LONGstorySHORT
with LESLIE WILCOX

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I was a starting pitcher in high school and at Stanford and everything. So when I coached, I needed to know more about hitting. So I picked up a book on hitting by Ted Williams, one of the best hitters of all time. And in this book, someone asked him, What's the secret of hitting? And he says, Knowing which pitches to let go. Which pitches not to swing at.

What he learned on the baseball field has served him well in life and as President of Punahou School. More from Dr. James Scott, next, on Long Story Short.

Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox is Hawaii's first weekly television program produced and broadcast in High Definition.

***Aloha Mai Kakou*. I'm Leslie Wilcox. On this edition of Long Story Short, we continue our conversation with James Scott, president of Punahou School since 1994. Dr. Scott attended Punahou all the way through, from kindergarten through 12th grade, then went on to earn degrees in political science and education from Stanford, the University of San Francisco, and Harvard. He had a successful career in school administration on the continent, serving as headmaster at the Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon before being recruited to take the helm of his high school alma mater. Much is expected of him by Punahou parents, teachers, students, trustees, and by the community at large. But James Scott remains calm through the pressure.**

What do you think your management style and temperament is?
Well, I'm not real excitable. [CHUCKLE] I listen, one, and I try to feed back what I'm hearing to people, so that they know that I'm hearing them. So I think that helps. I also try to be evenhanded and consistent, but I try to be as direct as possible too, so people know that they've been heard, that I've helped them and sometimes I've helped them sort of reshape the question, or the issue, or the challenge. And in that process, have them see the bigger picture, like I just talk about, or some of the pressures that I have from other areas too. I guess that's temperament. I probably had good mentors, either in school or when I first started to become head of a school or worked in schools with other trustees

and people. So one of my mentors when I first came was a gentleman who's no longer with us, Herb Cornuelle who was on the board of trustees.
Great guy.
He was wise and insightful, and thoughtful, and he'd ask me questions like, What risks has Punahou taken this year? 'Cause if you're not taking risks, who is? So I'd end up really thinking about it. So that centeredness and thoughtfulness has come from—I think maybe I seek mentors who can provide that.
You also said it seems to be a value at Punahou to challenge. And that means there are a lot of different constituents in a position to challenge you. So you must feel comfortable with that. You're getting it at all sides, I'm sure.
I feel comfortable because of the common ground. I mean, everyone is … almost everyone is very loyal to that place.
M-hm.
And wouldn't do anything to hurt it. But because they're so loyal, they have a clear opinion or an advocacy about something.
Is it hard to lead change at a place that has so many traditions?
Yeah. I think that now that I have a sixteen-year perspective on this [CHUCKLE] … didn't know it at the time, that although I sometimes felt like an outsider, and saw that as a value, the fact that I'm from Hawaii, graduated from the school, had relatives and friends that did so, I think that people could see some of the changes, and at some point feel confident that I wasn't gonna totally abandon the values and the history of the place. So I think what makes healthy institutions work is this balance between, on one hand, continuity, history, tradition, but also with innovation, change, and creativity. And I think holding that tension is an art form, and probably takes a certain temperament.

Holding tension may be an art form, but it was something that Punahou School President Dr. James Scott learned on the baseball field. He says the secret begins with … breathing.

You've had this great sports background, this discipline. How much does that help in your current job?
Well, when I was a pitcher, I had a great pitching coach at Punahou named Len Kasparovitch, old police sergeant. His older son, Keith, was a couple years ahead of me at Punahou, and he was the pitching coach when I got there. But he used to encourage me to breathe. To take a deep breathe; actually step off the mound, and look away from the batter, look out to centerfield, and take a deep breathe. And that breathing centers you, relaxes you. And so I think that's one. Second thing that he used ask us to do is to visualize the batting order of the other team, before you face them. So my memories of Kalani High School—
[CHUCKLE]
—or Joe Tory—I mean, Joe Story and the Kim twins, and Bubba Cruz, and Len Sakata; I mean, I could visualize that batting order. Never struck 'em out, never

got—could get 'em out. But it's the act of envisioning and imagining a good outcome that was helpful. So both of those, I still use. Before I came here, before [INDISTINCT] when there's gonna be a potentially stressful situation, or the—a lot of things that come into my office, if they were easy, they would have been solved outside. [INDISTINCT] Breathing, and visualizing an outcome, that is a win-win, I think is.

You must get asked to everything; every school event, and many of them are so worthy. How do you decide which ones to attend?

Well, luckily, my kids are sports fans. [CHUCKLE] They, and my children are also musicians. So it's easy to go with them. I have my family time to support Punahou events. And frankly, it's one of the best tickets in town, to watch an ILH sport [CHUCKLE] to Kamehameha, and Iolani, and Mid Pacific, and all the great IL—I mean, those are great competitive events. And the performing arts at Punahou, it's not an obligation or a chore, it's a joy. No, I can't do it all, and there are a hundred and sixteen sports teams in Punahou School, seventh through twelfth grade, three seasons. So my athletic directors give me a heads-up. When they give me the week's schedule, they might highlight either the Blue-Gold game, it'd be nice to come, see the softball teams play yesterday, and then show up for a couple innings. So you don't have to go the whole game. You came for two innings. If I went to one quarter—

M-hm.

—if I sort of circle the big key games or the rivalries. And so I always circle Kamehameha volleyball, Iolani basketball, [CHUCKLE] Mid Pac—

Do you try to—

—baseball.

—look threatening to the other team? [CHUCKLE]

I'm always there to support them.

What is it about this wonderful job that you have, that you either really don't like, or is really surprising that you find it part of what you've gotta do?

There's very little that I don't like, or find surprising. I mean there are a lot of heads of schools or heads of nonprofits that find raising money challenging, or something that they didn't think was going to be coming at them all the time. I enjoy asking people for money, because it's a chance for me to talk about the school. And giving money to a charity, and hopefully giving money to Punahou is something noble. So I enjoy doing that. I've gotten better at it over the years, and you get more confident and secure at it, and you get lots of help at it. So I don't see that as a chore, although it keeps coming at you. I mean, there's often, people who want to give large sums of money to the school don't want to meet a trustee or your development director, they want to meet you. And I'll go wherever they are in the world, or the country, or in the island, to go see them. So that's challenging.

Are you a good closer?

Yes. I mean, if the table's been set either by a trustee or by a parent who know some … even if someone's not in a position to do what you had hoped

financially, they might eventually. And if after forty-five minutes or an hour, it's a chance for them to get to know the school a little better.

M-hm.

So I don't see that as—and so the tough thing about raising money is that the more successful you are, the less successful you feel, 'cause there's always something … else to do.

These 21st-century learning skills are what all the educators are talking about. How do you design schools around them, and how do you teach children who have entirely different references—

M-hm.

—than most of us growing up? They're digital natives.

Well, at least for us, I think, we want to introduce the technology carefully and slowly, and not too early. So that's why we don't have the laptops required until the fourth grade, but we're still introducing Smartboards earlier on. I think for us, the twenty-first century skills include learning how to collaborate, learning to see one system and how it interrelates. Being able to see the intersection of several disciplines, rather than sort of seeing them separately. And those are conceptual skills and interpersonal skills that are critical. Also, at least for Punahou, I think one of the things that connects kindergarten through twelfth grade is our goal is to make our students … independent learners, so they're taking responsibility for their own learning. So there are a lot of open-ended questions, there's a lot of work where they're doing projects, where they're on their own, where they're working in groups. So we believe those are gonna be the twenty-first century skills.

Are you kind of comfortable with messiness?

Yeah. I mean, I think that most leaders … and I think especially someone who's leading Punahou, needs to feel comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity, and sometimes things that aren't quite buttoned down, and questions that are always being asked. So I think, if you're gonna be a lifelong learner, I think you have to be comfortable with messiness. That's what keeps you curious.

It's actually exciting and energizing, rather than defeating and—

Right.

—discouraging.

No, it's the older the kids get, the harder it is to get people who teach disciplines to think outside their disciplines. That's been—

M-hm.

That's been challenging. But that's challenging for the universities. And especially for the high schools, and a little bit to some extent with the middle schools. So getting teachers to understand that they are not their subjects, that they're not creating just little linguists or little mathematicians or scientists, but creating—or helping kids to see the intersection of all those disciplines, and that creativity exists at the intersection of disciplines. So just to give you an example, we had had a course in economics that was required of seniors for, like, fifty years.

M-hm.
Half course, and over the years, the social studies department on the high school has integrated the community service part of it. But just in the last three to five years, has reshaped the economics requirement so that they've decided what of the seven to ten principles of economics we're going to teach and how do we use them to each globalization, or sustainability, or social entrepreneurship or social responsibility? And then, have different case studies, either their service opportunity or in one case all of our students give away micro loans to people overseas. That would be an example of—before they leave, it's a capstone course using several disciplines—
M-m.
—to understand the world. And so the metaphor we've used among the faculty is that, for our seniors, just like the faculty giving them their commencement address, but the intersection of disciplines being critical to their own learning.

The family tradition of attending Punahou began with Dr. Jim Scott's father, and continued with Jim and his brother Doug. Jim is married to Punahou Class of 1971 graduate Maureen Dougherty Scott, and their children Tess and Buddy now attend. Yes, both children had to pass the entrance exam before being admitted. Because the School President and his family live on campus, it's a pretty short commute to the office and the classroom.

Does Maureen de facto become another non-paid employee of Punahou?
That's how she would describe it. Yes. [CHUCKLE] And so I was explaining to, my son the other day as we were playing catch in the backyard that the home doesn't belong to us; belongs to the school. The home we own is in Oregon, but our job is to fill it up with interesting people. So we've got events there a lot.
M-hm.
Just this past week, we had two parent meetings, we had the basketball team dinner and this weekend, we've got some visiting educators coming through. So we get a lot of help and support in doing it, but Maureen does set the tone and the expectation for the home, and does a great, great job at it. And along the way, the kids have a cool backyard. As I said, I come home from my job at five o'clock, we jump into a pair of shorts, and we try to go see the rest of the campus.
Sometimes, is it too much of a good thing?
[SIGH]
You know, there's that line—
That's a great question.
There's that line in that It's A Wonderful Life movie, where Jimmy Stewart says, I'm having a wonderful life, I'm just too busy to enjoy it.
Yeah.
Do you feel like that sometimes?

Um, yes. But what's great about it is that just in a school cycle, just when you're feeling that, Christmas break comes along. [CHUCKLE]

M-hm.

Or spring break. Or, in summer, I have a little more control over time, and we try to get away as a family for two to four weeks off island. So I think what I've learned, or what my family has learned is that my children don't have to share me with the school.

M-hm.

When we're on vacation, or off island. So that's—

You turn off your—

That's when it gets—

—digital devices?

That's when it gets hard, when there are too many events that take my time. If I miss dinner more than two or three times consecutively, we start to miss it, we start to feel it as a family. And now that my children are getting older, they're playing club volleyball, club basketball, they've got cello, they've got—our lives have become more complex.

Are you able to turn off your job when you're away from it?

I could do a better job of that. I mean, I'm always thinking about the school. And but I sometimes have my best—do my best thinking when I'm traveling on behalf of the school, or even on vacation. Where I'm sort of … you're relaxing, but you're finally resting.

You took a breath.

Yeah. You take that breath.

You mentioned that much of your job is strategy. And so I take it that you're a risk manager, you're out there looking for risks to Punahou. What are they?

Well, I think sometimes the risk is kind of the part of the noble vision. It's a very idealistic place. I believe that if you're admitted to Punahou, you should be able to come there, regardless of your financial circumstances. And I think I got that from my father, because he was a financial aid recipient, my brother and I were able to attend the school because of the generosity of others in the school. So with the support and leadership, and generosity of the trustees, we've been able to grow the endowment, we've been able to adjust the operating budget, so we've been able to do that the last five years. And the way we measure that is that everyone who applies for financial aid, there's a calculation about what your financial need is. And our goal as a school is to be able to fund a hundred percent of that demonstrated need. So most colleges and universities, most independent schools, that's their noble vision. That's a risk. [CHUCKLE] It's hard. It's what's able to keep us selective, but at the same time, especially in these times—I mean, we passed the tuition for this next year …

What is it?

[CHUCKLE]

It's seventeen now, isn't it?

It's seventeen-three; next year, it's gonna be seventeen-eight. So tuition is gonna go up two-point-nine percent, five hundred dollars. Although it's going up higher than the cost of living, compared to what the current parents have been used to, it felt like it was music to their ears. Like it—

M-m.

—wasn't five or six percent. But we want to meet that gap between what the financial need is, and what the financial aid budget is. So that's a risk.

If you make a commitment to all of the children who do qualify, does that ever squeeze the folks who have great legacies at the school, and they have kids who they want to see get in there, and they'll pay?

That's a tension … specially at kindergarten, where we only have seven hundred applications for a hundred and fifty spots. It's very competitive in kindergarten and fourth grade. And luckily, as the school gets—as you advance in grades, there are more *pukas*, more openings. But yes, that's a tension for some. We're trying to create as much of the economic and ethnic diversity as we can. At the same time, we feel an obligation to those people who have been loyal to us in the past, or who have siblings who have attended there. So there's—it's the hardest part about March and April for me during admissions time.

Despite a strong scholarship program, and the school's commitment to accept all qualified children regardless of income, Punahou is still viewed by many as the school for the *haves* rather than the *have nots*. But a new Punahou initiative may help change that perception.

You and Punahou have been honored by the DOE for your commitment to public education. And you have a philosophy about public education and private schools; what is it?

Well, when I first got home, everyone wanted to know how Punahou was gonna improve public schools. And I think that's a fair question. But at the time, and I still feel this at times, is that my job is to make Punahou the best it can be. At the same time, I think that as we were requiring community service of our seniors … over the last six, seven years, the seniors have been saying, What's the school really doing for the community? And so we've set up a center for public service that coordinates all the community service that talks about service learning within our curriculum that convenes conversations about how to improve Hawaii. And so I think that's been good. But we've also launched something called Partnerships in Unlimited Educational Opportunities; PUEO. And as we thought about what we could do to support public schools, we asked ourselves, What do we do best? And we said, We think we get our kids ready for college pretty well. So the way PUEO works is that we have identified rising sixth graders in local public schools, bring them to the campus for consecutive summers to give them a summer school course and enrichment courses and also when they get into high school, support that.

So you make multiple-year commitments.

Yeah. So the first year, the PUEO students, they—and the first rising sixth graders are ending their sophomore year now; they're about to become juniors. The purpose of the program is to raise the expectations and the preparation for public school kids to attend a four-year college.

Is it working?

Yes. Well you'll have to have me back in about three years, because by then, we will know. But we've hired Johns Hopkins University to do a longitudinal study to help us answer that question. We have advisors within the public schools. Pat Hamamoto has been really a source of advice, but also of support and encouragement. So getting the support of the public school superintendent, but also some key public school principals has been helpful.

And these are kids who do have financial challenges; they're on reduced or free lunch at their public school.

Right. So the way we identify them, we ask the elementary school principals to help us identify them. We identify kids who have high academic promise.

M-hm.

But who are experiencing low economic opportunity. And we identify that through a criteria, free or reduced lunch.

M-m.

So I go to their pep rallies all the time, 'cause they gather the kids several times in the summer, and our teachers ask, Who are you? And they say, PUEO. And these are two hundred forty kids. Where are you gonna go? College. And I was sitting with Pat, in the Punahou chapel last summer when that happened, and she just teared up. We said, because every child should have that expectation if they choose it.

So what is your commute to work? How long does it take you? [CHUCKLE]

Leslie, I have the best commute in Honolulu. I get to walk to school with my children. And we usually walk to their classrooms. Now that my daughter's in sixth grade, I sort of walk ten feet behind her.

[CHUCKLE]

And then she trots along. And then my—so we walk past barefoot children, and lily ponds, and just thirty-seven hundred people descending on the campus at the same time. So I've got a great commute.

M-m. Great commute, but huge weights to carry.

Yeah. Well, this is my sixteen year. And when I was first hired the trustees kept asking me how long I was gonna stay. [CHUCKLE] And I knew my predecessor had been there for twenty-six years, and his predecessor twenty-four years, and I couldn't do that. I couldn't guarantee that.

M-hm.

And I said, What I'd like to do is give it ten rigorous years. After which, the board would decide, and I would decide separately whether it's a good match. And so after ten years, we were raising money for the Case Middle School, so it wasn't an opportunity to leave. But in 2006, I took an extra month in the summer, and they gave me a chance to do a fellowship at Columbia University

for a month to really think about the next twelve years. And I feel like I came back ready to sign up. So if Buddy's in the fourth grade now, that means he graduates in eight years. I feel like I'm running out of time. [CHUCKLE] In eight years, I'll be sixty-six years old, and trying to figure out how to pay for college, and—

[CHUCKLE]

—retire at the same. But I can now see how someone is able to stay in this job for twenty-four years. It's not that it's easy, but you have a chance to reinvent yourself, because Punahou is just always reinventing itself.

This Long Story Short conversation took place in 2010, with Punahou School President James Scott, a master of balance—the varsity baseball player who always takes the time to breathe and who knows which pitches to let go. I'd like to thank Dr. Scott for sharing his philosophy on education, management, and life. And I'd like to thank YOU for joining us on Long Story Short. For PBS Hawaii, I'm Leslie Wilcox. *A hui hou kakou*.

For audio and written transcripts of this program, and *all* episodes of **Long Story Short with Leslie Wilcox**, visit pbshawaii.org.

Video clip with production credits:

Do educators tell jokes about the business?

Well, we tell jokes about Punahou alums. How many Punahou alums does it take to screw in a light bulb?

How many?

It takes seven. It takes one to screw in the light bulb, and six to reminisce about the old one.

[CHUCKLE]