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LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION PLANNING AT ALL LEVELS SHOULD BE AN IMPERATIVE STRATEGY

Dr. Scott Miller
President
Bethany College

Marylouise Fennell, RSM
Principal
Hyatt-Fennell

With some 50 percent of all college presidents at age 61, or older, according to a recent American Council on Education report, many campuses will experience significant change in leadership in the near future. Further, these shifts will not be limited to the presidential level; because changes at the top usually result in replacement of a number of senior personnel, an institution stands to lose momentum, vision and significant funding without a solid succession plan in place.

Unlike corporate America, which has witnessed countless quick internal appointments during recent transitions, higher education has not actively embraced the importance of this ongoing and vital process.

In the words of our colleague Dr. Jack P. Calareso, president of Anna Maria College in Massachusetts: "Succession planning is really about leadership. . . it is developing a clear roadmap for the future and ensuring that strong leadership will be in place to guide the institution."

Further, Calareso continues, "Succession

planning is more than thinking about the next president. It is just as important in anticipating needs at every senior level of the institution, developing internal candidates and being prepared for a search."

Therefore, it is critical not only for institutions to begin ongoing discussions about succession planning now, but also that these conversations include the following steps suggested by Dr. Calareso in a recent conversation:

- *Defining clear timelines and processes* for selecting an interim administrator;
- *Delineating the profile* of the desired leadership qualities, skills and experience;
- *Engaging the best consultant* to conduct the search for a permanent replacement;
- *Identifying a search committee*; and
- *Preparing for the transition and induction* of the new president or senior administrator.

Several of these key elements require special consideration, among them the significance of identifying and *mentoring* internal candidates with the potential to succeed in senior-level positions. Because of shared governance, multiple (sometimes competing) constituencies often play an active role in the search process. They tend to believe that external candidates always bring prestige, translating into enhanced institutional reputation and an ability to attract other candidates from aspirational colleges or universities in future searches.

However, "Insiders have a better ability to understand how to affect change within an

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organization than outsiders typically do,” reports Per-Ola Karlsson, managing director of Europe for Booz & Co. in the corporation’s recent newsletter. Its recently-released survey on succession planning suggests that in terms of their tenure, “inside” CEOs usually outlast those hired from the outside.

“When you do an external executive search and bring in an external leader,” notes Lucie Lapovsky, president of Lapovsky Consulting and past president of Mercy College in New York, as quoted in the Booz & Co. newsletter, “you often lose a year or more of time. Productivity is likely to suffer during the 1-2 years of transition in executive leadership.”

Not only do boards and senior management need to be consistently developing promising administrators who can think strategically, not just tactically, but also they need to take a more proactive role in grooming colleagues as part of the entire succession process, notes John P. Butler, III, Chairman of Barnes & Roche, Inc. “There is often an unwillingness among senior academics to mentor colleagues in lesser administrative roles, limiting their preparation for higher positions,” Butler observes.

Succession planning today will mitigate institutional crisis tomorrow. As Dr. Calareso notes, “Succession planning helps to avoid a leadership crisis.”

“The Lewis Carroll quote, ‘If you don’t know where you are going, any road will take you there’ is a dangerous approach for colleges and universities,” Dr. Calareso concludes.

We couldn’t have said it better.

Dr. Scott D. Miller is President of the College and M.M. Cochran Professor of Leadership Studies at Bethany College in West Virginia. Now in his third college presidency, he has served as a CEO for nearly 22 years.

Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, a former president of Carlow University in Pittsburgh, PA, is senior counsel for the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) and principal of Hyatt Fennell, a Higher Education Search Firm.

They have collaborated on nine books, including “President to President: Views on Technology in Higher Education” (2009) and

“Presidential Perspectives: Strategies to Address the Rising Cost of Higher Education” (2012). Both serve as consultants to college presidents and boards. They are regular columnists for “College Planning and Management” and “Enrollment Manager.”