

Inside Citywide Podcast Transcript

Episode 3: The City of New York's Return to Office

Michael Santos: You are listening to the Inside Citywide podcast, brought to you by the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services. Inside Citywide provides you with a behind the scenes look at some of the work we do to serve the people of New York City.

Nick Benson: Hello everyone. Welcome to Inside Citywide. I'm Nick.

Belinda French: And I am Belinda French. Thank you for joining us for our third episode. Today, we'll be discussing the City of New York's ongoing return to office for city employees and how the city maintained its daily operations during the pandemic.

Nick Benson: This was an unprecedented crisis that presented enormous challenges for governments all over the world. Obviously, there are so many incredible essential workers who kept our city running amidst COVID-19, but there was also a substantial portion of the city's workforce that transitioned to telework. These employees adapted to new realities, and now they have to return to the office at least on a part-time basis.

Belinda French: We are joined by two really outstanding guests who played key roles in not only transitioning portions of the city's workforce to telework, but also now returning those employees back to the office, they also wore many hats in developing policies and procedures to protect city workers, and basically everyone that we serve.

Nick Benson: Our first guest today is Quintin Haynes who serves as executive deputy commissioner at the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services, or DCAS as we call it. Welcome Quintin.

Quintin Haynes: Thank you so much for having me, Nick and Belinda. Glad to be here.

Belinda French: And we are also joined by Steve banks, the first deputy commissioner and general counsel for the New York City Office of Labor Relations. Thank you for joining us, Steve.

Steve Banks: Thanks so much for having me. OLR and DCAS are often working together on so many issues so I'm happy to collaborate with you guys on this podcast project.

Belinda French: Thank you so much. So, before we jump into our formal conversation, we're going to try something new this episode. We're going to start off by asking each of you about your personal story, and then ask a more lighthearted question to break the ice and let listeners get to know you. So, uh, Quintin, we're going to start with you. What's your personal story? What do you do at DCAS and why did you go into public service?

Quintin Haynes: So, I believe public service is a calling. Growing up, I wanted to be the fire chief, the police chief, the sanitation chief, the public works chief, and kind of the list went on. And so I was really interested in city government and city management. And really what I

felt passionate about was the impact public service delivery had on a resident's quality of life.

So, I went to school to study public administration, both undergraduate at Florida A&M University, and graduate school at NYU Wagner's Graduate School of Public Service, and really, I've had an extraordinary career solving big problems that help government at all levels operate more efficiently and effectively.

Now at DCAS as you asked, as executive deputy commissioner at DCAS, I oversee our citywide asset management portfolio, our agency's strategic operations, and also lead several of our innovation and change management initiatives. Related to this convo that we're having today, I was fortunate enough to lead DCAS's citywide role with our return to office and developing guidance for city agencies to operate during the pandemic, and so glad to talk to you about those things.

Belinda French: Thank you so much. You know, even though you didn't become the city's fire chief, you're definitely making an impact on the quality of life for our New Yorkers and our employees. So, thank you so much.

Nick Benson: Steve, what about you? Tell us a little bit about your personal story, the work you do at the Office of Labor Relations and how you ended up going into public service.

Steve Banks: Sure, so you know, as Quintin said, I've long been interested in public service. My father was a NYPD detective, and his father was a NYPD police officer as well so working for the city is kind of been in the blood lines.

I come from a legal background. I went to St. John's University. The school of law here in Queens. And right out of law school I started working for the Office of Labor Relations in our legal division. In my current role, I serve as first deputy commissioner and general counsel, which are really two distinct hats that I wear.

So, when I started in the legal division as an assistant general counsel, Oh, we represent city agencies in labor litigation, grievance, arbitrations, and proper practice cases, et cetera. So heavily litigation focused. And then, I moved over to the negotiation side, and that's in my role as first deputy commissioner, I supervised the contract negotiators at OLR where we negotiate with all public sector unions, 150 collective bargaining units.

And economic and non-economic negotiations with the unions. Um, and we work out those contracts. And so, you know, I find the work very fulfilling and interesting. Wearing those two hats I think it gives me the opportunity to participate in both areas, which, you know, I enjoy for different reasons.

The litigation and the arbitration cases, where you can use those trial skills has always been very interesting to me, but reaching a deal across the table, where you can avoid the need to have that sort of protracted back and forth, is exciting as well. And I know that a lot of the conversation we're going to have here is about what we've done over the past 15 months or so, um, with relation to COVID, which obviously is much more on the negotiation side and communication and, you know, with Quintin and a lot of our agency partners, it's been

about talking to the unions and working through issues. So that's an important part of our job. We're really management's voice to the workforce, through our union leaders.

Nick Benson: That's great how it's in the blood. I can definitely relate to that. My dad was a third-generation firefighter, so I definitely know what it's like to have public service and union membership and your family, uh, your history. So that's really cool.

Belinda French: Now to start off with a more lighthearted question, what did you want to be when you grew up? So, for this question, Steve, let's start with you.

Steve Banks: Sure. So, I think the answer from when I was a kid about what I wanted to be when I grew up would definitely been a player for the New York Mets but as I probably reached my teenage years, you know, I played in high school, but you need things like elite level talent and incredible drive. So, I soon realized that academics were probably a better long-term pursuit.

Belinda French: You know, I give it up for all of us Mets fans, but you know, that's a real New Yorker. But hey, um, that's, that's what we're here to do.

Nick Benson: And Quintin how about you? I know you said you wanted to be the fire chief, but I know you also dabbled as an actor when you were a kid so where did you see your career going? As a kid, was it always the fire chief route?

Quintin Haynes: So actually, I'm laughing because Steve said his athletic route and I wish I had the athletic prowess to go pro as well. But I, like him, would probably go towards the academic side. So yeah, I dabbled a little bit as an actor, I had a reoccurring role on a couple of shows and commercials growing up. But really what I wanted to be as a city manager. But since I said that before, I'll give another one that I wanted to be. I grew up watching the west wing as a child and always wanted to be the chief of staff at the white house.

That was my goal. The problem-solving nature of what they had to deal with on a day-to-day basis really, showed me that, you know, there are positions in government that could really make a huge impact to the everyday quality of life for both citizens, residents, and the international community.

Nick Benson: Oh, that's awesome. Yeah. West wing it makes government look so clean and not quite the accurate take always, but very much romanticizes the profession, so I always enjoyed that one too. So, I'll transition more into our formal questions now, really appreciated getting a little sense of both of your personalities and your background.

Um, but wanted to start our conversation with a question for both of you. Many employers all over the world had to abruptly adjust to teleworking at the start of the pandemic. While this was complex and difficult for everyone, you know, when you're the city government, there isn't an option to shut down.

When the pandemic reached New York City, what was it like for you trying to figure out how to develop guidance and best practices to protect city employees in the public while

minimizing disruption to government operations, when many services were most needed by the public. So, Steve let's start with you.

Steve Banks: Yeah so, I mean, certainly our role changed sort of overnight on a dime, last spring in terms of the pandemic and, you know, a lot of communications, a lot of discussions with unions, obviously dealing with health and safety issues, right. How we were going to do cleaning in the workplace and social distancing and, how we're going to handle absences, you know, where leading up to that, we were doing mostly economic pattern bargaining, right? What are going to be the percentage of wage increases, that kind of stuff. And we had to kind of pivot to a much more health and safety approach. And then as you know, the emergency continued in April and May of last year, we had different issues about employees being deployed from one agency to another, or just to help in an emergency situation, to help where the need was most acute. We worked with our labor partners probably to do some things in terms of moving employees around and transferring them and assigning tasks that our labor partners probably wouldn't accept in normal times, but that we were able to do because the need was so acute. And then moving forward from there, obviously as we developed, dealing with issues about return to the office, which, Quintin has been very instrumental in, talking to the MLC, which is the umbrella group of city municipal unions, and trying to get everybody on the same page. So, it's been kind of an evolving issue.

And, you know, in terms of those health and safety challenges, really the only prior experience that we had with that was the Ebola virus. If you go back five or six years, that was something that obviously was in the news a lot and that the city employees were very interested in, especially when you had patients going into the city hospitals and in the communities and stuff like that.

And so, we had a little bit of a playbook about how we get the word out. Like I said, using the MLC, which is the umbrella group of all the unions. That's a way to kind of get everybody in the same room together so that everybody's hearing the same message. And we did that during Ebola and also, in the early days during COVID and then on kind of a periodic basis as we went forward.

So, you know, obviously, a lot of change and some big challenges that we had to kind of deal with on the.

Nick Benson: I'm sure that had to be tough too because most of your negotiations with labor unions, I'm sure are, you know, more involved and a longer process. And here, you know, this was an emergency and you had to make decisions fast. You had to make changes fast. I'm sure that was a very different.

Steve Banks: Yeah, and you know the other element is that OLR you know, we have a staff of 160 employees all in an office and we went remote March 20th of last year as well. So, then it's also about adjusting to a different way of doing business, right? Even in recent months, as we've gone back to some of the contract bargaining and negotiations, you have to figure out how that works in a virtual environment as opposed to being in person, you know, I was in some labor bargaining actually last night into the wee hours. Right. And you're still figuring out how to set up all the breakout rooms, right. Where normally, you

might have some groups working on different issues and collective bargaining and using multiple conference rooms, but it's sometimes difficult to virtually move people to the breakout rooms using WebEx or Zoom.

So, you know, even for OLR as an agency ourselves, we had to change our way of doing business while at the same time, trying to do those important things.

Nick Benson: And Quintin, how about you? What was it like trying to figure out how to develop guidance to protect employees and the public while keeping city government going? You know, I know that was a key role that DCAS played, and you helped to spearhead that.

Quintin Haynes: Yeah, and I want to echo something that Steve just mentioned is, is that DCAS like, OLR was an agency in it of itself. And so, we were dealing with not just trying to think through our citywide role and functions, but also our own employees, because our employees, were also helping respond to the pandemic, but I would really say it was talent sourcing.

Um, we really started to think through, how we can leverage the city's expertise. I was so both proud, but also, very excited to work with our city partners, whether it would be OLR, DOHMH, the law department, H+H, T 2, VCC, and the list goes on, to really leverage their expertise as we were getting information from the CDC, the state, from industry best practice leaders. I mean, it was coming out like a fire hose, right? And so, we all had to both leverage our own expertise, but we had to be very clear on our roles and responsibilities. OLR was dealing with the unions, they were on the ground. They were listening to the employees, what the unions were saying about the concerns that their employees had. DOHMH was really thinking through the health guidance and how that impacted, not just the city, but the workforce. The law department was helping us think through all the legal ramifications and risk strategies of how do we think through this and what is legal what is not legal? How does this relate to the state's guidance, the CDC guidance, H+H our public hospitals, everything from vaccinations, T2, VCC, and so it was a very complex effort but what came apparent is that we have a lot of expertise within city government, and so it made it that much easier to be able to not just receive the information but turn that information to actionable plans that we can implement and guide agencies as they started to think through their operations. So, you know, I would say that's how we were able to develop the guidance, and really keep our employees both safe, effective, and efficient throughout the pandemic.

Nick Benson: And that had to be so difficult because, you know, in ordinary times this is just one piece of the work that your team did. And I'm sure you had to really reallocate resources to take this on in a crisis situation.

Quintin Haynes: Definitely. But you know, kudos to our teams, kudos to all the public servants, the civil servants that were out there doing the hard work and serving the public, but also thanks so much to all the teams for all of their work throughout the pandemic and their work as it is because we're close, but we're not out of the woods just yet and so our teams are still out there really just making sure that government is operating.

Belinda French: Quintin, I want to talk a little about the facilities that our employees had to work in, our city buildings. In addition to DCAS's role developing guidance for telework, I know your team played a crucial role in managing our 56 public buildings during the biggest public health crisis in a century. And many of these buildings continue to be used by essential workers and the public. So, two questions. How did you go about making adjustments to maximize safety? And also, how did you manage the challenge of evolving guidance as we learned more about COVID-19?

Quintin Haynes: So, I would say in one word it was communication. So, you know, on the onset, we met with all of our tenants to kind of go over the guidance that we had promulgated, and, and developed for the entire city, but for also the buildings that DCAS has managed as well. Um, but we talked to our tenants to really understand their needs and, and how the pandemic actually impacted their operations. And once we had that conversation, we developed plans in alignment with the tenants to really think through how we could both ensure that their spaces were operational, but also give them guidance on how to best utilize their space, both from an occupancy standpoint, a ventilation standpoint, a safety standpoint. Some of these examples include like we closed off common areas, that's inclusive of your pantries, some of the conference rooms, we close those off. We placed signage throughout the buildings to ensure that folks knew where to go, what a way to go from a directional standpoint. They knew what to use, what not to use. They knew the occupancy numbers. We made adjustments to our building systems as inclusive of the water systems, the bathrooms, the restrooms, the HVAC ventilation systems, we increased our frequency of cleaning, inclusive of both the common areas that were still used. So, your elevators, your lobbies, those type of areas, but also into the actual tenant space, the workspace where our employees work, any high touch spaces. And then we also just enhanced again, as I mentioned before, the one word, communication. We enhanced our engagement with our tenants. You know, we were on call 24/7, throughout this pandemic, our buildings didn't shut down as you mentioned. I honestly feel like most of the majority of our buildings still kept up the same amount of use. And so, we stepped up, we talked to our tenants, we got their needs, and we put together plans and that's how we were able to get through this, which was really just communication and listening to their needs and being able to react, and then reallocating our resources, you know, mostly our staff. And I will just have to give them a quick shout out to all of the city laborers, trades, custodial staff, engineers throughout the city who have worked nonstop throughout the pandemic making sure that our buildings are safe, are cleaned, are ready and prepared for a 24/7 operation.

Nick Benson: And Steve, many people may not realize this, but the City of New York employs roughly 400,000 people. There are only seven companies in America that have more employees than the city, but unlike the vast majority of private companies these days, the city's workforce is overwhelmingly unionized.

City employees are represented by a whole host of different unions. I think you actually said over 150, which means you had to work with numerous different partners in labor, on telework issues, health, and safety issues, et cetera. What lessons did you learn from that experience working with so many different partners?

Steve Banks: Yeah. So obviously, like I said before, the pandemic brought us in a whole different area from what we had been doing in January and February of last year, pivoting from, you know, the normal contract bargaining and labor management issues to health and safety issues. But I would say that, you know, in general, regardless of which category of issue you're dealing with, you know, what we preach, and we always talk to agencies and to our City Hall colleagues about is that communication is key, right. You know, having done this for a number of years, right? If there's an issue that comes up, you know, one option is to engage in a union, have a meeting or a phone call, have a discussion, even if it's going to be potentially controversial where you might have a disagreement. If that's the first option and the second option is to go ahead, and that the employee will then call the union and say "hey, this thing happened to me. I have a health and safety concern, or I'm being told to do work that I don't think is, you know, uh, within my assignment," or any other issue. If they hear it from the employee first, it automatically creates a more adversarial relationship at that point, right? So early communication is key, and I think, you know, we tried to do that throughout the pandemic. And the other element of that in terms of the communication is it has to be effective communication. Right? So, a lot of that in terms of dealing with our labor partners, you know, we knew labor relations, we know the relationships, we have long-term ways of doing business, but we're not subject matter experts on the pandemic. Right? So, a lot of it is also connecting our union partners with the people who are experts, and one of the reasons I was excited to do this is, you know, we work very closely with Quintin on a lot of the building issues, he is really, you know, one of the cities lead folks on the ventilation and all that stuff, and we've had several meetings with unions laying that out. Often, it's about us convening the meeting and, you know, we have that level of trust with the unions, but then letting the subject matter experts do what they do best.

So, you know, we've had the high-ranking doctors from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene early in the COVID pandemic to explain the issues, Dr. Varma from City Hall at various times has been a partner with us in dealing with the unions and any number of other folks in city government.

Sometimes it's about kind of directing the expert to best educate our unions. And then that's a really effective way to get the word out to the workforce, right? Because for the most part, our unions have a direct line to the employees who they represent. And there's a level of trust there, right?

This is the union that represents me, that advocates for my interest, that provides me my benefits. So, if I hear a message from them, there's going to be a level of trust. Every person of those 400,000 employees, everyone's different, but they might hear it differently from their union and from their commissioner for instance. There might be more of a level of trust with the union. So, it's another important communication medium for us. And you know, during the pandemic, and in general, our role is to kind of keep the labor piece and to show that collective bargaining works right? You had mentioned how highly unionized we are in the public sector, but our goal is always to demonstrate that the process of sitting across the table and collaboratively working out issues in different parts of the country, they're trying to reduce collective bargaining, but we're trying to show that it works. And that doesn't just mean it works for the unions and the employees, it works for the taxpayers,

right? For management to be able to operate, the residents of the city who are the recipients of the services. And so that's what we're trying to do every day during the pandemic, it becomes, you know, most important.

Nick Benson: Yeah, that's a really good point. You know, I do communications at DCAS and you know we focused a lot of our work internally on our employees and, you know, we would have messages come from our commissioner or senior staff members, but it's so important to remember that day to day your union or your direct supervisor, that's kind of who you have the most touch with and you have a certain amount of trust with. So, that's a really good point.

Belinda French: I have another question I would like to ask both of you. Just as you had to put great care into protecting our essential workers and transitioning employees to telework, it was inevitable that employees would ultimately have to return back to the office. Now we know that process has since started and we can expect that this isn't going to be an easy transition, both operationally and people having to readjust. But before we get into all of that, what were some of the considerations that came into play during the planning process for bringing people back? Quintin let's start with you.

Quintin Haynes: So, health and safety was paramount, as kind of outline in the RTO guidance that has guided agencies throughout the pandemic. It kind of focuses on four pillars, inclusive of preparing the building, preparing the workspace, preparing the workforce, and as Steve mentioned, communication, and really when you think about the building, it's coming up with risk mitigation strategies related to the buildings infrastructure, again, the HVAC systems, the restrooms, your common areas, the public areas, and really thinking through access to your buildings, and how do you kind of think through the flow of traffic in your building.

When you think about the workspace, this is really around strategies related to the agency's physical workspace, and that's kind of where they employee actually sits and operates and thinking through what best practices are there and inclusive of physical distancing, occupancy planning, how many people can be in a space at one time, and cleaning, and all other things such as mask wearing, face coverings, et cetera.

When you think about the workforce, it's really thinking through, and of course working with OLR and Steve and his team about alternative work schedules, face coverings and health screening requirements. As you know, the city has required that everyone that enters the building, be screened, both employees, clients, and visitors, and so those questions and ensuring compliance with that, personal hygiene best practices, ensuring that employees are washing their hands before and after they enter the elevator, ensuring that there are hand sanitizer stations, and PPE and equipment throughout the spaces so employees do not have to go far.

Is it easily accessible and convenient? Testing and vaccination, as you all know, all employees, before they started returning back to the office, as of recently were eligible to be vaccinated, and testing throughout the past year has been something that we've been pushing, while vaccinations are not mandatory for city employees, there are strongly

encouraged. And so, we have been making those available, whether it's through, pop-ups working with OLR throughout several of their programs and the VCC. And then also, and I may be stealing Steve's thunder a little bit, but they have all these great employee support resources such as be well, work well, that really have been literally tremendously successful and helpful to employees that really helped them think through how they get back to the office, thinking through childcare options, counseling and et cetera. Then the last piece is just communication. And you know, again, Steve talked about this, but it's so important that agencies establish and maintain that centralized communication, which is both two way.

Nick, our communications director, who's the co-host on this, has been very instrumental. But also sending out messages to employees and making sure that they understand, and how to navigate coming back into the office, what resources are available to them, any teleworking policies that are still in effect, any teleworking policies that have been expired, any leave or other resources that are available to them, that they have all of that. And I'll go give another shout out to our other host, any reasonable accommodation requirements, Belinda from our agency, uh, has dealt with, but that's also the same that is happening throughout the city.

Belinda French: Thank you for that. And Steve, what were your considerations that you had to take into account? Especially you mentioned the unions before, you know, your role in working with the unions that represent city employees.

Steve Banks: Yeah. So, you know, in terms of returning employees to the office, right, it's really a subgroup of our city unions that we were dealing with, you know, who would have largely been remote during the pandemic, but you know, of the approximately 400,000 municipal employees that Nick was referencing earlier, I think our best counts were that over 300,000 never stopped working in person right? When you think about the public services that the city provides, sanitation workers were always picking up the garbage. Everyone had clean drinking water. So, the DEP employees were working. Police and fire obviously are not taking any days off. Teachers were largely working either in person or remote from the beginning you know, without interruption. So, the transition in May was really a subgroup of the city employees and, you know, in terms of that project and that communication, for us, it was really about consistency. And so, you know, City Hall and the deputy mayor for operations worked with all the agencies and most of the issues that we dealt with our labor unions was about consistency across and within. We have agency, A and agency B are in the same building and their plans look much different, you know, and to work with our union, to explain the reasons why, in some situations it made sense in some situations, frankly, it didn't, and we'd have to work with our management folks on their plan.

And so again, when you talk about communication, we started those conversations in March leading toward a May 3rd return date right? And so that gives time for that back-and-forth iterative conversation. And also, within agencies, right? Obviously, you know, one of the union's, roles are to keep management honest about playing favorites, right. You're returning to some employees, even whether it's a whole grouping or even getting up to the individual level. Some employees have one work arrangement and others have a different work arrangement, there is going to be questions about fairness and equity in those

situations. Even within a single agency. So that's really what we spent most of our time working with our unions on. Transitioning in some instances, from employees being fully remote to a hybrid model.

Belinda French: I would definitely agree. The effective communication, consistency and collaboration throughout the pandemic has been very, very helpful to our employees.

Nick Benson: And we have one final question that we'd like to hear from both of you on before we wrap up. While some employers haven't started to transition employees back to the office, all city employees are now reporting to the office, at least some of the time.

What has been the response so far from those employees who are coming back, and I know Steve, you said about three quarters of the workforce never stopped coming in, but of that quarter or so that has been remote, what has it been like so far? Has it gone smoothly? Quintin let's start with you.

Quintin Haynes: So, yes, I do really think that it has gone smoothly. The agencies have done an amazing job in preparing for those teleworkers to return back and even myself, even walking around the building and talking to employees, it has all been positive. A lot of what I hear is that employees are glad that we are starting to get to some type of normalcy, so they appreciate it. They notice and realize how much work has gone in, how much thought has gone into their return, and, and they're thankful. I can only foresee that as we continue to return back to a pre-COVID 19 times, that we will continue to see both an increase in workers coming back to the office, but also kind of this sense of normalcy to whereas you start to get employees around each other, collaborating with each other, and really, returning to what was a good time, but also a time where a lot of work was getting done. We were productive. And you see, you know, smiles on people's faces and people are able to give hugs, and handshakes and high fives, and those types of things. So, you know, I'm optimistic, but you know, everything that I've heard thus far has been ultimately positive.

Nick Benson: Yeah, it really does seem that way so far. And that's a huge credit, Quintin, to you and to your team, the kind of care that you put into the guidance that went out to agencies, because I really feel like it made employees more comfortable that they knew their agencies put a lot of care and a lot of thought into the planning and preparations and we're looking out for their interests.

So, I really think that was key. And Steve, what about you? How has the return to office been going so far, you know, from your perspective and what are some of your impressions?

Steve Banks: Yeah. I mean, I agree with what you just said, you know, the, the level of planning that went into everything certainly I think has helped with a relatively smooth transition even if the, the return to office guidance that Quintin and his team worked so hard on.

Just that document itself, I think, is a demonstration of how much thought and effort, you know, has gone into this within city government, you know, our oversight agencies and the Department of Health and everybody working together. And I think the return on May 3rd was really a prelude to what's a really exciting time in New York City, where vaccination

rates are up, positivity rates are down, and you can see it all over society. I personally, I went to a wedding a couple of weeks ago, first time, and you know, there's a lot of firsts. I've been going to church without a mask. It's like getting back, exactly like Quintin said, a return to normalcy in people's personal lives, but that also applies to the work that everybody does. So, I think that return to normalcy is exciting for a lot of people. I think it has been, generally positive and I know that we're going to continue to be moving in that direction. And so, you know, I think a lot of people are looking forward to that.

Nick Benson: So, this was a really great conversation. I'd like to thank both of you for joining us. You both played a really important role in keeping the city going during this crisis and I personally appreciate everything you've done and will continue to do. Quintin, you know, Belinda and I have enjoyed working with you and helping to support your team and its success, so, you know, thank you again to you and for joining.

Quintin Haynes: Thanks so much for having me and also thanks to my partner, Steve. OLR has been tremendous in this effort. We couldn't have asked for a better partner in really making sure that our employees have everything they need to get back to the office.

Belinda French: I'd like to thank Steve, as well. In my role as an EEO officer, my work often intersects with labor relations, and Steve I've always appreciated you and your team and especially during the pandemic. So, thank you so much.

Steve Banks: And I appreciate the opportunity to be here. Like I said, at the very beginning, you know, OLR and DCAS are sort of like sister agencies, you know, between us and the law department and OMB the Office of Management and Budget, we're sort of like the oversight group who's there to assist all the other agencies, so I really appreciate the opportunity to be here. I expect this podcast to be one of the top 10 in iTunes in terms of ratings, we're going after some of those big ones. I know you guys are just building something here, but it's an exciting thing to get the word about city government out there to the masses, so it's appreciated, and I appreciate the opportunity to come today.

Nick Benson: We're coming for your pod save America, we're on your heels. So, all right. Thank you both so much. We really appreciate it, and I'm sure we'll be talking soon, thanks.

So, before we wrap up Belinda, you know, one of the fun questions we asked at the beginning was what our guests wanted to be when they grew up.

I'm curious, what did you want to be?

Belinda French: So, I wanted to be a lot of things, but there's two that stand out. When I was younger, maybe about grade school, I had a lot of great teachers in my life. So, my first thing was to be a teacher because I wanted to help students like myself.

But then, in my high school era, I actually wanted to be an actress. And that is because I always spent high school and a little bit of college doing drama. I was always on a dance team. The only issue was that I could not sing. I still can't sing. So, you know, you have to be a little bit of a triple threat to really be successful out there as an actress, but, you know, I

still try to incorporate some of those acting skills in my EEO role. So that's what I do. How about you?

Nick Benson: I can imagine you have to turn it on sometimes. When I was really young, I wanted to be a college football coach of all things. You know, I was crazy about football when I was a kid and thought I would go in that direction and then kind of as I got older and got into high school, my focus moved away from sports, towards my academics.

I think I knew then that I wanted to work in public service. In government politics in some capacities. So, you know, that's kind of what I've done with my career, working in several different government agencies in two different states and then I worked on some political campaigns and stuff like that.

So, I knew I wanted to give back in some way and I've really enjoyed that, and it's such a great thing to wake up each day and try to make a difference for your fellow New Yorkers.

We'd like to thank all of our listeners for joining us for this episode. We really appreciate the feedback that we receive, and we'd like to actually invite you to submit questions. If you have any questions about DCAS or about city government in general, we'll do our best to answer your questions during our next episode. So, if you'd like to, you can send us your questions at communications@dcas.nyc.gov. Again, it's communications@dcas.nyc.gov.

Belinda French: Thanks again for joining us!

Michael Santos: Thank you for listening to Inside Citywide, a podcast brought to you by the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services. To learn more about DCAS, visit our website at nyc.gov/DCAS.