

## Leadership 101: Building Trust and Relationships

By Dr. Marylouise Fennell and Dr. Scott D. Miller - *College Planning & Management, August 2010*

Nothing is more essential to a presidency, especially in the first 90 days, than building trust, loyalty, and enduring relationships. In their zeal to demonstrate success and momentum, new CEOs too often allow relationships to take a back seat to tasks. This is a potentially lethal mistake because, as globally recognized expert on leadership Michael Maccoby, author of *The Leaders We Need: And What Makes Us Follow*, observed, "Loyalty creates loyalty, and it is essential for a leader to have a loyal team."

Leaders must be loyal to the people who work under them, added Yash Gupta, dean of Johns Hopkins' Carey Business School.

One of our longest-serving trustees, a nationally recognized leader in his industry, recently noted that in his 50-year career, "in those [divisions of] my organization where performance exceeded my expectations, it was always because of the personnel.

"I've learned to both hold [employees] accountable and to hold them in utmost respect," he pointed out.

In his new book, *The First 90 Days*, author Michael Watkins emphasizes building a road map by negotiating success, achieving alignment, building your team, and creating coalitions.

"The right advice and counsel network is an indispensable resource," he said.

Here are some other things that we've learned are critical to effective team building in young presidencies.

### Listen and Learn

Cultivate active listening skills. Listening for meaning, observing body language, and noting what is left unsaid are among the

most crucial – and underutilized – leadership skills. A common thread among the countless tributes to the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy is that he listened to everyone, remembered, and followed up on small details: birthdays, anniversaries, and other significant milestones. One long-time dean and professor who mentored dozens of students met with a prominent alumnus nearly 30 years after he retired. The former recalled, "He must have asked questions for the first 30 minutes!"

### Be Visible

Don't "hole up" in your office. Appear energetic, optimistic, futuristic, dedicated, and visionary. In the first 90 days, we suggest: making contact with all of your main constituent groups, in person if possible; begin calling and visiting your top 50 donors prospect list; and visiting editorial boards of area newspapers. Eat in the cafeteria, walk the campus, and attend campus events (even if on a "fly by" basis). Presidents sometimes mistakenly assume that their presence at a small campus athletic event, for example, won't be missed; these occasions are very meaningful for students, families, and young alumni.

### Help Everyone to Win

Ask about sick children of staff members. Help a young faculty member. These small kindnesses will pay huge dividends later. Foster and cultivate relationships by Twitter, e-mail, phone, and handwritten personal notes.

Continually network; we find that about two dozen key relationships keep giving back to us in support, counsel, affirmation, and friendship.

### Small Gestures Count

Finally, never underestimate the power of a small, symbolic gesture to forge ongoing loyalty. "Small gestures can often mean more than sweeping ones," noted Gary E. McCullough, president and chief executive of the Career Education Corporation. McCullough recounts the "Lesson of the 38 Candy Bars" from his former career as a U.S. Army platoon leader at Ft. Bragg: "The commanding general asked a vehicle driver what he could do to improve conditions for him in the field.... 'Sir, I sure could use a Snickers bar,' was the reply. A couple of days later, a box showed up for the private, filled with 38 Snickers bars, the number of soldiers in the platoon. From the day onward, we would've followed the general anywhere!"

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