn't start in School of Com, you started somewhere else, tell us about it.

TL: I started in, as the sports information director, as Lance indicated, and I worked in what's now athletics communications for 27 years. And I retired from that position in 2006. Now rolling it back, 1987, I think, was the first fall that I taught a class. I taught a class in the School of Communication every fall and spring for 19 years before I retired. And then I took retirement from athletics. And now I've been over in the School of Communication. So, this is 17 years now teaching PR, teaching in the sports communication program that we're excited will be a major soon and working with interns and also working with alumni and special events like COM Week.

JN: That's fantastic. I remember taking your class in fall of 2006.

TL: That was the first time I taught that class and I have great memories of some of the people that were in it. But when I go and look back at my notes and look back at the syllabus, well, let's

just say the course has evolved since then. That was the first large lecture class I ever taught in my life.

JN: I think it was the first one I'd ever been in personally, too.

TL: Probably. For a lot of people that is. But you know, great teaching assistants from the start and still to today, the opportunity to work with teaching assistants, graduate assistants is also a special part of it.

LL: Now, the process of getting, I'm not gonna tell him about how you complained. I remember 2007, you were just whining about your classes.

JN: You know me.

LL: No, yeah, if you, yes. And that certainly is not you. And I'm just teasing. The process of getting an internship. Now when they come to you, you pick it out for them, you figure it all out, right?

TL: No.

LL: So, what's the process of a student as they come to you and all across the School of Com, all four areas. What are they? What happens?

TL: That's a good question and what it is, is we aren't going, when they say, *My advisor Julie said you would find an internship for me.* I said, *You should listen to your advisor Julie, but I'm not going to find the internship. I'm gonna help you find an internship that you want to do.* And we do that with, we have actually a kind of an outline that we give them that focuses on identifying things you might want to do, researching those organizations and, you know, being kind of old school or very old school. I focused the whole thing on a phone call. Even today with you know, you're probably gonna go to voicemail and the phone call is pretty simple. *My name is Tom Lamonica, I'm a public relations major at Illinois State University and I want to be your intern.* That's it. *And you can get back to me at...* and so when they call back this, the next thing that happens with the students and when they're in the office is...I asked them. I said, *Okay, when they call you back, what are they going to say to you?* And about 40% of them get the answer on the first try, and that's *why.* *Why Tom Lamonica, why Julie Navickas? Why did you call us with all the other places you could have called for an internship, why did you call us?* And that gives you an opportunity to talk about the organization's mission and vision, goals and what they're doing right now. And I think that for a lot of students it leads to this line, which is, *Seeing what you're trying to do and seeing your goals and wanting to be part of that, helping you achieve your goals would be a great experience for me as an intern.* So, by now you know, both of you know this from your scholarship in communication. By now, it's possible that the conversation's flipped. And the person on the other end of the phone says, *They know who we are. They know what we do. They care about what we do. And they think that...a good internship would be about helping us achieve our goals.* There's no me in there. So, it works pretty well. And the students are able to do it because they do have the knowledge, they do

have the skills and I go back to the classroom. That's where internships start. With what you learn in the classroom.

JN: Absolutely. And we have a lot of students who take advantage of internships, right?

TL: We do. We do. It's, it's again, it's become part of the culture. And I say that because of our academic advisors, our organizational advisors and of course our faculty, you know, when somebody brings up, when there's a situation in the classroom where the teacher says something, or the book says something...and somebody's had an internship and they approached that situation differently. The exciting thing about the School of Communication is our faculty will say, *Hey, tell us about that*. It's not like, *Well, this is what the book says, and this is what I think, and that's what matters*. You let those internships bring that knowledge back into the classroom, and students learn from each other, which again, I think is a really exciting part of teaching college students. I tell them, *You're going to learn more from each other than you are from me*. They smile. They laugh. And they, that's exactly what happens.

LL: And a big part of that is also building community partners. So, we have so many people that we have done work with as a school and that Tom has nurtured those relationships. And that's a big part of who we are. A lot of them are with Illinois State alums or on campus. Some of them aren't, but that's a huge part of it too, is developing those community partners.

TL: Yes, and the community partners are enormous here. And also of course, students, especially in the summer, going home, looking around their own neighborhoods, their own, their own places of where they grew up. But the idea of students being able to bring something out and then have people come back. You mentioned on campus. I was surprised about three years ago, I guess four years ago now, before the pandemic. I did a five-year analysis of our interns and I found that there were 41 different units on campus that had had interns over that five-year period.

JN: Wow.

TL: So, I mean again, we've got alums all over campus, we've got people who want, want communication, need communicators to help them with what they're doing.

JN: That's incredible. What I really appreciate too, because I get this question a lot from students is, *Do I have to do an internship before I graduate?* And I smile and I say, *No you don't, but you should*. So, trivia time, Tom Lamonica, what percentage of ISU communication students will graduate with at least one internship completed?

TL: That figure is about 75%. It's down a little because of the pandemic, but it's about 75%.

JN: That's incredible.

LL: Yeah, totally. Yeah. I mean that's just high as anybody in the country at a university and we're also starting to see maybe after you graduate looking for a paid internship to bridge into

a job if you can't find that. But all kinds of ways that it's evolving. Those numbers are incredible. So, thank you.

TL: Well, thank you and both of you because you both have had a huge impact on the success of this program. One of the things I've learned from 15 or 16 years on this, of doing this, is that it's not about one person or one office or a guy and a graduate student, it's about the entire community that is the School of Communication supporting it. And the practical experiences that our students get at places like ZND and TV-10 and the Vidette and the RSOs, all of those things. I think our students understand. I had, I heard somebody say this last week during COM Week, you know, *I really feel like I learned more outside the classroom than inside the classroom*. And I don't think anybody has an objection to that.

LL: Well, it's certainly in unison. It has to, you have to make that connection and make it relevant. And so, this is definitely one good way to do that, so. Yeah, I'm really proud of our internship program, Julie.

JN: Oh, without a doubt.

LL: And now as we get ready to wrap up, I guess he keeps talking about how long, how long he's been here. So is it true again, another rumor. Did you know Jesse Fell?

TL: No.

LL: Okay, you did not.

TL: I did not know Jesse Fell. You're not the first person to say, *Who hired you? Jesse Fell?* But...and there is at least one professor on campus who has been here longer than I have, you know him, Wib Leonard, and Wib Leonard, has been here like over 50 years. So, there's at least one person on campus that pre-dates me, but just a real quick story, the generations that have evolved...when I first came here, two of the people that were wonderful to my wife and I, we just had a baby...young family and all that, were Dr. Lloyd Watkins, who was the president, and his wife Mary. the Watkins were, they really treated us like their family. And last week during COM Week, their grandson Reed received a scholarship in the School of Communication. Dr. Watkins was a COM professor himself and after he left the presidency here, he was in the School of Communication. But, and his son Bob, I've known, you know, for about 40 years but to me that was, that was really a moment for me to see Reed Watkins receiving a scholarship from the School of Communication that meant so much to his family for three generations.

JN: That's incredible. And you gave him a hard time when you were up there, too.

LL: I've known Reed since he was in school and Bob...Yeah, you know, just kind of keep giving it. So, it's all good.

TL: I feel sorry for the students that have been around the last three or four years because a lot of the locals of course grew up with your son Joseph and they all know Joseph is a really good guy. And then they get to meet you.

LL: I know! it's hard to...You know, well. What can I say? It speaks for itself.

TL: And you got a graduation coming up and a wedding? Boy, that's, now you're really gonna become, you know, parents of grown-ups. That's an exciting phase of life. Let me tell you.

LL: So, grown up isn't the word my wife uses for me. But...we'll see how that works.

TL: Coach Duffy Bass was instrumental in my coming here. The late baseball coach Hall of Famer at Illinois State. When in the early 80s when our children were small, we would see Coach Bass at maybe an athletic event and he would kind of look them all over and look up at Claire and say, *You know, Claire. You're doing a great job of raising all these kids, especially the big one with the mustache.* So, I've got my, yeah, my own history there.

JN: Tom I think we could talk to you all day.

TL: Oh, same here, same here, this is, this has been fun. Thank you for doing this and thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of it.

JN: Well, as always, we appreciate you and thank you for your time and your stories and all that you do for the School of Communication.

TL: You're very welcome and thank you. Thanks, Lance.

JN: Very good. Well, on our next episode, we will sit down, and we'll have the opportunity to talk to Dr. Brent Simonds and he will share a little bit about the mass media major here in the School of Communication. Thanks for listening!