In this episode, we'll hear from a dynamic leader in our region, Dr. Amit Singh, President of Edmonds Community College. Who will be telling us more about himself, his new role, and how we can make ourselves robot-proof. That's coming up next on Check It Out.

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Hi, I'm Ken Harvey.

I'm Susan Hempstead.

Susan and I are really pleased spend time in the studio this afternoon with our special studio guest, Dr. Amit Singh, President of the Edmonds Community College. Thank you so much for spending time with us.

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity.

Yes. Well, you said good morning and I said good afternoon.

Good evening.

It doesn't matter what time of the day our audience is listening to this. This is going to be a great conversation. Dr. Singh, I'd like to spend a little bit of time letting the audience know a little bit more about you and this incredible background that you have. You are the 5th President of the Edmonds Community College and you joined Edmonds Community College in June 2018.

Right.

Just over a year ago. Congratulations.
Amit Singh: 01:29 Thank you. It's been about 15 or 16 months now.

Susan Hempstead: 01:32 Busy months?

Amit Singh: 01:33 Busy. Yes.

Susan Hempstead: 01:34 Busy, busy months.

Ken Harvey: 01:35 You come with 22 years of experience in higher education. Before I have you here and before coming to Edmonds Community College, you served at four different community colleges in three different states. Rising from a part-time faculty member to Dean, Chief Academic Officer, Senior Vice President and Provost. That's incredible and sounds like a great journey that we'll want to share with the audience a little bit more about. You also completed the Management Development Program offered by the Harvard Graduate School of Education and the Presidential Fellowship offered by the Aspen Institute in collaboration with the Stanford University.

Ken Harvey: 02:14 You hold four graduate degrees, that's more than me. Many more than me actually, it's four more than me. Doctorate in Economics, Masters in Finance, a Masters of Business Administration, and a Masters in Economics. That's an impressive resume and I was not including everything that I know is there.

Amit Singh: 02:36 Thank you.

Susan Hempstead: 02:37 Ken, I think we're bringing the interview quotient down, IQ quotient down today. One of us were special guest host.

Amit Singh: 02:44 Thank you. Thank you for the compliment.

Ken Harvey: 02:46 Well, you've been now at Edmonds Community College, you said now for 15 months?

Amit Singh: 02:52 Yeah, 16 months.

Ken Harvey: 02:53 16 months and you are actually new to the area, right? You and your family?

Amit Singh: 03:01 I am. First time to the West Coast and first time to Washington state.

Ken Harvey: 03:06 Coming from where?
Amit Singh: 03:08 Ohio.

Susan Hempstead: 03:10 How is your family finding the gray skies of south Snohomish County this fall?

Amit Singh: 03:14 My family is actually loving it and so do I. Yes, wonderful weather beautiful state. I've lived in Georgia, and then Pennsylvania, Ohio, couple of different colleges and now in Washington, and I never thought that I'm going to end up on the West Coast, but this job opened up and I applied and here I am.

Ken Harvey: 03:37 Well, it's delightful to have you in the region. As I understand your family is living in a beautiful community called Mukilteo.

Amit Singh: 03:46 Yes.

Ken Harvey: 03:47 Nice place.

Amit Singh: 03:48 Yeah, very nice place and it's close to my work. It's only seven miles from my college, it takes me about 16 to 17 minutes. No matter... when you drive there's always light, light traffic and I found back roads is very, very convenient. I think I'm very lucky to have found a place and work that's so good.

Susan Hempstead: 04:09 Dr. Singh. When you get to the office in the morning, what does an average day look like for you? How do you start your day? If people are thinking, "I know what a community college president. I think what they do, but how do they spend their day?"

Amit Singh: 04:24 Thank you for asking. When I get to my office sometime I have early morning meetings, maybe off campus or on campus, but normally I try to keep my at least first half an hour, just to plan and think about the day and what I'm going to do and look at the documents and so forth. Normally meetings could start early at 8:30, 9:00 sometime eight o'clock, and if it's a light, light day, I may have this five to six meetings on campus normally 8 to 10 different meetings both on and off or obvious a little bit heavier than maybe 12, 13 or 14.

Susan Hempstead: 04:59 That's a busy day.

Ken Harvey: 05:01 When someone says, maybe go home, and you're asked, "What did you do today?" You say, "I was in meeting."

Susan Hempstead: 05:06 "I was in meeting."
Amit Singh: 05:08 That's true. We have a lot of meetings and academia we do a lot of things by meeting in a smaller large group, we share ideas and share governance. You have to include people in what you do, what you’re thinking, your decision making process is part of what we do and that's why. Plus, we have to be engaged with the community and this is one part of it. I'm here. That's why there's so many meetings, both on and off campus.

Susan Hempstead: 05:37 When you look at your campus, and it's a wonderfully rich, diverse, not only among streets in Lynnwood and the local community of Edmonds. How do you think the community sees these buildings and the students coming and going to Edmonds Community College?

Amit Singh: 05:55 Thank you for asking. One thing I was so impressed coming to Edmonds and coming to Washington was how much support the community has for the college. They see it as one of the main anchors of the community and they see it as a great asset to the community. Anywhere I go, people thank me for what the college does and what the college stands for and all that. Great support from the community for the college, and I really appreciate that support from our community.

Susan Hempstead: 06:29 That's super. Do you think the community knows how to access you or what to do with you? I'm sure that we all appreciate having institutions like Edmonds Community College civic institutions, but if I'm a neighbor on 196. How do I interact with the college? How would you see me as your neighbor?

Amit Singh: 06:48 Sure, I hope they know they can access us or me anytime and we do. When I go out and speak to the Rotary Club and different civic groups and clubs and the more I interact people know that here we are. We are all available, not just me, but all our staff and we're here to serve the community. That's our purpose. Yes, we are very available. I am available for anyone who wants to come and talk to me about anything, both on campus or off campus and we do that all the time.

Ken Harvey: 07:18 When you came on board, you were selected from, I think, probably a very rich and deep pool of candidates. Obviously, the community and the board of the college thought that you're the person, you're the person who was the right fit, and the right person to lead the organization into the next decade, into the next generation. What was the vision and that you came with? Have you felt like that vision is being reshaped a little bit or being refined as you've gone along the last year and a half?
Amit Singh: 07:58 Yeah, thank you for that question. I think you mentioned earlier that a good fit and a good fit is important for any employee looking for a job. I think it's much, much more important for college president, the fit has to be the right fit. Everyone has his or her own strength and I have my own. Different colleges look for different things in a president. For example, some college may want to keep things stable for a while, some may have gone through some rough time and they want some healing and so forth. Some colleges are ready to take off for the next stage. You have to understand you have to know what your strengths are, what do you bring to the table, and I knew that I am the kind of person who likes to take things from good to great. That's my strength. That's what I do.

Amit Singh: 08:51 Finding that fit was very important to me, and I was told early on I was doing research and talking to the search consultant, and then of course, the search committee and then the all the interview the second interview. It became more and more clear to me that this is what they're looking for from all of trustees, from faculty and staff they are ready to move from good to great and that's what I was looking for. 16 months into my job I can tell you it's a good fit, they were looking for someone to lead from good to great and the college was ready for that. I think I found a very good fit for myself and for the college and I think it's good.

Susan Hempstead: 09:32 That's exciting. How did you spend the better part of your first 100 days? You arrived and the Board of Trustees welcomed you on board and the communities welcomed you on board on your roadmap from good to great. How did your first 100 days begin?

Amit Singh: 09:49 You read something, you learn something and when you go to different conference or your program for opportunity, like I said Stanford Aspen Institute and all those are good. But then every context is different and you have to adjust, adapt to that context. Plus I'm different too. Normally for the first two, three months, you try to study, look at the community, look at the college and see what you want to do. I did that too. I also did something, what you call hit the ground running. I did the day one actually, I had asked my leadership team two months before starting my job, and I hope that they're listening and they're not going to get mad at me. I asked that I want to know, what are your core functions of each of your area with academic support services, all different department research? Then I want to know where are the gaps?

Amit Singh: 10:53 This assignment was given to me by me two months before starting my job. The very first day when I came first day,
Monday afternoon, we have our meeting leadership team and I spent two, three and a half, two, three hours going over my expectations, my leadership style, and where I want this college to, what I'm seeing and what we want to do. Very first day, we spent three hours it caught them off guard, they did not know that I would talk about what I'm expecting for the very first day. The first week, we spent all Thursday and Friday, two days, like a retreat on campus with my leadership team, learning about their core functions and learning about the gaps. Very early on first week, my team knew where we need to go.

Susan Hempstead: 11:41 You're building trust and you're building your team you're bringing them with you. That's critically important.

Amit Singh: 11:47 That's extremely important. Some people told me, "What are the building trust part?" I said, "Whether with my leadership team trust had to be start from day one." Then you go out and build a trust with the college and the community that takes time. With leadership team, you had to start soon. I did not want to waste six month time just doing something else. That start pretty early on.

Ken Harvey: 12:13 Well, the college serves an incredible number of students every year. I think, given the information, I have about 18,000 students a year and coming from a lot of different directions. Significant number of international students coming from about 62 different countries. If someone who was suddenly transported and just plopped down in the middle of the campus between classes and students are moving between classes and maybe faculty are moving around, they would see a very diverse campus. Is that something that you see? That you want to continue to leverage and build? What is it that you think really attracts students from so many different locations around the globe?

Amit Singh: 13:11 We have 40% diversity in terms of our student body, which is pretty good. As you said, people from 62 different countries are here but 12% enrollment is from international students. 40% diversity, that's really amazing. One of the attraction was for me to apply for this job that this campus, this colleges, this committee has so much of diversity. Of course, we want to continue with that, we want to celebrate the diversity. We want to play up on that. It's a globally connected world that we live in, and those are the thing that you would need more of as a leader. Having that environment, being in that diversity on our campus is just wonderful. We are so proud of that.
Susan Hempstead: 13:56 Not only issues of equity diversity inclusion, but you have this wonderful age range of students on campus from high school students or newly graduated students or adults who are looking to retrain or people coming back to work. How do you build community when you have such a broad range of individual students and individual student needs?

Amit Singh: 14:20 That's a question is, we always talk about those things, what can we do? As you said, we have a wide range of offering from pre college, which includes GED, high school completion program, to just basic language skill, ESL, English as a second language. To all the way now we offer baccalaureate degrees, and everything in between wide, wide range of offers.

Susan Hempstead: 14:49 That's a big menu.

Amit Singh: 14:51 A big menu. For all age group for all kinds of background, and so we have to serve all of them and serve them well. That's the beauty of community colleges. I think one of the biggest invention I always love to say in 20th century was the community college that was funded in the USA. Two things, one is we are open access institution. We welcome anyone, and then we meet you where you are. That's something so unique about community colleges, no matter what your background is. STEM, non-STEM, college ready, it doesn't matter. We'll meet you where you are and we'll make you successful.

Susan Hempstead: 15:28 I think that's exactly what community colleges and public libraries have in common meeting people where they are. There's an author who is recently in town Eric Klinenberg, and he wrote a book Palaces for the People. His ethos, the cornerstone of his of his thesis is that these wonderful democratic institutions, these civic institutions that we have put into our communities. They matter and the people who come to us them matter coming into public library or community college. Our executive director, and we were having a conversation and the premises. What if somebody came up with the idea for community college today? If you went to Congress and said, "We would like to have institution of learning in every community across the United States. We would like capital facilities, and we would like programming and we would have from high school to later in life lifelong learning." Would that even resonate or trigger investment today?

Amit Singh: 16:39 Yeah, it's wonderful, wonderful. I think, like I said, one of the biggest events of 20th century community colleges.
Ken Harvey: 16:45  Well, I know that when I attended Community College more years than I want to admit here, more years ago.

Susan Hempstead: 16:55  Just a few.

Ken Harvey: 16:55  Just a few years ago. It seemed to be the perfect place for someone who wasn't quite sure what they wanted to do yet or be at, to really explore through learning what was out there what was possible. Do you find that, that is still a found a need that that individuals have?

Amit Singh: 17:23  It is very much so, the difference now is that in the past people would just wander around and take many courses and figure out what they want to do. In the process, they would lose a lot of time, money and credit that did not count for anything. Now that we cannot afford to do that because your time is limited, your money is limited, financial aid can run out if you spend too much time. Now, not just we, the whole college system is working on something we call guided pathways. We want you to explore, but explore quickly and early on, and get on the path as soon as you can so that you don't lose your time and money.

Ken Harvey: 18:06  That makes so much sense.

Susan Hempstead: 18:08  I mean, it almost feels like you are finding a way to provide individualized instruction counseling and professional career support for all of your students. That's amazing.

Amit Singh: 18:22  Yes.

Ken Harvey: 18:22  Let me just jump on what you just said for a second, because I just want to make sure that the audience really catches that and knows that it's very intentional. Are you saying that at the Edmonds Community College, there are individuals employed by the college who actually help guide, help provide that direction or coaching or counsel?

Amit Singh: 18:45  Yeah, exactly. For example, our new plan is that we give you early advising before you start your first quarter. Before that, we also let you through a certain technology tool, you can explore your career and see what might interest you. Then we are also starting to offer from this quarter is called Success Course. Within the course you also get to explore your interest. Then by the end of the first quarter, hopefully, what do you want to do. Then you have a study plan for the duration of your stay with the college. Hopefully, the plan includes the or if you
want to move on to four year school. Hopefully, your plan includes your four year plan.

Amit Singh: 19:30 We want to extend that to not even to our student, but go back to the high school. We were talking about it right now, if you can start as early as 10th, 11th grade and build a pathway for you, all the way from high school to your 16th year if that's what your goal is, then you're good track and the right track and you would keep moving without losing much, your time and money.

Ken Harvey: 19:56 That's so great to hear. I just want to let the audience know we're going to throw a couple more questions to Dr. Singh and then we're going to take a short break and come back and explore some other facets of his background. One of the questions I want to ask before the break is really around the incredible growth that this region is seeing. Part of what seems to be spurring the growth is the incredible science, technology, engineering, math related careers, that are just exploding in our region. Advanced manufacturing, bio medicine and bio science-

Susan Hempstead: 20:41 Nursing.

Ken Harvey: 20:42 Nursing and all kinds of technology based things. How is that growth? I think some we're talking about 1.8 million more people in the region in the next two or three decades and over a million more jobs and things. How is that forecast affecting Edmonds Community College?

Amit Singh: 21:08 We look into all of those things and we are planning, long term planning and see how we can serve the community. First of all, let me go back to your comment earlier of the growth and that's one thing that attracted me to this region and to this state. I've lived in South Georgia and other states, Ohio where we normally worry about losing population and not having any growth.

Susan Hempstead: 21:30 Interesting.

Amit Singh: 21:30 Here the problem is just the opposite.

Susan Hempstead: 21:32 Opposite.

Amit Singh: 21:34 Complaining about more traffic it's a problem and more growth, more people moving in.

Susan Hempstead: 21:38 Housing, right?
Amit Singh: 21:39
Housing and these are real problems, but also opportunity. I'm looking at a half glass full, but we have to work with that. I'll give you... In my early research before applying for this job. I was looking at Snohomish County and I saw that, wow Snohomish County... Then I looked at King County and Pierce County, I realized that between these three counties the states, half the population 3.7 plus million people are in just three counties. Then I started looking at the economy, the GDP, the Gross Domestic Product, the output, and I realized that two thirds of the output economic output in these three counties. Then I start looking at Snohomish County more detail and I might someone research and I found that approximately Snohomish County is about $50 billion economy annual economy.

Amit Singh: 22:27
I said, "Okay, in a global context, what it means." Normally economist and we follow about close to 200 countries in the world, that we have good data for economy output and all economic output and all that. If Snohomish County award a country be would ranked number 65 or so in the world as a nation.

Susan Hempstead: 22:48
Wow.

Ken Harvey: 22:48
Incredible.

Amit Singh: 22:50
In a global context, think about that, how much potential? Then of course, you look at the and the business cluster in this region and start with manufacturing and aerospace and healthcare, technology of course in IT sector and now we see more growth in medical equipment and all that. Incredible opportunity and in this region, but we have to make sure we are ready for that growth, for that opportunity. Our purpose of our college or any entity is to add value to your stakeholders. To add value, you have to understand where the region is going, and how you can be partner along the way to support that growth and that economy.

Ken Harvey: 23:32
You're saying that... your answer I have to tell you, convinces me that you did get your Doctorate in Economics? I love that answer. Are you saying that demand and the growth affecting the college in terms of its physical size and how it uses its space, its own space needs to be projected into the future?

Amit Singh: 23:54
Yes, it will be. For the last few years on nationwide, we saw a decline in enrollment because normally when the economy is doing so well and a lower unemployment people are working and not going to school and that's what traditionally happens.
It's a decline all over the state and all over the country but now we're seeing some getting somewhat stable. Now we are predicting some growth hopefully in the future depending on what happen to the economy. Based on that we are looking at what are our capacity and what capacity we need to add? Right now, yes, the space is tight on our campus and as you may or may not know that we are adding a building a brand new STEM and nursing building.

Susan Hempstead: 24:40 Yeah. You have a big construction project going on.

Amit Singh: 24:42 Yes. Part of that reason is because we didn't have enough capacity for lab, for the classrooms and so forth. This will add a much needed space on our campus. Then we'll study, we have a 10 year master plan and we already looking at that again and see what else we need to do with the light rail coming to Lynnwood and that's always what we are talking about that what that means to us. Then there's an orange line coming from Mill Creek all the way, it's going to stop at Edmonds Community College that the new orange line.

Ken Harvey: 25:15 That's rapid transit.

Amit Singh: 25:16 Exactly. All this thing will bring so much traffic in our area. Also, we had to watch our demographics what's going on. One of the fastest growing program on our campus is the English as a second language for people who are already here, recent refugee or recent immigrants who are here, that program keeps growing 10% plus every year. That tells you the diversity and people come into your region and the need that they have and how we can serve them. All these things we have to think about.

Ken Harvey: 25:50 Well, thank you. Yeah, I can absolutely see that. Look, we're going to take a short break. When we come back, we're going to spend a little bit of time talking about some of your early beginnings and the work that led you to where you are today. All that more up next.

Ken Harvey: 26:06 You want to get the latest business news and solid financial advice from the experts, for free? You can. With your Sno-Isle Libraries accounts, library customers can download the latest news and advice from publications like entrepreneur Kiplinger, Fast Company and Inc, you'll find feature stories around the business of technology, leadership, innovation, the stock market, retirement planning and achieving financial success. All of that with a library card, just waiting for you online at Sno-Isle Libraries.
Ken Harvey: 26:38 Enjoying this episode of the Check It Out Podcast, head over to the iTunes Store, Google Play Music Store or most other podcast stores to subscribe, rate the podcast or leave a review. Your rating and review will make it easier for others to find the Check It Out Podcast wherever it’s available.

Ken Harvey: 27:06 We’re back from our break, we are having a delightful conversation with Dr. Amit Singh, who is the President of Edmonds Community College. He’s been sharing with us about his 16, 17 month journey as the new president of this educational institution that’s been so important than in our region. What we’re finding especially from what he shared with us, to individuals students from around the world who’ve been part of the family and community of those who have been educated or and are being educated. We want to spend a little bit of time with this last segment. Maybe going back into the past a little bit and I want to ask Dr. Singh about the place where he grew up and what those early years like and how did they set you on the trajectory that led you to where you are today?

Amit Singh: 28:07 Thank you. I grew up in a state in North East India, and I belong to a good middle class family. My parents were farmers, I actually grew up on a farm.

Ken Harvey: 28:20 Farming what?


Ken Harvey: 28:24 There is nothing like fresh sugarcane, oh my gosh.

Susan Hempstead: 28:28 Yum.

Amit Singh: 28:28 Yes. Wheat and so forth. We had a good life and parents were really supportive and all that. Then opportunity in India, as now has 1.3 billion people and even when I was there, still had a lot of people and not as many good schools or colleges. If you want to get good education or any good technical or general education, there were not too many opportunities. Let’s say you want to go to, my parents just like a typical Indian parent. My brother became an engineer, they wanted him to become a doctor. There were not too many options back then either you become a doctor, engineer or one of the government jobs was a brief prestigious but hard to get to and then maybe you want to banking job. That’s it, besides those there were not too many, private sector was not open-
Susan Hempstead: 29:21  Economy wasn't diversified enough.

Amit Singh: 29:22  Yeah, exactly. There were not too many jobs in private sector and if there were they were very low paid jobs. Nobody even thought about those jobs. I knew that getting a good job or in a good school was difficult, although I was going to a good school but medical was not something that I was interested in. Somehow I liked economics or pursuing economics, my brother came to U.S. before me and he went to Ohio State for his master's.

Susan Hempstead: 29:52  Your back guys.

Amit Singh: 29:53  Back guys, yes. For his master's in computer science degree. My parents came to see him once he got a job after finishing school and they went back and told me, "Wow, what a country. What an opportunity. That's where you should go. Just drop everything." I dropped everything and started studying for those couple of internet test, one is called GMAT for management.

Susan Hempstead: 30:19  GMAT and SAT.

Amit Singh: 30:20  TOEFL for English. I took those, applied and got into school and then I came here. I knew that I wanted to stay here because there are so many opportunities here. My coming here was because of the opportunity. India has changed a lot of good job there too, back then there were not too many. I had to come here just like my brother, and I'm so glad that I did.

Susan Hempstead: 30:45  From India to Ohio is a pretty big leap. Ohio is a farming community, it has some farming agrarian community as well. How was that experience departing your home and arriving in Ohio.

Amit Singh: 31:01  When I came to Maryland.

Susan Hempstead: 31:02  Maryland, first.

Amit Singh: 31:03  Maryland first, Maryland and then Georgia and then Pennsylvania, Ohio then here. Yes, this is 33 years ago, 1987. There was the internet and the world was not as connected. We did not know as much about there, there was no American TV that we were watching in India. Now, it's all over, right? They know so much about America as much as I do it seems like. Coming first time, landed a JFK in New York and this was January 24. My brother lived in Philadelphia he arranged a
certain service for me to be picked up because so much snow he
couldn't come. I stepped out of the airport and it was like -5
with the windchill and my life I've never seen below 45 for 15
years. "Oh my god, I'm going back home." That was amazing.

Susan Hempstead: 31:56 You're going to need a warmer coat.

Amit Singh: 31:57 Yes. Then, I this bus ride and I saw all the snow on the roof top
and I thought, "Wow, this looks like a whole different planet." It
was a big, big adjustment to me. Then I went to my college and
live in dorm. I thought, "Well, English is English what's the big
deal? Indian people do speak English they understand English,
they speak English." That was British English.

Ken Harvey: 32:20 A little different.

Amit Singh: 32:21 Different. I didn't know something called American English and
all the slang and everything. For six months I was homesick and I
was trying to understand the language and the culture and it
was simple words like somebody saying, "Hey, what's up?" I
didn't know what he said. I have to stop and ask them, "What
did he say?" He's saying what is up it means how are you.

Ken Harvey: 32:42 What is happening. How are you.

Amit Singh: 32:44 Now, if you go back to India they use what's up, they already
know those things. It was a struggle for six months, but then it
was all good. I started enjoying my school, my job on campus
and on and on and then never looked back.

Ken Harvey: 33:00 I can relate to that, I lived in Great Britain for a number of years
as a young person and went from Great Britain to Mississippi.
Yes, I discovered there're some differences in English depending
upon where you're living. You also worked before Academia in
the private sector for a while, do you want to just tell us a little
bit about some of those positions, functions, roles that you
played and what you've learned from it and how you leverage
that in your current role.

Amit Singh: 33:32 Thank you. When I came from India, I knew I'm going to go to
MBA and some of the things may be in work in a corporate
world, that's what I thought. I never thought of Academia or
that's for me. I did my MBA and a couple other degrees and
then start working as a first job as an investment analyst in
Atlanta, analyzing companies and so forth and there was a good
job. I thought this is pretty good. Then I switched my job as a
senior financial analyst as a corporate governance analyst. This
was a very, very unique job. We can talk some of the time, but I was involved with some of the larger merger acquisition in the country, billion dollar plus. What I was doing at that time was only 5, 6 to 7 people were doing in the whole country, analyzing the proxies for the companies, and then our clients were the oldest big mutual fund company where our clients are voting on their behalf in the annual meeting for these companies.

Amit Singh: 34:29 Anyway, long story very, very high stress job. I started burning out and then my company moved to Maryland. I did not want to move with them, I lost my job in a way. I said, "Okay, let me apply for now a couple of different jobs." One is, how about teaching? I was teaching part-time by the way while working full time. I love teaching.

Ken Harvey: 34:51 What was it you were teaching?

Amit Singh: 34:53 I was teaching corporate finance and investment and economics at a four year Business School.

Ken Harvey: 34:57 Can I just jump in just for a second? Because, you just seized on something there that I just wanted to just point out. It seems to me that a number of individuals who you find teaching part-time in community colleges are actually from the private sector, and they're taking some of that skill and passion and they just want to pass it on to others. Was that true of you?

Amit Singh: 35:22 Yes. Very much true of me. In fact, I run into the teaching thing by accident. I was doing my MBA, my faculty, he was going out of town and I had taken his undergrad class the previous semester, and he said, "Hey, can you fill in for me? I'm going out of town." I said, "Sure, I will do it." My first time teaching ever and I was still one year into this country, and I taught the class. The whole class was just glued to my teaching, I'm just bragging right now.

Susan Hempstead: 35:49 That's all right.

Ken Harvey: 35:49 That's wonderful.

Amit Singh: 35:50 They loved my teaching. I said, "Wow, I have this skill, a talent that I did not even know." He gave me credit for his class doing so well, because the way I taught on the exam next week, and they did so well. Anyway-

Ken Harvey: 36:04 How excited he was? You're remembering that. That's fantastic.
Amit Singh: 36:05  I knew I had this talent to teach. I thought, "Okay, let me get my job and my Green card and all this out, and then I'll teach part-time." After I got my job and Green card, then I start teaching at a four year school and then I loved it. When I lost my job, corporate job, I applied for corporate job and the teaching job. I got an offer from both community college in South Georgia and a corporate job in Atlanta. I said, "I want to do something different." I went for this teaching job and the rest is history. I love teaching from day one. I love sharing my experience with my class and coming back to my office and reading, researching and going back was so much fun. I thought, "This is what I'm going to do."

Amit Singh: 36:50  I thought, I'm going to be in faculty all my life, but I also started doing a lot of extra things besides teaching. I was advising a club. I was honest program coordinator. I was international Program Coordinator. Four or five additional things I was doing and I was making a difference and each of those things I was doing. At some point, I think this was in 2002, I thought, "I want to be a college president. I want to make a bigger difference." Then I start on that track. From that point on, I thought like a college president, I thought everything I was doing, I would think like, "What would I do if I were a college president?"

Susan Hempstead: 37:22  You had your goal in mind, you were on the path.

Amit Singh: 37:24  I put the mind on the path. Then Assistant Dean, Dean and I kept moving and took as many different opportunity for learning as I could and so forth. Then here I am.

Susan Hempstead: 37:35  It's fantastic.

Amit Singh: 37:36  Going back to your question about corporate job, very, very helpful in a way that we don't talk about business much in Academia, but a lot of what you do in Academia, you can use that skill. Like marketing your program, that's a business thing, but you always market your programs, otherwise how can you grow your program and finance the budgeting and strategic planning? All those things are so critical, and I think it was very helpful to me to have that business background and also my academic credential. The difference is you have to apply in the academic setting. The culture is different, the governance is different. You have the skill, but you apply in the right context and that's what makes a difference.

Susan Hempstead: 38:18  You have a wealth and a breadth of skills, talents, competencies, as you look towards your students who are coming over the next two or three decades. What skill sets
competencies are students going to need for whatever job may come and if we can all predict this, we'd all be on an island that we own somewhere in a warmer climate, but we have artificial intelligence, we have virtual reality. We have all of these on foreseen technologies coming but what does a student need to consider as they're planning their pathway now to be in the 2050 economy, let's say?

Amit Singh: 38:57 Thank you. You mentioned a lot of good things the AI and all this technology changes. What do we need? You need two things for sure, you need your technical skill that you are in and then you need some higher level mental skill. By that we know we normally call the soft skill but let's say critical thinking, problem solving, system's thinking and all that you need. That's what we call making your robot-proof. Robot cannot take those jobs away from you if we had a higher level mental thinking, mental skill, and for that you need a good I will say a liberal art background. Yes, you can get a technical degree but also have a nice diversified portfolio I would say that you collect along the way and that comes from the somewhat of a liberal arts education where you learn about this critical thinking and all the skill. On top of that you have your technical skill, and that's what important.

Amit Singh: 40:05 Sometimes you hear that all you need is technical skill, that's may be good for short term but long term that's not what you need to survive, especially when you have so much AI and robots and all this technology changes. Plus you need to be adaptive, you need to be flexible and you need to have a mind of an immigrant. What do I mean by that? When an immigrant comes to a country, guess what he or she does, he or she knows that, Oh my God, everything will be new, everything will be different. I have to adapt to everything that I'm going to face, from the food to the culture to the way you live and the weather, everything you have to adopt. That's the kind of mindset we need, that kind of adaptive mindset to be successful in the future.

Susan Hempstead: 40:49 Students learn in many different ways and we're finding I have a 15 year old daughter and a 17 year old son and they are YouTubers. I guess they're not YouTubers, they watch YouTube, they're not a YouTube producer. There's WikiHow, there's all this direct knowledge that's being transferring to the end user. For you as a community college president administrator for us as a public library, should this worry us? Should this keep us up at night that this direct transfer, we may be irrelevant at some point?
Amit Singh: 41:25 Wow. Thank you for that question.

Susan Hempstead: 41:28 I know that's a bummer.

Amit Singh: 41:30 You made me think. If you think about that, so let's go back to this idea of being disrupted and all the things that are happening and technology. Example of a company like Blockbuster, or a bookstore, Barnes and Noble from different kinds of bookstore. I'm not just picking on any particular but these are the middleman if you think about middlemen of content transfer. Blockbuster was video, they're transferring the knowledge to the video to you, but they are not creating the video. What technology did was we can bypass the middleman, bypass the blog and go straight to the video streaming device a company and directly download some from the source. Same thing for book you don't have to go to a bookstore now you can read book on your Kindle-

Susan Hempstead: 42:27 The author can read it to you.

Amit Singh: 42:28 Read it to you. Without a phone or computer. You're bypassing the middleman, the middleman of content transfer business. If you think about it, colleges, we are also in a way knowledge transfer business. We transfer knowledge and with the technology, what stops you from bypassing us and going straight to watching a free YouTube video or listening to your podcasting or any of those things. Now you have all kinds of faculty had their free video online or number of different sources, you have heard Khan Academy and all different sources.

Amit Singh: 43:09 We are also in the business of transferring knowledge. Question is, what could we do? How we can add value, so we cannot be outsourced? I fully believe that we cannot be outsourced if we do the things right. How we can add value, the way we teach in the classroom that could be different in the future and the wraparound services. It cannot be added in an online environment because we serve people from all across the walk of life, right? There are people who are maybe ready for the college or out of the college for 15, 20 years. All of those need different kinds of help. As long as we keep adding those services, the wraparound services and the teaching itself.

Amit Singh: 43:54 Yes, online you can learn things but I can bring you to classroom and now we can use your time to solve problems, do more critical thinking and more current discussion about different things. That's where we can add value that you cannot add value in an online situation. We have to think about our own,
what we’re doing and how we can keep improving our offering
till we stay relevant, because we are also in the content
knowledge transfer business.

Susan Hempstead: 44:21 At the end of that experience of critical thinking and working
and problem solving, you leave with a credential, you leave with
some sort of certifications at the end.

Amit Singh: 44:31 Exactly. That's worth to the employers and the employee.

Susan Hempstead: 44:32 Yes, it is.

Amit Singh: 44:35 Yes. I also believe that we cannot be replaced because we can
add so much value, but we have to be mindful-

Susan Hempstead: 44:41 Intentional.

Amit Singh: 44:42 -to make sure we keep adding value and keep adapting to this
new day and age.

Susan Hempstead: 44:47 That's perfect. Thank you.

Ken Harvey: 44:49 We have just a couple minutes left and I know that one of the
things we definitely just wanted to just chat about with you is
some of the work that you and Edmonds Community College is
involved in partnering with other organizations like Sno-Isle
Libraries, like the City of Lynnwood around things that you've
determined matter, obviously. I love to just throw that out to
you and just say, why is Edmonds Community College involved
in the Mariner Community Campus project involved with the
Lynnwood partners collaborative and maybe some other
things?

Amit Singh: 45:31 Sure. Our mission is three words, teaching, learning and
community. Community is very much part of what we do and as
the community grows, so do we. Our job is to work alongside
the community and bring everybody along and help everyone in
our region. We are very much part of community and if you
think about our students, they come from a community while
they are with us, they're still part of the community and they go
back to the community when they go and work in the
community. Community is all around us. That's why the
partnership is key to making sure that we keep serving our
students and keep serving our community.

Amit Singh: 46:14 In that sense, we have to look at to get to 12 partnership,
nonprofits, or four year partners, or business community and
the nonprofits and library for example, and we are talking to you about it and we are thinking about starting a center for entrepreneurial center. You do such a good job at your library offering workshop for people who want to start a business and resource. How can I partner with you? If somebody come to us, we know what you offer, we can refer them to you, and vice versa. Partnership is a key for success of any community, that's what we are here and that's what we're doing.

Ken Harvey: 46:53 Yeah, thank you for that. I think I’d like to just end with this, you at the start of the conversation you talked about how when someone says, "Well, what did you do today?" You say, "Meetings." It's obvious that you are a very busy leader in our region and we're glad to have you as part of the region. How do you balance all the demands all the different voices that can come up the conflicting priorities and that may present themselves? How do you balance all of that and keep yourself straight and saying, what is it that you do for fun? How do you balance it and what do you do for fun?

Amit Singh: 47:43 Somebody asked me this question during my job interview and they laugh and when I replied that for fun I do reading.

Susan Hempstead: 47:51 You are the people you should interview over here.

Amit Singh: 47:55 How do I balance? Thank you for asking. In the end, you have to think about the bigger picture, what you here for. Think about the students, think about the community, think about what's good for the college and the region. That's how you make a decisions and keep yourself balanced. Because of course, people will have different ideas, different things to say but sometimes will bring you down, you may feel discouraged, but it doesn't matter. You look at the bigger picture, what is your purpose? What is the purpose of the college? What's good for my students? What is good for my community? That's what drives you what you do every day.

Ken Harvey: 48:36 Gosh, thank you. Well, this has been an incredible conversation, I really appreciate your time. We have been talking with Dr. Amit Singh, he is the President of the Edmonds Community College. He has been in our region now for less than two years, but we are looking forward to many years with you here and Sno-Isle Libraries we’re committed to help you work and implement your vision and see the outcomes of that for the benefit of our region. We're just so delighted that you are partnering with us on the Mariner Community Campus Project and seeing you and the community college is so active in our region. We appreciate the leadership you brought this far and
we’re looking forward to that continued leadership going forward.

Amit Singh: 49:27 Thank you. Thank you very much.

Susan Hempstead: 49:28 Please come back. We’ll check in with you to see how things are going.


Susan Hempstead: 49:31 Thank you.


Ken Harvey: 49:33 When you give to the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation, your gift touches generations. Your donation helps turn babies and young children into readers. Turn students and first time entrepreneurs into successes and helps maintain the lifelong learning of adults seniors and our homebound neighbors. You can be part of the change you’re looking for your one time gift month or gift or Memorial gift can make all the difference. Please consider investing in children, seniors and others through the Sno-Isle Libraries Foundation today.

Ken Harvey: 50:10 That was so interesting chatting with Dr. Singh about his background and about to what he’s brought and bringing to the Edmonds Community College.

Susan Hempstead: 50:19 I really appreciate the vision and leadership, he’s really able to get up on the balcony and take a full 360 degree environmental scan of what it means to be a student, part of the community and part of the faculty and staff that he has at the campus and where they need to go next to become great.

Ken Harvey: 50:40 Yeah, I think that can be such a challenge for a leader to not get pulled down into all the details and all the challenges and problems and really to rise above, know how to rise above that when needed and really, as you said, take that much higher view to help ensure that everyone is moving towards the desired outcome.

Susan Hempstead: 51:06 To have intent around what is our role? If we know there, I was just fascinated by his conversation on content transfer, and if we know there are other ways that people can find or seek information, what is our value proposition and what can we offer in terms of wraparound services or systems thinking or critical conversations or problem solving, so that students have
additional benefits to them into the economy after they leave Edmonds Community College?

Ken Harvey: 51:39 Yeah, I was really glad you asked that question because like Edmonds, like the community colleges, the libraries are confronted with this that same challenge because more and more people they get sometimes what they think they need straight from the internet. Yet, as Dr. Singh pointed out, that doesn't necessarily provide you everything you need.

Susan Hempstead: 52:07 Right. If you come to a children's story time or baby STEM, come play with blocks or a play and learn, you're getting more than just what you would by listening to, "Alexa, play audible." Or just an independent solo learning experience.

Ken Harvey: 52:25 He's really clear that, that Edmonds Community College under his leadership, and we under the leadership of our CEO, Lois Langer Thompson, we're both looking to see how do we continue to provide a higher level of service a more wraparound set of services that continue to be valuable to the communities that we serve. There was also something else a few other things that he said I was really fascinated by his own personal journey and his early family, his recollections about early family. Not only the things that made coming to the United States attractive, but also the differences in English between the British style English that he learned practiced in India and American and I should say somewhat American South English.

Susan Hempstead: 53:33 He has a wonderful personal story. I like how you said journey but for me as I was reflecting upon what he was talking about all the times he was bold and brave in his life to make a change. When he was presented with choices, he often did not take the safe choice, he took one that would help advance a dream that might still be forming but was on its way to germinating. He did not have to come to the United States, he could have stayed in India. He didn't have to go into teaching, he could have chosen to stay in the corporate world. I think all of us have those choices presented and are we willing to take that next step and that next pathway forward that might not be comfortable but helps us achieve our dream? I think that's remarkable, there's learning in there for everybody.

Ken Harvey: 54:29 What do you think of his comment around making yourself robot-proof? What do you think of that?

Susan Hempstead: 54:35 I think everybody hopes that will happen. I think that's one of those wonderful stories as you look towards technology and you look at its growth and we've heard all sorts about
outsourcing and offshoring, and what are the careers for the workforce of the future.

Ken Harvey: 54:52 The fear about artificial intelligence is taking over everyone's job.

Susan Hempstead: 54:55 Yes. We all saw that Will Smith movie, but what is the workforce of the future? I like how he described it that yes, you will have to have some technical skill, but it's also these higher level mental skills of analytical thinking or systems thinking or problem solving or team connection and team solving. How to be robot-proof? Isn't that how he said of robot-proof. That higher level mental, how to use. I was just thinking while he was talking that, often Bill Gates releases all the books that he's read for the year, right? We should offer Dr. Singh a slot to share with us the books he's read for the year. It was a great learning.

Ken Harvey: 55:36 Because he did say that one of the ways he finds balances he reads for fun.

Susan Hempstead: 55:41 Right. I don't know if that's a genre balance, he's reading.

Ken Harvey: 55:45 We'll have to find that from him.

Susan Hempstead: 55:46 Graphic novels here, economics and manuals here.

Ken Harvey: 55:50 Well, that's an incredible conversation. Fascinating, fascinating person and we are just, I think as a region very fortunate to have Dr. Amit Singh as part of our community.

Susan Hempstead: 56:02 Yeah, that was a rich conversation. Thanks for bringing him in.

Ken Harvey: 56:06 Thank you for listening to the Check It Out Podcast. For free resources and materials connected to today's guest and topic, head over to the library's website and search for the word podcast. The library's website is sno-isle.org/podcast.