

“As Spiders Do” – UR Alumni Podcast

Navigating Legacy & Change with Sarah Bowers, '12

Episode 3

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[intro music]

Maggie Johnson:

Welcome to As Spiders Do, the University of Richmond podcast where we share stories about our amazing alumni. I'm your host, Maggie Johnson, from the class of 2018. Today, I'm talking with Sarah Bowers, from the class of 2012. She's a professional change manager at Nestlé and lives in Washington, DC. Today is all about legacy and community. So, let's learn how to be the change.

[intro music fades]

Maggie Johnson:

I'd love to start with just hearing how you ended up at University of Richmond?

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, definitely. Thanks for having me. I found University of Richmond two ways. The first way is through my older sister, who is a 2005 alum, and seeing her go there. You know, I would stay with her sometimes on the weekends, it felt really familiar. It felt really welcoming. And then I knew she was also getting a great education. And then second, I went to the Governor's School for the Humanities, which is for Virginia high school students. And I spent a summer at University of Richmond, again, such a beautiful campus. So, by the time my senior year came around, it was definitely at the top of my list. And yeah, I ended up going.

Maggie Johnson:

Did you overlap with your sister at all while here?

Sarah Bowers:

I didn't, no. She's 2005. And I'm 2012. But we did share in common the [Jepson School of Leadership Studies](#). So, we had some of the same professors, which is really great. And I hope I continue the legacy that she had set for me.

Maggie Johnson:

When you were here, did you feel like people associated you with her at all? Or did you really have a completely individual experience?

Sarah Bowers:

I do feel like I was in her footsteps a little bit, because she was a grad, and she also worked on campus. She worked first in admissions, and then later in development for the law school. So again, being a student on campus, and then, not only had she been a grad, she also worked there, so we could, grab coffees and you know, I think it was definitely a Bowers sisters kind of thing, that we were associated with one another. So definitely a close connection, my parents love Richmond, because, taking care of both of their daughters, and because they employed my sister for a very long time, too. So yeah, I definitely feel like I walked in her legacy.

Maggie Johnson:

That's awesome. And have you guys remained close since graduation?

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah definitely! I live in the District of Columbia. She lives in the District of Columbia with her husband and her two kids. So, I see them weekly. We're super close, even though we're six and a half, seven years apart. We lived together before she got married. So yeah, we're super close, siblings, heightened by the fact that we overlapped in the sense that I was a student at the University while she was working at the University.

Maggie Johnson:

I love to hear that. I think there's something really special about college in general, bringing siblings together. But I think especially getting to kind of experience it together, but in different ways at the same time is really cool.

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah.

Maggie Johnson:

Awesome. Well, tell me a little bit about your experience at UR. What did you major in? What were you involved in?

Sarah Bowers:

I majored in Journalism and Leadership Studies. So, I was a double major. And while I was there, I was a part of the [Collegian](#). I was on a copy-editing staff, and then eventually became the copy editor. I was an [Oliver Hill Scholar](#). So, I was pretty involved with that as

monthly programming. And then I eventually joined that, the Oliver Hill Scholar Board to interview scholars who are interested in being part of the program. I was involved in ODK, the service organization, so I was Vice President Membership for that, helping to make sure we identified the right candidates to continue the ODK legacy, that sort of thing. And then, I guess most prominently, I was a member of [Alpha Kappa Alpha](#). I was a member of AKA starting my second semester of my freshman year, and then served as president for two years and then was just really involved with all things Alpha Kappa Alpha.

Maggie Johnson:

Out of all that, was there any one experience that was really transformative for you or really just impacted you during your time?

Sarah Bowers:

I would say AKA was really important for me, because I was able to form such close bonds with those women. It was really the community that I clung most to, that they were my social outlet. And then we did a lot of programming on campus too that was around the different initiatives that AKA has, whether it was around fitness or mental health or getting involved or how to navigate your first year, I felt like the things that we did were really impactful, especially for welcoming African American students onto campus and making them feel like they had a home. So, I think AKA really provided the visibility so that people of color could find one another and so that we can elevate different initiatives that supported the development of people of color on campus.

Maggie Johnson:

Are you still involved with Alpha Kappa Alpha as an alumna or did that kind of peter out after college?

Sarah Bowers:

I am yeah, so I'm still involved. I'm in a grad chapter in Alexandria, Virginia. So still waving the AKA flag. And that's another legacy item. My sister is AKA, my mom's AKA, you know, that runs deep through the family as well.

Maggie Johnson:

Awesome. So how did UR shape who you became as a professional, whether you know directly through your major or just kind of in other ways?

Sarah Bowers:

I think that UR brought out the best parts of me and really helped me to understand my passions. So, like I said, I did Journalism and Leadership Studies. And those really are the two things in my life that I'm most passionate about. My career started off in consulting, where I was leveraging my background of all of the things that I learned on how to be an effective writer, how to be an effective communicator. But then Jepson brought that piece of how can you be an effective leader, regardless of where you are in an organization. How can you be an ethical leader? How can you be a servant leader? So I feel like the things that I studied at Richmond helped me to be a more robust and well-rounded professional in a way that wasn't made up; it was all grounded in theory and in studies that I had had read during my time. And honestly, through professorial involvement, because I think the journalism school is just really small. I had Tom Mullen, who has an icon at University of Richmond, but I had him five times. So, for that level of investment from a professor really helped me to be a better writer and a better communicator, and really get to a different place than if I had been at a different school.

Maggie Johnson:

Did you have any favorite leadership classes? I was a leadership major, too, so I'm always curious.

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah. So, I feel like the one that was most impactful for me was Leadership and Organizations. And I don't know if that's offered every year, but it was taught by Dr. Gil Hickman. And we got to study essentially, what does what does leadership look like in an organization? So we went to this company that's called [Prophet](#), which I think is a consulting firm, and did a study of what were the employees perceptions of leadership, where are their opportunities; and then we were able to take all that information and present it back to a huge group from the company so that they could get insights and then plan around these recommendations that we had made from a leadership perspective. So, I felt like that was a really good example of how do I put my Jepson education to work in the real world. Because we were constantly doing these interviews going into downtown Richmond, really interacting with people who were taking the recommendations that we were making, and then actually applying them in order to make their workplaces a better place to work. So that was really cool. Definitely favorite class.



Maggie Johnson:

That's excellent. That sounds almost like that kind of leads into your career now, as a change manager. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, definitely. So, my career now. I'm a change manager at Nestlé. And I like to say change management is helping people navigate from a current state to a future state. And I think my career is really, again, a combination of all of my different passions, because I believe in a people-led organization, a people-forward organization, and I believe that if you're going to implement any sort of change, if people can't be successful, if your employees can't be successful, then it's going to be a failure. So, I get to play a direct role in helping to come up with a strategy so that people know how to use new technology, so that they know how to interact when there are new ways of working that are introduced, or when an organization is going to shift, that we thought about, what about what's going to happen to this process? Who's going to own it? How is it going to change? So, I think that this is definitely the culmination of all of the different things that I learned at Richmond, and is really a pivot of my career, because I started in communications and communications is very external facing, right. So, it's a lot of execution, a lot of documentation of decisions. Whereas I think with change management, I get to play a bigger role in the decisions that get made, before they are communicated out. I liked that I was able to shift and influence. So, when there are bigger changes, then I can say, "Hey, have we thought about, you know, the trainings that we're going to provide to our employees," that kind of thing. Or "have we thought about how we're going to communicate to them? Can we involve employees in the processes, they can get excited about the change that's coming?" I like that I get to have that say before letting the world in to what's to come.

Maggie Johnson:

That's so fascinating that you've really seen both sides. And so, you can look back down and say, "well, this is how I might have reacted to it if I was on the outside and hearing about this change," and you get to influence it now.

Sarah Bowers:

Exactly, and I have the empathy of working at the organization too, because that's the other change is that, I went from being an external consultant where I was really focused on clients, right? It's mostly the federal government and now being an internal employee, I am there with you. Like I understand why this is frustrating. And I always make the joke, it's change managers who struggle the most with change. So, I get it, I want to make it easier for

people and I want them that to know what's coming and to feel like they're prepared to embrace whatever change is coming.

Maggie Johnson:

Absolutely. I think your career is so, so important, especially right now. We just come out of the pandemic and two years of just kind of consistent change. Is there been any, kind of, either one big change or one challenge that you've had?

Sarah Bowers:

I mean, honestly, I started in my role at the beginning of the pandemic. So that in and of itself was a huge change. I think Nestlé historically, it was a pretty office-based company, you know, a lot of culture is built around people communing together. And that was impossible at the beginning of the pandemic, right. So, we all immediately went to working from home, onboarding from home, I was trying to build my network from home, but that created opportunity. So, one of the things that I ended up doing, because I felt this need to want to connect with other people, was to create a change management community of practice. So, this is something that existed at previous employers, but didn't exist in the same way that I wanted it to at Nestlé. So, I talked to my leader at the time about like, “hey, what do you think about creating a forum where we get like change managers together to talk about what they're working on, so that they can be inspired by others work so that we can see all changes applied in the company?” She was totally on board. So, I got a little committee together. And we figured out, what do we want to do? How do we want people to feel connected and came up with this whole plan that, you know, we branded it, we established when and how frequently we want to meet, created a Workplace, which is kind of like an internal social network, so workplace groups so that we can publicize that this community existed, and now it has 58 people. So it's really great that, I don't know that I would have done this so quickly, being new to the organization, had it not been a pandemic, but I think that's one of the opportunities that came about is that I can say that I created the space for other change managers, and people who want to learn about change management to come together at Nestlé, and just talk about what they're working on, on a regular cadence. People will ask questions like, “Hey, does anyone have a template for X, Y, and Z,” or you're like, I'm going to have time for a phone call, that kind of thing, which is really great to see.

Maggie Johnson:

I'm really struck by the fact that Nestlé even has this role of change manager. So many organizations out there don't, and really rely on self-starters, you who are like, I want to aid this process and make it better. Do you have any tips for anyone like that, in their own

workplaces? Change manager isn't their official title, can they help create that positive change management process in their own situation?

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, for sure. I mean, I think it starts by just showing up to those employee forums, because a lot of times companies will do those kinds of things, but then it'll stop. And I think that the change management piece is the what happens next. So, we've heard the voice of the employee of like, "hey, we really want to do more of XY and Z." But as far as the actual implementation and how you get there, that's kind of where the change management becomes involved. So then figuring out how you can remain engaged, after those types of forums exist. There's also formal methodology around change management, you know, it's not just a made-up thing. I'm formally trained in **Prosci**, which is a, I would say, the leading change management methodology. But it's really helpful to just ground yourself in the principles of **Prosci**, so that you kind of are, or in any methodology of your choosing, so that you kind of know, what are the phases of change. And usually it starts with awareness, and then it builds to desire, and then you create knowledge, then it comes to ability, and then reinforcement is the final phase. And those, it's just helpful to kind of see, where are you on a change cycle? And then when you think about the things that you want to implement in your own life, honestly, it's applicable, right? So, it's like, oh, man, you know, "I want to save more money as a goal," for example. Awareness is the first step like, "I'm probably spending too much." Desire is, "it'd be great to see my bank account get to this number." Knowledge is, "maybe I should get one of those spending apps so that I can see how I'm spending my money on a monthly basis," right? Ability is then, "how can I get reminders when I've hit the budget cap that I've set for myself so that I can stay on track?" And then reinforcement is like, "Hey, I'm going to look at my, monthly spending report and see, am I am I trending in the right direction? Are there adjustments that I need to make?" But I think it's really processing; how people change is, is a lot of times, it's on an individual basis. And then, at an organizational level, it's a collective of individuals that need to change. So, there are going to be varying needs that happen for the different user groups. But just getting attuned to how do people navigate change is really helpful, if you're looking to get started in something like change management.

Maggie Johnson:

That's very cool. I love that you bring it back to that personal life aspect; there's this such this sense of, self-improvement and growing as people but there's still that process there, too, that can help kind of guide us. I think that's so cool.

Sarah Bowers:

For sure, and to make it practical, I think because sometimes it can feel like; change management can feel very intangible and this really untouchable thing, but it's like, you got to break it down, right. There's this basic building blocks, to everything. And I think that those methodologies and decision-making frameworks can help to do that.

Maggie Johnson:

Kind of in that realm, are there any major misconceptions about your title or what you do?

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, I think a lot of people still don't know. It's still a pretty burgeoning area. And I think a lot of times people say change management equals communications or change management equals training. And that's really not what it is. Change management is at its core, it's an enabling function for all of those things to happen. So, communications and training falls under change management. But it's after there have been an analysis to say, what the needs are based off of the criteria of the change. So yes, those are outcomes. But it starts by thinking about, who are the impacted stakeholder groups? How are they impacted? What do they need? And then yes, that can manifest as a communication or training or some other type of engagement type of activity that I think a lot of times people are like, oh, yeah, so you'll write that email, right? And it's just, well, if we determine that, yes, this email from this executive is the best approach. Yes. But first, we have to start with strategy.

Maggie Johnson:

Absolutely. Again, I'm so fascinated that there's so much that's the end result, like we associate saving money as the end result, or the training as the end result. And you're really educating people on the process in the background and making people more effective from start to finish, which is so cool. So, because it's such a growing field, how did you land here?

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, so I started, like I said, I was doing strategic communications, and did that for four and a half years, and I had a colleague from the team that I worked on, go to another firm and start working in change management. And she was like, you know, I think you'd really like it, both the firm and doing just a little bit more than just strategic communications. So, I really started with, honestly, my relationship development with her. She's two or three years older than me, but was really instrumental in me making the second move in my career. And yeah, I mean, I immediately got placed on a project that was under the same group that she was supporting. So again, very influential from this person. And then a lot of it was learning on

the job. So, I was placed on a workforce transformation project, where we were thinking about culture after two organizations had combined. “What did that look like? What did employees want to see?” And one of the first things I actually got to work on was facilitating a working group on what does it mean to be a leader, which obviously aligns very nicely with my background, but I would just facilitate these conversations where we have these three personas that we created that were entry level, mid-level and senior level, and then have discussions about what does it mean for that person to display leadership based off of these, certain qualities we’ve identified. And then we ended up packaging all of that, and then creating a learning journey that was associated with developing those different types of skills based off the employee feedback that we had received. So, I think a combination of networking, and then just honestly, diving right in was how I ended up getting to where I am. And then as I stayed working in change management, then I got certified in [Prosci](#), and I became a certified [Change Management Professional](#), which is the industry standard certification that you can get. So, I became more and more, I guess, legit, the longer I stayed in it, because I realized that I like being there. And I liked what was happening. But I wanted people to take our recommendations seriously and know that they were grounded in proven methodology and not something that was just something that I need.

Maggie Johnson:

I’m fascinated by this project that you talked about, and used specifically leadership, and how your background really helpful. I think that’s the kind of thing that you know, people think of as that one-to-one Jepson education to talking about leadership in the workplace. Have there been any other projects or moments that have stood out to you where either your journalism and/or leadership background really came into focus like that?

Sarah Bowers:

That’s a good question. Moving forward, I was doing a lot of creation of things. After I worked on that project, I helped offices create change management capabilities. So essentially, how do they become change management service providers? How do they intake different projects? And then how do they staff them based off of the different elements that come together? So, I think that there was a little bit of components of my journalism background and the need to sort of brand these organizations as doing that thing. So, creating the marketing materials, creating the service type of menu of the things that they could provide, and then coaching the staff that I was working with on how they can go out and deliver service. So, I think that’s probably a good example. But I mean, I think I use all of it every day too. Honestly just, even when you think about how do I want to be as a leader, I do rely a lot on my Jepson background and taking notes. I think one of the best teachers that you can have is having a not great boss and being able to then determine, how am I going to

be different once I'm in that position, and I think that I have the context of what it means to be an effective leader because of my Jepson background. And then I write every day. I try to be you know, an effective email writer and effective communicator. But I think that they are just a part of truly who I am.

Maggie Johnson:

You mentioned the bad boss and transforming leadership in that way. I would love if you are willing, to expand if you've ever had an experience like that, and how that's changed your leadership style.

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, for sure. I think the most prominent example was at my last employer. And I think that this individual was so great at hiring people. Everyone that he hired, I loved - truly I keep in touch with to this day. His flaw was that; there's a saying that says, hire good people and get out of their way. And he was the opposite of that. So, he hired great people who were highly capable, who had expertise, and then micromanaged every step of the way. And I think that, that's something that I won't ever do. And I think there is a tendency to believe that you can do something better if you have control, or oh, I can do it faster. But it also prohibits people from growing if you don't let people try and fail, or maybe try and succeed, because you're not even giving them that opportunity. So that's the most prominent example, where he was approving everything from, emails, even, which I'm just like, how can you have the time to approve an email I'm setting this up on! But something that I will never do, even for people that are younger in their career, I want to make sure that they feel empowered, and that they understand the standard of our level of delivery, but that they still are able to put their own spin on how things should be done. And to be open to new ideas and new way of doing things. Just because I've done it before doesn't mean that I've done it right. So always just continuously learning and growing from anyone in the organization. You know, whether they're 22, or they're 52 and they've been at, the organization for 30 years. There's multiple ways to do things, and you have to let people have agency in how they deliver that work.

Maggie Johnson:

I love to hear that. What's your favorite part of your job?

Sarah Bowers:

I think that it's I get to work on cool projects. I think the cool thing about Nestlé, it's a conglomeration of different companies. And because of that, there's always something that they're trying to transform so that they can continue to be the leader in the market. And this

is the first time that I've gotten to work on things that I then get to experience in the real world in a really meaningful way. So, for example, one of my projects, Nestlé used to own Nestlé Pure Life, Deer Park, etc. And they sold off that part of the business and integrated the premium waters into the operating company that I sit in. So that includes Perrier, San Pellegrino, S. Pellegrino, etc. And I got to work on that integration. And that was like, "This is so cool. This is on the news." So that and getting to work on diverse things. Because when I first started, I also worked on this platform deployment. And that was cross operating companies. So that means that I got to work with people who were from Purina and then Cooper from St. Nutrition, who owns Gerber, and those kinds of things, but just seeing how they all work differently. But then there's a lot of commonality and you know, have a lot of the shared goals and trying to bring that out of people is always really interesting. But I can never predict what the next project is going to be. So, right now I'm working on something that's called strategic revenue management. And it's really transforming how we think about the data that we have, and how we can make our products better priced, more tailored to the right occasion and for the right time, based off of dynamic information that we're receiving. I never could have predicted that I was going to work on something like this. So, I think just the variety of different types of projects is very fascinating. And I think that they are the things that people want to work on. So, I really like that.

Maggie Johnson:

I'm fascinated, I had no idea Nestlé owns so many different kinds of groups or products. So that's just, it's so cool.

Sarah Bowers:

It's so crazy. And I honestly didn't either. I'm like everything from DiGiorno Pizza, and everyone says chocolate, right? And I'm like, Yeah, Toll House cookies. That's always a big morsels, Lean Cuisine, life cuisine. I mean, there's so many products that are in the Nestlé suite. So, it's really fascinating. And we get to do tastings around the office. And then we get free cookies, which is really nice. Like at two o'clock, there's fresh baked cookies. So yeah, it's a fun place to be.

Maggie Johnson:

I'm a little jealous about the cookies. I'd be in so much trouble. Looking back from your time at UR. Do you think your former self would be surprised by where you are now and what you're doing now?

Sarah Bowers:

She'd be 100% shocked. I think similar to a lot of people, I didn't know this was a career path that existed. And I knew that I was going to be successful. But I had no idea what that looked like, right? Even though I'm still early in my career. I don't know what the next 20 years will hold. I did not think that I would be in this position. One, I mean, Nestlé just moved here in 2018. Right, so I didn't even know that this was available. But no, she'd be shocked and she'd be super proud. I think Richmond really helped with creating that polish and the [Jepson School](#) in particular, I think. We had to present so much, there was that leadership in organizations class, having to present literally every other week on our findings on different things really helped make me be a better presenter and to know how to conduct a meeting. And to know basics that not everyone knows. Honestly, people don't know that you need an agenda for a meeting. And you know, she'd be shocked and very proud, I think, of where we're going.

Maggie Johnson:

I love to hear that. You mentioned kind of that that idea of success being different, would love to just hear a little bit about how your definition of success has evolved?

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, I think when I first started, my career wasn't making very much. So, I think a lot of success meant that I was doing well financially. And while that certainly is a component, now, I realized that there are other things that I value, like being able to take time off, and being able to make my workout class and being able to spend time with my family, and not working in a toxic work environment, and being able to have a say in into where I work. So, there are other things now that are important to me, that make a holistic, successful life, rather than just, Oh, when I get to this number, from a paycheck perspective, then that will make me happy. Because that's it's really not it, you're constantly building a full life and adding different components to it. And, to me, when I'm most successful, I have room for all the different components that I value, and that make me feel fulfilled. And that made me feel filled up and I don't have to miss out on the big moments of my niece and my nephew, for example, doing certain things.

Maggie Johnson:

I'm really curious about how you kind of, you know, those things that fill your cup and are important to you? Are those things that have evolved too over time? Or how did you go about kind of identifying those and then trying to create that space where you could make time for them?

Sarah Bowers:

I think I've always been super family oriented, I mean, obviously, the conversation around Kim. So, I think definitely being able to be in the same city with her and to experience her children growing up and to be there as they grow up is super important to me. A new thing that has come up with in the last I'd say five or six years is fitness. I was having to just, I know I wasn't eating the best, I knew that I wasn't, being as active as I should be. So that was an intention to try to say, I need to be more active, I need to be more conscious about just the things that I'm putting into my body. And my friend introduced me to [ClassPass](#) just an app where you can take different fitness classes around the city. And that truly was transformative, because it opened the door for me, like, Okay, I'm going to show up to this class, because if I don't show up, then I have to pay a fee, but then it made fitness feel more accessible and like something that I could do, so that I transitioned from just doing classes to going to the gym. And you know, being able to do workouts on my own, which is really simple. But was really tough for me, I also wanted to get more involved in the DC community. So, I've joined other things beyond AKA. I just recently joined the [Junior League](#) of Washington, which is a women's service organization, where we go out in the DC community and we'll do different types of community service. But then there's also a development component where you just get exposure to women who are working in different areas, and where you can be a leader within the organization too. So, I think it's been a combination of just who I am at my core and then wanting to think about future Sarah and the things that she does, the habits that she has, who she associates with, and then trying to align activities to that vision. I also had a coach, which was, which was really helpful too, a personal professional coach, and she kind of helped me to draft out the vision for my life. And do some work toward getting to that vision through really tangible ways that I could check in with her each month about what I was doing. So that was really helpful.

Maggie Johnson:

That's really cool. I love that. I'm also the [Junior League](#) of Richmond. So, I think it's such a great organization. I love it. You mentioned kind of connecting your work through Nestlé. How much do you connect the different parts of your life?

Sarah Bowers:

As much as possible. So, I mean, I'm passionate about; one of the things we talked about earlier was diversity, equity and inclusion. That's something that's super important to me and that I am able to do through the [Junior League](#). through [Alpha Kappa Alpha](#). But then I also made sure to join the Nestlé groups that were focused on that. So, starting with the Nestlé Black Employee Association, and then working on this. My team sits in finance, but there's a

finance-dedicated diversity, equity and inclusion initiative that I was a part of, there were five of us. And we did things like making sure that interview panels include one racial minority and one woman. We also made sure that diverse talent was being spotlighted. There's a lot of conversation around certain high performers, but usually it's kind of the same rotation of people. So, we came up with different criteria so that we could make sure that women and that people of color were being spotlighted through our leadership team. So, doing those types of initiatives by actively I kind of sought that out.

Maggie Johnson:

I think it's just so interesting, those pieces that we can connect or do connect it is just so individual. So, thank you for sharing. What would you consider your greatest achievement?

Sarah Bowers:

Oh, my goodness, I think personally, is that my niece is named after me, that that was such an honor. And then I think professionally, navigating Nestlé during COVID was really, really challenging and it was really isolating and the fact that I am where I am now that I know the number of people that I know, particularly as an introvert joining a global organization remotely, and people actually knowing who I am is super meaningful. It seems simple, but it was that was really, really, really tough.

Maggie Johnson:

I love that your two achievements are really people-focused. I think that is so telling of what you find important. I always like to flip in on its head. Is there a missed opportunity in your life that you wish you had a second chance at?

Sarah Bowers:

Oh, 100% yes, and it's at Richmond. I think I'm the one person in the student body population that didn't go abroad. So that would be my biggest regret because I don't know when there will be another time when I have six months to go live in another country. But I think just lack of knowledge and valuing the wrong things at the time. Oh my gosh, so wish that I had gone abroad.

Maggie Johnson:

If you could go back, where would you go abroad, do you think?

Sarah Bowers:

Either London or Australia, those are the popular ones. But yeah, I just, I think I thought I couldn't do it, or I don't really know what my perspective was. Or that maybe I would feel like I was lonely, and I probably would have felt those things. But that doesn't mean that I couldn't have done it. So, I wish that I had gone or that I had someone that had forced me or I somehow mistakenly ended up on some list or something like that, I don't know. But I wish that I had gone.

Maggie Johnson:

Have you gotten to do any international travel since graduation? I know it's, to your point, different, it's not six months.

Sarah Bowers:

Yeah, I have. I still haven't gone to London yet but I've definitely been to a lot of islands, Central America, South America. Been to Thailand, so yeah, a lot of travel but not the same.

Maggie Johnson:

Yes, yes. Well that's really cool, I love that. So just a couple of last questions for you. What's the best advice you've ever received?

Sarah Bowers:

I think the best advice is “half the battle is just showing up.” And I think that applies for anything, truly. Whether it's working out – half the battle is literally getting there. Or going to a meeting where maybe you don't feel prepared or you're not excited – literally showing up matters. People value it, people notice it and if you show up with anything that you have to contribute and you're willing to say it, people notice you active at meetings. So, I think showing up even when you don't want to.

Maggie Johnson:

I love that. And finally, I like to ask this of everyone, but what does it mean to be a Spider?

Sarah Bowers:

Oh my gosh – I think that Spiders are really unique. One, I think that, it's one of those, if you know, you know. If you know about Richmond, you know how special it is, then you get it. I think that, I've always found, particularly alums, they're always willing to chat, always willing to connect. There's a love for the University that I don't think that other schools have. And

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there's a pride in having been a Spider. And the commonality that you have for a long time of having lived in the same dorms or had the same professors, that I think is really unique, definitely to small schools and I would say arguably definitely to Richmond. And because of its intentionality around keeping classes small, building relationships. I also think the Richmond student is interested in being part of their community. I think that was a pretty big focus of how do we engage with downtown Richmond and so we did that through classes, through Justice and Civil Society, we had to go out and volunteer with a downtown Richmond organization but I think that has been how it translated for me. I want to be a part of and an active member of the community I live in so that I'm helping to make it better, that I'm helping to mentor, to volunteer, to do something.

[outro music]

Maggie Johnson:

Thanks for listening to As Spiders Do from the University of Richmond Office of Alumni Relations! We hope you enjoyed hearing from today's alumni guests and learned a little more about what it means to be a Richmond Spider. Thank you to Olivia Huber, class of 2025, for editing this episode. Our episode music is by [FAS Sounds](#) from [Pixabay](#).

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