

William Vandament

Interviewer: Constance Lincke

Location: Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan

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Start of interview:

(Constance Lincke) Dr. Vandament, it's nice to have the opportunity to speak with you today. And I'm always interested to know why people choose a major in college, what was it was that made you choose psychology? What kind of background brought you up to that point?

(William Vandament) Well I never, I went to college without any specific goal when I went. I went knowing really that about the only thing that I didn't want to do, was to work in a factory alongside my father, so I knew you had to get a college education to get out of the factory. So I went off to college, I actually at the time was very much interested in literature and so I naturally drifted into English and so I was majoring, I was really a major in English. I assumed that probably I would go on and become an English teacher, maybe a high school English teacher or perhaps a college teacher. But I really was interested in human behavior also somewhat, it was just a kind of a passing fancy and got into psychology courses. I did well in them, and one of my instructors pulled me aside one day and well maybe you ought to consider majoring in psychology. And so I said well that sounds, well that does sound interesting and so it really was a faculty member who took interest in me and shifted from being an English lit major to majoring in psychology.

(CL) So it was more than, it was outside of the family then that you had this influence rather than from parents.

(WV) Oh sure although probably what made me curious about behavior and human beings was living in my family [Laughs]. I was naturally curious about my people behaved as they did, no my parents were not educated. My father I guess had a fourth grade education and my mother went to school eight years but she was the daughter of the sharecropper and so she never actually finished any of those eight years, they were out planting, working the fields every year. So no they didn't, there isn't a history of psychologist in my family.

(CL) Also I guess you are contemporary with my times, these were Depression times too by the time we got to college it wasn't but in our earlier years it was Depression times.

(WV) Oh yes that's right it was.

(CL) So you went to college, did you go there on a scholarship did you say?

(WV) Um yes Quincy College was a private college, about five or six hundred students at the time and it was a Franciscan college, I had been reared a Baptist which was not a Baptist any longer but it served our community. It in fact it took the place of a community college for the young people in my hometown and so I went there and yes I went on a scholarship actually it was a music scholarship.

(CL) Isn't that so?

(WV) I didn't have to major in music, all I had to do was play my trumpet so I played my trumpet in the band and the orchestra ensembles and groups like that. In return for that, they granted me my tuition.

(CL) I noticed that you had attested to use your, is it your coronet here at Northern Michigan University?

(WV) Unfortunately, yes I am afraid I have come somewhat of an embarrassment.

(CL) Oh.

(WV) With it. Local musicians Don Bays [Spelled Phonetically] will introduce me every now and then saying here is Dr. Vandament playing one of the two ballads that he knows.

(CL) [Laughs] Well after you had gotten into psychology, you went on to a clinical experience, first of all at Illinois and then into Wisconsin is that right?

(WV) Yes yes. I went after graduating from Quincy college, I went to Southern Illinois University and got a master's degree and from that point then I went to work for the state hospital as a psychologist. Then on up I joined the practice of psychiatrist who was practicing in the scene of private practice and he had been, his life had been changed by a psychologist when he was a youngster and so he thought he needed to have a psychologist working with him in psychiatric practice overseen. So I went up there and joined him and worked for several years, I guess eight years I worked with him. We formed something called the --- clinic.

(CL) Oh I see.

(WV) We got social workers in later and it was a thriving business and so it was somewhat difficult to leave it but not entirely so.

(CL) Then I noticed you went into academics after that! What spurred that idea?

(WV) Well when I was working as a clinical psychologist, I often felt that I was ill prepared, first I thought well it's because I am working in a master's degree level and need a PHD and all that training I'd be much smarter. But I got plenty of work with my colleagues up and down Lake Michigan and Chicago and Milwaukee and I found out that they weren't much brighter than I was about things. So to me I finally concluded that psychology is a field that is not yet ready for

applied practice and it was a bit like trying to do engineering without an underline in physics base. So I thought I had to take a new direction so I moved into experimental psychology and became a mourning and behaviorist.

(CL) By the way, I had a chance to look at some of your articles in some clinical psychology magazines, um will you just briefly tell me what this is about?

(WV) Well they aren't clinical psychology journals they are actually journals in learning and memory and in experimental psychology and I worked with, well I was working with the condition reflex.

(CL) Oh I see that was it.

(WV) The Pavlovian reflex, I moved all the way from dealing with complex abnormal behavior down to working with behavior change in its simplest form. I became a part of a school that assumed the only way we were going to advance knowledge about behavior was to understand the fundamental unit of behavior change and we thought that was condition reflex. We compared ourselves really to the cell biologist in biology. It's the cell being the simplest form of one can call life and you can extrapolate it into more complex situation, you had multiple cell and you had the cell differentiation and all of that. You can take, you can go from the cell down into a more molecular level as well and get yourself into biochemistry. So we thought that that fundamental unit of behavior change was the condition reflex so therefor it was important to understand that and then we can extrapolate how these fundamental units get formed into multiples to produce its more complicated issues. We thought it would also provide phenomenon at a basic enough level that if we would provide data for those working at the biological and chemical levels. I still believe that probably, although I have no evidence to back me up on it.

(CL) No at least now when I go back to read them over I will know what you are talking about!

(WV) You will notice that since those articles were all about the eyelid response

(CL) Right exactly.

(WV) And if you asked me why I studied the eyelid response, the eyelid response was, well whatever response you know a scientist would choose to study would be hopefully a prototype of other response systems and there was nothing inherently interesting about the eye blink response other than that it was frankly easy to measure.

(CL) I see.

(WV) It easy to pull a little lever, tape a little level to somebodies eyelid and you can measure mechanically the, you can measure twitches and so it was measuring those little bitty twitches that the subject himself or herself couldn't even report to you that we were doing. It was frank to me you know, Pavlov used saliva well saliva is messy.

(CL) Yeah [Giggles]

(WV) And humans subjects won't let you do surgery on them to get the --- in their months and so we, psychologists have looked for a response system that was easily measured and that's why most Pavlovian researchers in America forces on the condition eyelid response.

(CL) Very interesting. I wanted about that after I was reading it.

(WV) Many people ask me, why that?

(CL) Um while you were you got into academics and then, you obviously got interested in the financial aspects of the university and probably can see people moving up. What prompted you to get interested in the financial in the university position?

(WV) Ok well it was a graduate transition, I was a faculty member in psychology doing my research and teaching but I also worked on university life committees and in doing that I came to the attention of the dean at our university. We didn't have vice presidents in those days, we only had deans and the dean had an opening in administration for something for an area called Planning and Institution Research. And he thought I'd be good at that because believe it or not most psychologists are very good with qualitative information and qualitative data. So it was the idea of having those qualitative skills that I had learned in psychology and the ability to translate I guess complex questions into questions that could be analyzed with qualitative information. It got me into institution research and then they added more and more planning duties to me so that we were interesting in embarking in a new direction it would fall on me to do the background work and how we got into it. In one of the instances I then administered new programs before we turned them over to some administrative on a more permanent bases. Well in the process of doing all of that planning there was one key ingredient that was usually missing on these new programs that I was working with and that was money.

(CL) One of the important issues.

(WV) So I became, as a planning officer for the university I became fixated on the acquisition and use of resources and how long we get resources to move into a turning, you know tuning ideal fantasies or ideal dreams into reality. And so gradually I moved into budgeting for the academic side of the university, so I ended up budgeting, I was at State University in New York and I handled the budget for the colleges and the academic departments. You know for the academic side of the house and so gradually that, I moved a step toward financial management and an interesting opportunity came up at the Ohio State University for a budgeting and planning officer. I was under a little trouble on my campus, we had a change in the administration, new president and I wasn't sure I was welcome there. And so I applied for the job and lord behold the we had a president who was into which we say venture he had enough venture in him to take me on. So I went off to Ohio State, you know interestingly enough the largest university campus in the county and with the help of a staff that reported to me, a hired a financial management.

(CL) [Laughs]

(WV) So it was a staff that was very talented but they had difficulty communicating with other people and I became their translator and so they taught me and they taught me the concepts. So I got my, it was on the job training but it was on the job training from people who worked for me rather than from people that I worked for.

(CL) You evidently felt comfortable enough with this after time to even write a book about it because I had a chance to go over to the library and get it out and look it over.

(WV) Yes yes I became active in NACUBO the National Association of College and University Business Officers while I was in Ohio State and became chair of the financial management committee of that national organization. We surveyed the field and found out that there really wasn't much written on financial management per say in college and university work. So we as a committee put together a little book and I wasn't satisfied with it, with the committee work and so a few years later when I had time I wrote one on my own.

(CL) I noticed at the beginning of your book you mention of the fact that as you move up through a university organization they don't always take into account that they going to have to face financial issues when they get close to the top. And it's probably a good idea to be prepared ahead of time.

(WV) That's right that right and so actually the audience for my book really was the middle level university administrator, primarily the academic administrator, I hoped that it would be a book that would be helpful for the department, academic department head, for the dean, for the academic vice presidents, for people that were not from financial background.

(CL) Um getting into your coming to Northern Michigan University, um of course we had a president here, Dr. Appleberry who was leaving and they needed an interim president. How was it that you sort of... it took you and the university made contact. How did that come about?

(WV) Alright I had, well I had been a vice president actually at three major universities so Ohio State and also had financial and administration at New York University in Manhattan and then had gone off as academic provost at the California State University system in California. After a while, I really had burned out on being an administrative so in about 1987 I went back to the faculty, I had been given the title of professor of psychology at the Fullerton campus in the Cal State system. When I came in as the academic vice president they always have to you if you are the academic officer of the university your credentials and your discipline are always evaluated and the very often you carry that title. That's why I carry the title professor of psychology, and I thought well I'll just go back and become a professor of psychology again and I had gone back to the faculty at Fullerton. So I had been doing that about three years, perfectly happy and was moving into retirement and the telephone rang you know one Friday evening after I had just gotten back home and it was a head hunter who asked if I would be interested in applying for an

interim position at Northern Michigan University. Um having lived in Racine, Wisconsin I knew something about the Upper Peninsula but not very much. And so I said to my wife, well how about going up to Northern Michigan for a year? You know she of course thought I took a leave of my senses but I said you know for a year it would be like a sabbatical. So we agreed to do it so we came up intending to have a year's different kind of experience.

(CL) If I can refer back to the interview you did with one of the students who wrote an article in *The North Wind* called "Some Time Ago". You had told the student that you felt perhaps a little creatively stifled when you were in the California system and that you felt maybe you'd like to sort of have the opportunity to be your own man. [Laughs]

(WV) Well no that's true. That's true. And I have said since being here I mean I have been here almost five years now.

(CL) That's right

(WV) I've said that actually in many ways the job of president is easier than a job of vice president because when you are vice president, you are basically carrying out other people's programs. You are held accountable and blamed for your boss's mistakes as well as for your own so it's kind of a relief not to be responsible for any boss's mistakes and to only be responsible for my own mistakes.

(CL) I thought it was rather nice that you made the remark it was like running your own business.

(WV) Yeah that's right sure sure. Having your own shop.

(CL) That's right [Giggles] what has been your biggest challenge since you have been here? I know finically that was a big problem but...

(WV) But that's, yes that's been a worry, that's been a very yeah that's been a persistent pattern problem. Um could we take a short break?

(CL) Yeah sure.

[Tape is turned off]

(CL) Ok we were going about the big challenge here at Northern.

(WV) Um actually it's very difficult for me to single out challenges frankly. I suppose I am not that well organized with what happens is that I find that I tend to focus on whatever it is that we are not getting done at the moment as the biggest challenge. It's hard to maintain a racial analytical view on challenges, certainly financial challenges have been great during my entire time here. I came in... oh we had a two point three million dollar short fall to deal with and we had to deal with it pretty quickly I came in July first and we had to make cuts pretty regular and

then it was year after year I've actually not had a year yet in which we have not had a major budget reductions. And I have not been faced with some tuition increases that had been more than what I would have chosen so certainly that has been a major set of challenges. It kind of sets the tone for everything, everything that happens on the campus.

(CL) It's in your preoccupations then.

(WV) Well it's been in the background, it's been in the background for almost everything because a university above all has to be, has to maintain integrity as a community. It has to act as a community and when you are making difficult decisions and eliminate positions, we have eliminated about hundred positions. When you are doing that it means that whenever you try to move off in new directions with whatever various expenditure or funds for something that is a little bit new or can enrich something, it's always done at the expenses of something else and all of the people who were affected by the something else, that's been sacrificed, there is a special scrutiny given then to anything new that you do. That is that can be somewhat inhibiting. Fortunately, we have not let that completely dominate our thoughts here and our actions at Northern during this time. So I am grateful at people that understood the need for us not to circle wagons, just circle wagons and protect everything at the expense of investing in the future. The faculty and staff and the students have been at least somewhat tolerant of us undertaking some new kinds of things at the same time that we have been cutting back on things that have been --. What's difficult for people to understand in the university is that it is in fact and this should be of course should get out careful reading my financial magazine book, that a university is in fact a set of multiple enterprises and that very often they have different sources of funding and therefore their funding prospects can vary. You can have a very tight situation for example with your university's general funds, unrestricted general funds, the core funding which we get from the state that can be very tight. At the same time, we may be running an enterprise somewhere else, like the University Center, an auxiliary operation holding conferences and other things like that, that is capable of generating revues so that it can invest make investments in its future. So there are, so it seems anomalous sometimes that one part of the enterprise can be moving forward while the other is sacrificed.

(CL) Yeah.

(WV) And that is very difficult for people to understand, they really think you ought to be able to just move the money around and then if you let the operation that is making progress, if you just lead money away from it that would solve other problems. But what they don't realize is that in managing any kind of multifaceted business the minute you take away all of the incentives from a part of an organization that can grow and that can generate revues what you have done you have destroyed all incentives for it to do that! And you can no longer have that.

(CL) That's right.

(WV) So you have to, we have operated to the extent that we could on a decentralized as much as possible, decentralized financial management philosophy because I think that promotes an entrepreneur spirit and I think that's the way to do it. The whole operation benefits because I think if a part of the university improves its quality and the perception of others improves the quality, I think that reflects on the rest of the university.

(CL) Of course as students see this as a better university to come to, more students are going to come and it has a domino effect.

(WV) Yes, no I firmly believe that. The one advantage that I have as president now that I guess I never really had before to the extent is that I do, is that I knew overview in which I can take pleasure in any success anywhere in the institution. Whereas if you are a part of the institution down in a department or in an office something like that very often some other programs success means to you that you are not valued.

(CL) Yeah.

(WV) And therefore there is a great deal of jealousy that exists in the community life in the university that I would like to see gone. I wish to get rid of all that, I wish everyone could you know, rejoice whenever they see anyone else in the university being successful. That would be my ideal university in which everybody shared the joy of everyone else's successes.

(CL) I am going to flip the tape over.

[Tape cuts out]

(CL) I think as a psychologist you can probably see that can't you?

(WV) Well not really I have to tell you I almost renounced psychology as an applied.

(CL) Oh I see.

(WV) In the applied field many years ago.

(CL) Oh ok alright.

(WV) So to me when I applied for my background it was very narrow.

(CL) Ok.

(WV) When it comes to dealing with administration and people and everything else I'm affirmative, I'm really flying by instinct and intuition, not from reported science.

(CL) Ok. [Laughs] When you came to Northern there of course was the big financial problems that we just talked about but there seemed to be some faculty what kind of odds with the



administration, do you think that has been largely been resolved now? Or maybe I'm not asking the right question or wording it the right way?

(WV) No I think the question is worded properly I just don't know if I can combine a sensible answer for it. Um I think certainly, there were significant divisions I think between the faculty and the administration when I came here. I heard stories about there being a ruckus over the quality of the toilet paper in the administration building. That it's not the superior quality...

(CL) Somebody told me about that!

(WV) It's kind of symbolic [Laughs] I think symbolic of the kind of division and yes I was quite disturbed at the way in which I was perceived. And I think primarily because I was the administrator, the university president. It was not entirely new to me to have that kind of tensions --- --- of the university more so of a certain times at other university. And more so than other universities --. But yes well was something unproductive about it, it truly was something --- I hope that things are improved, there are but I would not claim that the we have reached an ideally state in our daily interaction.

(CL) Well no matter where you are there are always going to be people who are dissatisfied with something and always going to be those who pick them out and this and that. But I guess overall perhaps you feel that?

(WV) Well the one thing that was important to me, to remnant was a kind of major --. That really didn't work because I think that actually is destructive really to the mission of the university. It seemed to me from some of my dealings with students for example that I found the students were actually in some instances being lobbied and indoctrinated.

(CL) Yeah yeah.

(WV) And things of that I mean that I think interferes with the educational aspects and also you see in my ideal university um the faculty should actually be running everything. Faculty should as professionals be setting standards for themselves and should play a major role in setting the directions for the university. It was, I grew up academically in that tradition in the place where I started ---, had a very strong faculty and I was proud to be part of that attitude. And I thought of it as somewhat a demotion when I moved to administration I must say. I mean I did it but at the same time being monitored as a faculty, being monitored everything the administration did that was not it was always done in a hostel way nor humble. It just we thought that the results of professional responsibility to do that.

(CL) I noticed that was one of the issues that the that the media, complications speakers to the faculty in August of every year. And it's one of the issues that you brought up in and focused on and on the professionalism that they need to generate more of that here at Northern.

(WV) No I do think so, I think we have a student faculty as you will find that again in four-year comprehensive university. Our programs for our majors are excellent and once the students find their academic home they really have a marvelous experience. But I think faculty across the country by and large do not define their roles as involving the professional education component. They think of themselves as the psychologist, rather than biologist.

(CL) Ok.

(WV) It's an application. But not necessarily as a professional educator and that's something that distresses me about America higher education, actually less so here than it does in other universities. --- but never the less I think it's something that needs attention in our higher education.

(CL) Do you think it's something that students don't learn as they are going through the higher education process? What it means to be a professional when you get out into the real world?

(WV) Um they learn what it means to be a professional educator in their disciplines.

(CL) Mm I see.

(WV) And but take on the broader role is something that they are not prepared for. They actually most faculty know almost nothing about the history of education. And then back a few years ago by the time when you got culture illiteracy and you got ---.

(CL) Right right.

(WV) I devised a simple little test on the history of higher education that I gave several faculty groups across the country. Its multiple-choice test with five alternative answers and of about four hundred and fifty faculty tested, the average correct was nineteen percent. Just slightly below chance. [Laughs] And I mean you know it shows a kind of a general lack of knowledge about the education process. You know we teach our college instructors almost nothing about the micro learning and memory. So they are really facing students not knowing much about attention span and not really about how vocabulary is built and the effects of presenting the information in manageable chunks that the students so don't lose track of it. So there is a whole hostler of simple things that people don't know. I had a very encouraging students last week that we formed a counsel on teaching and learning.

(CL) Yes I know about it.

(WV) A few years ago, a couple years ago, it took me a couple years to get it formed actually.

(CL) Sure sure.

(WV) Working within the governance system and then it seemed to me to take forever for them to go on to their task to figure out what it was for them to do. But they held a conference last

week and it was pretty amazing. We had a number of faculty members who were sharing their own experiences in teaching and little techniques and approaches to dealing with classrooms and here we find there is kind of reservoir of faculty members unknown to each other who were doing all these things that would promote teaching and learning. I was very hearted with that.

(CL) They are faculty that can teach each other how to.

(WV) And that's the whole reason that got me. See that's what I would like to see develop in a university something in which there is a serious study of teaching and learning in various disciplines and sharing of experiences with others and the knowledge that has been built up. Very often people think of teaching as a matter of just learning the right things to do and then doing them. But in fact you see the science of teaching is a pretty big science. I mean it's a science in progress! So I would like to see our faculty contributing to the knowledge base about teaching, not going out and just absorbing what someone else presents on the subject of teaching. And I would like to see them contributing to the knowledge base about teaching and learning.

(CL) I think this is particularly important because this is one of your visions for Northern Michigan University. You want it to be a recognized center for education of teachers, what you said just leads it right into that as the importance.

(WV) Usually when you say that when you say something like that what I just said, your misunderstood because it's taken to mean that you mean something really simple minded. Like learning how to teaching, like learning how to ride a bicycle, learning how to form other rootamentary skill. That's not what I am talking about at all, I would like to see a -- of faculty who know a great deal about basic science of learning and playing off of that to experiment with learning techniques so that we can build a base. Many faculty members are contributing to that just as they are contributing to the information about the discipline.

(CL) You wanted Northern to be known as a premier university. Do you think that...

(WV) Well you see I believe that it is a premier university and you can look at primarily at the records of our graduating classes, records of our graduates and see that is the case even though they do not want it to be widely publicized. For the past few years I've made a bore of myself reciting you know a litany of statistics, you know the nurses pass their ---

(CL) Yes yes I read that.

(WV) ... one hundred percent one year and ninety percent in most years, in fact our pre-med students are placed you know in the ninety percent medical schools. Psychology majors and graduate preparation program are placed incredibly high rate, accounting majors passing their --- are about fifty percent higher than the national average. This is a high quality institution and one of my challenges, one of things that frustrates me very much is the lack of progress that we are making in letting everyone know that.

(CL) I see.

(WV) Very difficult to communicate and in particular, well first you have to be visible as an entity of Northern and then beyond that the characteristics and quality of the community. They are still at that level, much of downstate Michigan and some other places that are even being known as an entity and so it makes it very difficult to put quality, quality perception to the general public.

(CL) Do you think um it's a problem that Northern is expected to be a community college as well as a university? Do you think that's creates a problem here?

(WV) It does contribute to the complexity of that. Some people say it's going to be impossible for Northern both to have that, well the right to try.

(CL) Right eight.

(WV) The community college has play a role and then also premier baccalaureate institution is viewed are somehow never going to be sorted out in uniformity. I hope that is not the case, but it is very difficult to talk about being a high quality baccalaureate institution when you are admitting many students who are not qualified and you have petitions in the background. I can understand some of the confusion.

(CL) You have to, you've formed this U.P. contortion which is trying to encourage people who decide to stay in the U.P. to learn how to do jobs that can be done here rather than having to be exported to other places.

(WV) Well we try, yes and for that we are trying to get to a new market of students, students who by and large would not attended a university and so in that way we are trying to combine something for those students who probably will not become baccalaureate students. But I don't believe that is incompatible in having high quality...

(CL) Oh no oh no.

(WV) And having baccalaureate backbone. But it does make it difficult to communicate with parents to classify you along this single dimension and it's hard for them to believe that you are a multidimensional institution. I call it the paradox of universities. Excuse me by labeling it paradox it tells people to be alert, its more than a single dimension. That's why I call it a paradox.

(CL) Um before we wind up with the interview is there anything that you would like me to ask you, that we there are a hundred subjects we can discuss is there something that you would like to say that maybe you haven't addressed? Or maybe you feel that it is important that you put down on paper for me?

(WV) Well I think for me, my Northern Michigan University experience has been just an extremely important one in my life. Northern Michigan University is a unique kind of institution, it's difficult to capture in words but there is a I guess a loyalty in generally combined in this institution. In its students that may not appear while they are attending Northern but one finds evidence of it years, years down the road. And so what has particularly impressed me about Northern is the way in which you can find a contrary of people in cities and towns across the country. I mean we are not a very large institution, but if you go across the country and simply send out invitations and announce that you are a Northern Alumni university, you know Northern Michigan University Alumni, come to this place we are going to have a good time. You'll get, you'll get a contingent of people and they will indeed share kind of feeling about this university. I think for a university of our kind a regional university that comes out of a teachers colleges tradition. I think you'll find that's rare, it's kind of corny but it's actually school spirit of people you know sixty, seventy, eighty years old.

(CL) Yeah yeah.

(WV) Along with people who graduated two years ago I mean they share a bond that it's not unique in American higher education, there are other colleges and universities that have that but it is still rare. It's not common to find that degree of devotion among a college or universities graduates.

(CL) Can I just add this one thing, do you think it's because a lot of people have lived here in the U.P. and this has been their school as the U.P. is a little special place? In this minds of many people who come from here, picked Northern because it is from the U.P.? Do you think that has something to do with it?

(WV) I think that's part of it but another part of it is many of our most loyal supporters are young people from down state.

(CL) Oh I see.

(WV) Or New York, we have a contingency from New York City who were shipped off here graduated they are back in New York City and all you have to do is raise the flag and they will show up. We've had people from Chicago, people from Detroit a variety of places who discovered something unusual when they came here and it stayed with them for their lives. So it is both, it's really both, native Yoopers and everybody around here. You also find that in a lot of converted trolls that's --.

(CL) Well thank you very much for doing this interview with me.

(WV) My pleasure.

(CL) And I enjoyed it very much.

End of Interview