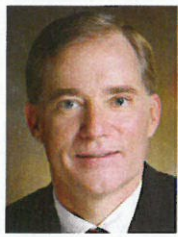


The President and Academics

Cultivate and support senior staff positions for managerial success.

BY DR. SCOTT D. MILLER AND DR. MARYLOUISE FENNELL



COLLEGE PRESIDENTS CANNOT “go it alone.” Although every CEO must select and nurture valued and loyal individuals for his or her cabinet, no senior staff member is more essential to an effective college presidency than the academic vice president, known on some campuses as the provost.



The chief academic officer was once expected to manage faculty and curriculum competently. Today, he or she is also charged with being a presidential advisor, a marketer, a recruiter, a team-builder, a strategist and a change agent — in short, having many of the same expectations as do presidents. Add the

business-model role of chief operating officer in the president’s absence, and it is a challenging job description by any standard.

What strengths and experience should CEOs seek in chief academic officers and other senior staff?

A Visionary Planner

Alan Mullaly was named president and CEO of Ford in 2006, when it was on the verge of bankruptcy. Seven years later, he is widely seen as the man behind an impressive turnaround and a new, transformational organizational culture. Of identifying key senior staff he says, “It is important to have a compelling vision and a comprehensive plan. Positive leadership — conveying the idea that there is always a way forward — is so important because that is why you are here — to figure out how to move the organization forward.”

A Team-Builder

Interviewed on “Leading in the 21st Century” by The McKinsey Quarterly, a leading management journal, Mullaly further notes that effective members of senior management need to “reinforce the idea that everyone is included. Everyone is part of the team and everyone’s contribution is respected, so everyone should participate.”

A Problem-Solver

Chief academic officers and other senior staff can provide crucial support and perspective to CEOs if they anticipate and diffuse potential campus issues before they reach the president’s desk. Effective team-builders solve problems more quickly because they

have already fostered a credible environment in which commitment to success and authentic, dynamic leadership flourish.

A Credible, Trustworthy Leader

Especially for new presidents, and to assure credibility, it is essential that new cabinet picks are widely viewed as ethical, honest, energetic, mission-oriented, creative and transformational. They, along with the CEO, will set the tone and shape the culture for the entire organization.

Author and former president of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) James L. Fisher observes in his book *The Entrepreneurial College President* that it is important for the new president to understand that “to be surrounded by persons of lesser ability or potential is to invite the burden of incompetence and, ultimately, of failure.”

Here are other helpful suggestions designed for new CEOs:

- Prior to arriving, commission an institutional review that will not only point out areas of concern, but also will highlight strengths of the institution upon which a new CEO can build.
- Develop an organizational structure that will ensure presidential effectiveness. Lines of authority should be clearly defined.
- Early on, conduct a senior staff retreat, preferably away from campus and facilitated by an outsider. The retreat should have well-defined, desired outcomes.
- Share credit for success with donors, politicians and other key stakeholders.
- Maintain appropriate distance. The college presidency can be a lonely profession, but don’t look for friendships among your key constituents.

As we’ve often noted, senior staff positions are a direct reflection of presidential leadership. If, like a diligent gardener, you nourish and tend to them, they will, in turn, produce a bountiful harvest.

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