RN: You grew up in L.A. and went to an independent school. What do you think is the most unique thing about this experience?

AS: The beauty of independent schools overall is that students are known really, really well. We tend to be smaller communities. We tend to be highly intentional communities with faculty who have the flexibility to think about the curriculum, what the school believes, and how can they map onto the school’s philosophy for teaching. Having that possibility to know and be known is an overarching attribute in independent schools.

RN: I agree. In looking at other job opportunities, what stood out to you about Buckley particularly?

AS: I know I keep saying this, but the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I’m not sure how much you know about how these searches begin, but we get things online and there’s a whole position description and that really leapt up off the page. Another thing is there’s something about a K–12 community in which students are nurtured from as young as five to up to 18 or 19 that is a really magical space. It’s impressive for students to continue to connect with their Lower School faculty even when they’re in high school, and for Lower School students to physically imagine themselves as teenagers. That was another big piece of it. I’m also a huge fan of the Four-Fold Plan, which is tried-and-true regardless of the generation and the time in which we are living. Knowing that students—and my own children—are going to have really strong academics, arts, athletics, and moral education is spot on for me. In addition, my impression on the ground while I was visiting Buckley is that the teachers here uplift the people around them. They uplift the students and each other—and that to me is part of the magic of being in a school community.

RN: How do you plan on making this a place where teachers feel supported and that they belong?

AS: It’s one of the most important parts of my job. The most important relationship is the one between students and their teachers, but the next level of relationship is what goes on between faculty and the administrators who support them. The adults in the community need to be perpetual learners and able to say to one another, “Hey have you heard about this?” or, “Can we go explore that?” Teachers are themselves both experts and artists, which means they are continually applying a craft and learning it and discovering new aspects of it at the same time. They are also responding to the students in front of them, recognizing that the students of today have some similarities to the students of the 2000s and the ’90s and the ’80s, but they are also different in many ways, and we have to recognize that. Teachers are also attracted to places that are really committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and if they can see themselves in that mix they are going to be far more interested in coming and staying.

RN: I think that students, especially because there has been so much change in the last couple of years, are a little apprehensive about another new wave and what that entails, especially high school students who notice it a little bit more. What is your philosophy on managing change?

AS: I have no clear intention around change for next year. I’m not pro-change or anti-change, but I understand that change is the one constant. There’s always growth and evolution. When I have been part of a community someone will come with a question, or an observation, and say “What do you think?” I’ll then say back, “What do you think?” We should explore it together. Not just you and me sitting here, but also other members of the community.
who are going to be affected. Student voices also matter a ton. Students need to know that they’re heard and that they can have influence in the community that they are living in and shaping. The same would be true for faculty and the same would be true in some ways for parents and alumni. What’s exciting is knowing we can do it together.

RN: In starting work as soon as now, what’s been your priority so far? Is it getting to know people or—

AS: You hit it on the head! It’s getting to know people and there are just far more of you than there are of me or Dr. Lucas. It’s not just getting to know people, but being an observer in the crowd.

RN: A lot of what’s been focused on in our student elections is getting people to support athletics and performing arts. How do you think you foster a community where everyone is interested in what their peers are doing and where it’s cool to go to a school event together?

AS: Some of it is showing up yourself and not just being there but participating and really give thanks to the students, families, faculty, or other community members who have also chosen to be there. Part of it is spreading the word. Inviting others to go with you—most people respond to a personal, live invitation. It’s important to consider the “sticky” members of the community—people who are going to be a draw for others. How can we help engage them?

RN: Having a female head of school and a female assistant head of school is going to be a change for Buckley and I think it’s really exciting. It’s kind of unusual—you don’t see that in independent schools, at least not in Los Angeles. How do you think your and Dr. Lucas’s perspectives will change the community?

AS: That’s a superb question. It’s really unusual to have a female head of a co-ed, K–12, independent school. There just aren’t that many of us in the country. And I’ve been surprised myself at how many people have said, “So glad to have one more!” In addition, most of the co-ed, K–12, independent schools that have female heads either don’t have an assistant head or happen to have a male assistant head. Let me also just be really clear, I think leadership can come in all different forms and shapes, and gender is not necessarily the thing that shapes the school; it’s the experiences and the mindsets that influence a school’s culture. Dr. Lucas and I really believe in student voice and faculty voice. That has nothing to do with our gender. Those are mindsets we both happen to bring to the role.

RN: Yeah, I just think it’s a great role model to show a K–12 institution especially. We’ve written articles in the newspaper about the lack of diversity in heads of school and I felt like I had to mention it just because it is so rare.

AS: I suspect and hope that just by having us here more girls will step into leadership opportunities and feel empowered and boys will see that girls are awesome counterparts. From my experience, the strongest decisions come from the most diverse conversations. The ideal collaborative group is one in which people are coming from a lot of different backgrounds. It’s not just gender; it’s not just age, but it’s racial and ethnic backgrounds, it’s religious affiliation, it’s political affiliation, it’s sexual orientation, we can go on and on about those specks of identity. It’s ableism, right? Have we lived with illness in our family? All of that informs how we make good decisions, informs our creativity, informs our understanding of the world at large, and enables us to be more innovative over time.

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**The Second Mountain** by David Brooks. There’s much in Brooks’ book to learn and to love: the encouragement to “transcend the self and care for others”; the distinction between happiness, which we can create and is pleasing, and joy, which seizes and transforms us; and the inspiration to “build a culture that steers (us) toward relation, community and commitment.”

**Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do** by Jennifer Eberhardt, professor of psychology at Stanford University. A leading expert in this new field and a frequent consultant to law enforcement, start-ups, and schools, offers evidence of the subtle and sometimes significant impact of unconscious bias. Her books challenges us all to look deeply and make choices that support equity for all.

**Maybe You Should Talk to Someone** by Lori Gottlieb. In addition to contributing to *The Atlantic* and NPR, Gottlieb is a practicing therapist in West LA. She peels back the curtain and writes about both being a therapist and going into therapy herself. I cried and laughed and then laughed some more as her words made me ache, rejoice, and take a good look at myself.

**Simple Cake** by Odette Williams. In high school I discovered that baking brings me joy and brings joy to others. Williams and I are on the same page. She writes, “There’s nothing as comforting as the smell of a cake baking when you walk into a home. It smells like love.” And who else has recipes for a “Back to School” Cake, a “How Did you Get So Big?” Cake, a “Self-Care” Cake, or a “Bribery” Cake?

**Voice Lessons for Parents** by Wendy Mogel. Mogel, author of *Blessing of a Skinned Knee* and *Blessing of a B Minus* understands the challenge of parenting. In this book Mogel offers concrete advice, delivered with her characteristic humor, for how parents can talk with their children to connect, to coach, and to love.

**Joyful: The Surprising Power of Ordinary Things to Create Extraordinary Happiness** by Ingrid Fetell Lee. In a somewhat counter-cultural move, Lee asserts that while joy can come from within, our external world also brings joy. She shares insights and practical advice using simple shifts to create additional joyfulness to our lives.

**El Deafo** by Cece Bell. My son’s second grade teacher recommended this graphic novel to me as one he would likely enjoy. I picked it up reluctantly, as graphic novels generally aren’t my thing. This one, however about a young hearing-impaired student’s efforts to make friends in school, is a gripping empathy-builder and expanded my understanding of deafness and my appreciation for the genre.

**The Coddling of the American Mind** by Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt. Haidt and Lukianoff begin by examining the recent friction on college campuses over diversity and inclusion. They then loop back to examine current parenting practices as a root cause for the current challenges on campus. Theirs is a fresh, challenging, and provocative perspective.

**Podcasts**

**WorkLife with Adam Grant.** A professor at Wharton, Grant studies organization psychology. In this podcast he interviews fascinating individuals with incredible stories about their successes and failures. He taps into research in psychology, sociology, neurology, and economics and delivers insight with humor and a slight edge. I’m a fan.

**Trader Joe’s (Inside).** I’m not just a loyal Trader Joe’s shopper, I’m hook-line-and-sinker sold on their brand, from the quality of the food, to the interesting (and sometimes unexpected) items, to the experience they create for shoppers. This podcast offers a behind-the-scenes glimpse into their culture, products, and purpose.

**99% Invisible.** This podcast with Roman Mars looks at the hidden forces that shape our culture. Fascinating and unexpected.

**Trained.** Nike knows excellence is developed over time, through a deliberate, holistic approach. Here they offer the newest insights about training, nutrition, recovery, and sleep.