GUIDE TO

Higher Education Presidential Transition

The college presidency isn't what it used to be. Presidents are under increasingly intense scrutiny for things they do and say nearly every day, and yet there are and will continue to be many great leaders who aspire to the role. Being a college president is still special, and impactful. More than ever, it is critical for each higher education institution to identify the right president for its needs, and to support this individual in the transition into their new role to increase the likelihood of immediate and long-term success.

That's what this resource from WittKieffer is for. In the articles below, we explore some of the most challenging and compelling topics related to the presidential search and transition, and provide clear-headed, actionable advice for search committees and boards of trustees to follow. What my colleagues and I have learned over many years in recruiting and transitioning presidents is that there are many ways to find the "right" leader for a given time at a given institution. The following offerings provide essential context for institutions as they move forward in selecting and supporting their next campus leaders.

The presidency isn't what it used to be, to be sure. But never has "getting it right" been more essential to our collective future. If we can be helpful to you as you explore these resources, I invite you to be in touch.

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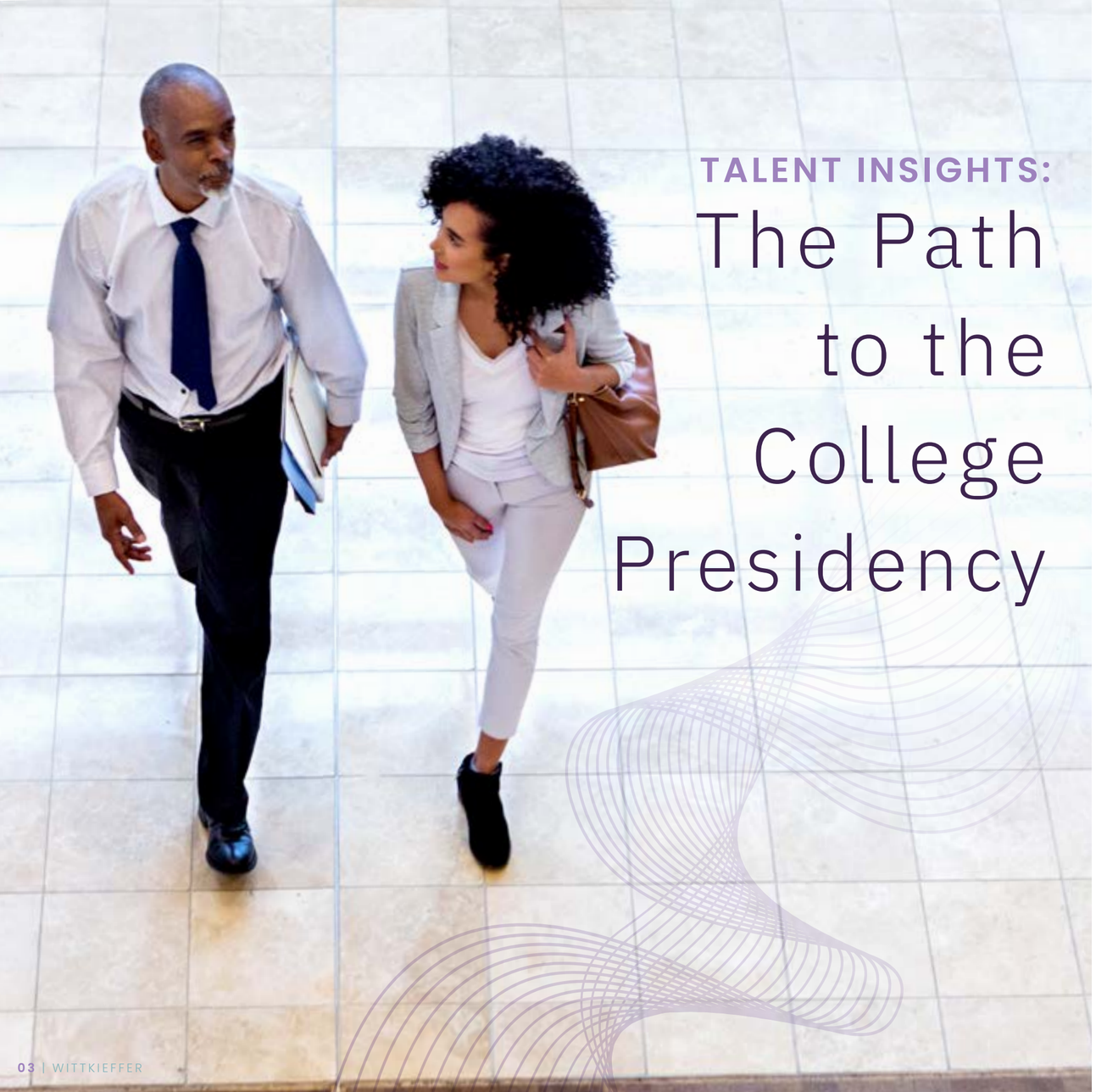


TALENT INSIGHTS:

The Path to the College Presidency

CURRENT TRENDS

GREATER DIVERSITY

- Presidents at leading universities continue to grow more diverse, with more than a quarter (26%) identifying as people of color.
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of WittKieffer's presidential placements in higher education over the past five years are people of color and/or women.

SUCCESSION ON THE RISE

- The average retirement age among past presidents increased to 69.
- Significant proportion of presidents, specifically more than four in 10 (44%), are aged 65 or above. This demographic trend implies an impending wave of retirements.
- Strategic succession planning and nurturing internal talent will be vital for smoother leadership transitions.

PATH TO PRESIDENCY

- More than nine in 10 (92%) of current presidents rose through the ranks in education, taking an average of 24 years to attain the role of president.
- More than three in four (78%) current presidents were recruited externally rather than being appointed from within an institution for which they taught or served in administration. However, in the last two years internal appointments appear to be on the rise.
- Nearly one in five (17%) presidents have served as an interim, either now or in the past.

Source: WittKieffer proprietary research on the career paths of top 130 university presidents (105 national; 25 regional), as designated by *U.S. News and World Report*., December 2023.

DIVERSITY LENS

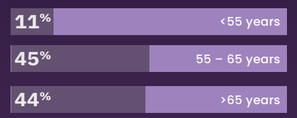
- Presidents are growing more diverse, signaling a gradual movement towards a more inclusive and equitable presidency landscape.
- While gender diversity is seeing some improvement, women, on average, take three years longer to attain the position of president.
- More than four in 10 (44%) university presidents already exceed age 65, underscoring the need for effective succession planning.

Academic Background

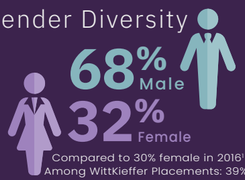
Demographic Profile

AGE +/- 63

Current age, on average



Gender Diversity



Compared to 30% female in 2016[1]
Among WittKieffer Placements: 39%[2]

Ethnic Diversity

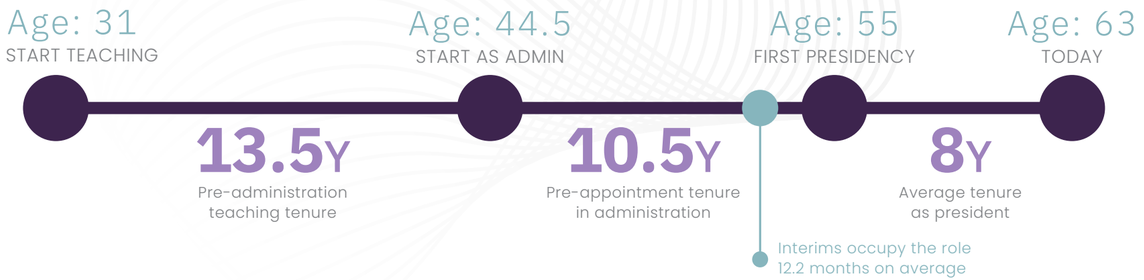
26% People of Color[3]

74% White

Compared to 17% POC in 2016[1]
Among WittKieffer Placements: 32%[2]

[1] Benchmarking data from the previous publications of "The American College President."
[2] WittKieffer's placements over 60 months (Jan 1, 2019 to Dec 31, 2023).
Source: WittKieffer proprietary research on the career paths of top 130 university presidents (105 national; 25 regional), as designated by *U.S. News and World Report*, December 2023.
[3] Black or African American 9%; Hispanic or Latino 5%; Asian 5%; North African or Middle Eastern 3%; Other 4%

Path to Presidency



- Our analysis of previous presidents at leading universities showed an average retirement age of 69 (based on the analysis of nearly 40 former presidents).
- Interim leadership continues to grow, with nearly 1 in 5 (17%) leading presidents serving as interims now or in the past. More than a third (41%) of the 22 presidents who previously served as interims were appointed to the permanent position, and most were internally selected.
- One quarter of current university presidents at leading institutions previously held the role elsewhere. Reasons for accepting new appointments include:
  - Serving at an alma mater;
  - Joining a more prestigious institution;
  - Living closer to family;
  - Transitioning to a better work environment.

24Y

Average tenure in academia before first presidential appointment

CURRENT PRESIDENCY ROLE

Historically, external recruitment for presidents was much more common, but internal appointments are now increasing. In just the last two years, 38% of presidents were internally appointed, much higher than the 22% average across all presidents studied. Average tenure for these leaders exceeds six years.

22%

Internal appointments (after an average of 13.9y at the same institution)

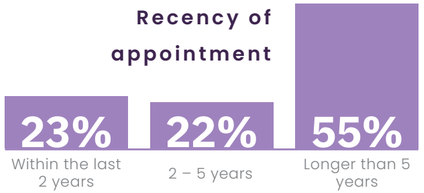
External appointments

78%

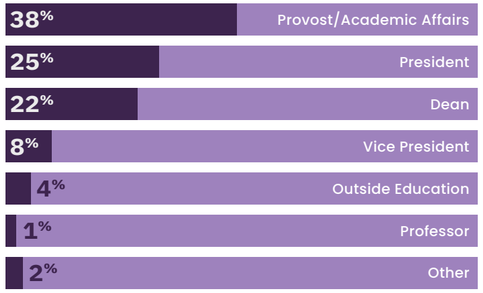
6.4Y

Tenure in current position

Recency of appointment



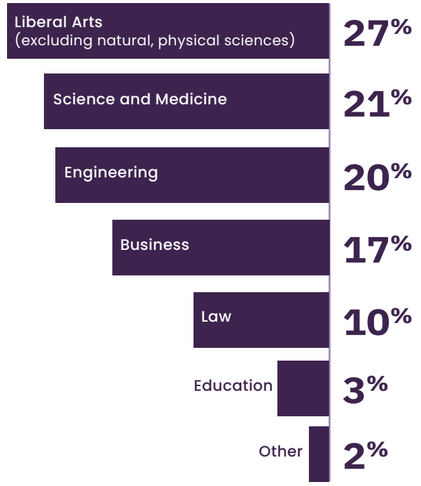
Immediate Position Before Presidency



While the traditional provost path to the presidency remains prevalent, a substantial portion of presidents previously served as deans or in other administrative roles immediately prior to their presidential appointment. A quarter of current presidents came directly from the same role at another institution.

Common Academic Areas

Presidents specialize in a wide variety of academic areas.



Source: WittKieffer proprietary research on the career paths of top 130 university presidents (105 national; 25 regional), as designated by *U.S. News and World Report*, December 2023.

What Do You Really Need in Your Next President?

BY SUZANNE TEER

A presidential transition can be a time of great excitement, anxiety, uncertainty, or all of the above. For the committee charged with finding a new leader, the tendency is to jump right in and get moving on this vitally important hire. But even when it seems crystal clear what is needed from a new leader, the smartest thing the committee can do is to take a step back before forging ahead.

Taking the time to define what your institution needs in its next president — especially during a period of tumult or after the departure of a long-serving CEO — sets the stage for a successful search.

Keep in mind: Not everyone with leadership potential wants to be a college president. It's a thankless, grueling, 24/7 job in our post-Covid era. Showing that your campus has done its homework before recruitment will go a long way toward enticing exceptional candidates to consider such a monumental role.

As a search consultant, I recently supported two institutions that took very different tacks in their presidential searches:

On the first campus, the trustees felt confident from the start that they knew what was needed in a new leader. Representing the majority voice on the search committee, the board's views dominated meetings. As we got deeper into the search process, however, the committee members began to have second thoughts. They realized that the most pressing issues facing the institution called for a different profile of candidate than they had originally imagined. It took additional time to shift gears and refocus the search on candidates aligned with this new profile.

The other institution took a more measured approach from the start. Before opening the search, the committee conducted an organizational-needs assessment and defined the type of leader to meet those needs. Once under way, the search used those written guidelines to frame the process.
Both campuses hired outstanding new presidents. But the first process took a toll on the search committee (and, dare I say, on the consultants) while the second moved forward with clear understanding and direction at each stage.

In too many leadership searches, the planning phase is cut short — which can be a missed opportunity and a time-consuming mistake. Articulating and prioritizing your needs up front will, ultimately, result in a stronger set of candidates who are best suited to meet the unique and up-to-date needs of your institution.

Here, then, are some pre-recruitment steps to consider if you are a trustee or search-committee member:

STEP 1: Conduct a thorough organizational assessment. Your board should conduct this review, with an eye toward defining what the institution needs now and in the years ahead. It should include an honest look at how you stack up against your competition, your financial performance and outlook (including the strength of your fund raising), your progress toward stated strategic priorities (if you have them), and your organizational culture and morale. The results will inform your institution's requirements for its next president and serve as important background information for candidates. Done well, this assessment can also serve as a roadmap for the newly appointed leader. Too many presidential tenures are derailed because the leaders are not set up for success from the start — there is a lack of thoughtful transition planning, onboarding, and support for the newcomer. While search or leadership consultants don't have to be involved at this assessment stage, we can help you think through the process and ask the right questions.

Some institutions — roughly a quarter — do succession planning, a process that often includes organizational assessment. A succession plan outlines future leadership requirements and sometimes identifies potential candidates. Consider a presidential search as an opportunity to create or update your institution's succession plan. It could even lead to the selection of a strong internal candidate who has been groomed for the role.

STEP 2: Go on a listening tour. After the board has done its work, it is time to invite your faculty and staff members, students, alumni, donors and other constituents to share their views. Your search consultant can help you map out this tour and organize small-group meetings, open forums, and/or one-on-one sessions. You could also use a community survey to solicit broad feedback.

Ask people what they see as the most exciting opportunities and the most concerning challenges facing the institution as well as the experiences and skills they believe the next president must have.

STEP 3: Take what you hear to heart. You may or may not believe — or even like — what you learn from these meetings. Regardless, stay open minded. This is the mix of people that your new president will be leading, and it is important to understand what they want in their next campus leader.

If there's a lack of alignment between what the board and the campus desire, now is the time to understand and deal with those differences, to rethink and refine expectations and build consensus.

The trustees on one presidential-search committee I worked with were convinced that a corporate leader would be ideal to resolve the university's most pressing concerns, many of which related to rising tuition and the shifting business model of higher education. Well into the process, they realized that other issues and dynamics had to take priority — for example, community building and concerns about campus culture, student experience and DEI — and an experienced academic leader was needed. The board didn't let go of its desire to hire a business-savvy leader but concluded that now was not the right time to bring in a "nontraditional" candidate.

STEP 4: Put a leadership profile in writing. This document serves multiple purposes. First, it requires you to put into words the agenda for your next president. The exercise alone can help define the new leader's strategic priorities if they were unclear beforehand. Second, the document requires the committee and the board to wrestle with how to share institutional challenges with the public.

Speaking from experience, developing the leadership profile for a presidential search can be a daunting and time-consuming task — but well worth the effort. One committee I worked with was reluctant to share publicly the university's financial circumstances. The institution had been in a deficit-spending position and reversing that trend was a top priority. In the end the committee and the board made the difficult decision to be open and honest about the problem. They needed a president with the skills and the willingness to take it on. One candidate in particular noted that "it was refreshing to see such openness."

The lesson: It's OK to scare off a few candidates who are not prepared to tackle your institution's challenges. The right president for you will be willing to do the work. Some may come fully equipped to act, and others may need more support.

STEP 5: Prioritize. No candidate has it all and no candidate is absolutely perfect for your institution. But understanding campus needs — and being willing to prioritize them — will help you make the best choice among imperfect but highly qualified leaders.

I worked with an institution that ended up with four remarkable presidential finalists. Much to the board's pleasure, it could have hired any one of them. The search chair shared with me that the ultimate decision came down to a simple question: Who will be the strongest change agent? That candidate got the job. Because this board knew what it wanted, listened to people on the campus (who were also ready for change) and prioritized its needs, trustees came to a unanimous conclusion and hired the president that they and the search-committee members were most excited about.

A key priority for many colleges is diversity. Now is the time — before the search begins — to evaluate whether or not your institution will prioritize hiring a woman, a person of color, a member of the LGBTQ community, or other diverse leader. Much more than a yes/no consensus, this question requires an institutional analysis. Will the campus truly welcome someone other than the traditional white, male president? Will such a hire have the support of students, faculty members, administrators, and trustees? Is the college ready for someone who has a unique background and CV, who will talk and think differently from their predecessors, and who will challenge institutional norms and push for change?

So many colleges and universities crave diversity in their next president, and yet their institutional culture remains change-averse and beholden to tradition. Look carefully at what a diverse leader would mean for the future of your institution and how it operates. Be ready to explain to diverse candidates how your institution is positioned for change and how you will support them should they be hired.

"The change in leadership provides an opportunity to pause and consider where the college is today and what it most needs in its next leader," said Donald Gould, chair of the board at Pitzer College, who oversaw the recent search that hired Strom C. Thacker as its new president. Giving all constituencies a voice in that process, he said, "leads to greater acceptance and support of the candidate who is ultimately selected."

A presidential search is an opportunity for people across the institution to envision what is possible under new leadership. It is important to take a step back — assessing needs, gaining consensus, and crafting a comprehensive description of the role — before charging ahead to find the right person to lead your institution's future.

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7 (More) Qualities to Look for in a College President

BY ROBIN MAMLET & SHEILA MURPHY

Years ago, we wrote an essay for The Chronicle of Higher Education on six essential qualities to look for in a college president. They were characteristics — such as a sense of emotional intelligence and an appetite for data and analysis — that search committees had identified time and again. As executive-search consultants with many presidential recruitments under our belts, we think those six qualities are as relevant as ever, but they are no longer enough.

Much has changed during the past few years, of course. In rethinking this topic and consulting with colleagues as well as sitting presidents, we have identified a set of additional qualities that every campus C.E.O. should possess. What follows are seven interconnected traits essential to success in the top job on any campus.

NO. 1: AN ABILITY TO LEAD IN THIS ERA OF INTENSE SOCIAL ACTIVISM.

Even before the murder of George Floyd, the political tenor on college campuses was changing. Conversations between presidents and students, in particular, were increasingly strained and discordant. In the aftermath of Floyd's murder, it became even more essential for leaders to be adept at encouraging civil discourse — especially regarding concerns about systemic racism or about campus buildings, statues, and monuments named after now-controversial figures.

In every presidential recruitment we do now, the institution puts a premium on candidates with a proven ability to:

- Lead "across difference."
- Take a clear and principled stand on questions of deep moral complexity.
- And spur action and results.

NO. 2: EXPERTISE IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT.

The pandemic ended business as usual across higher education. Faculty and staff members are burned out and many institutions are experiencing staff shortages. The Great Resignation is very real on some campuses. Students — especially with regard to their mental health — are under duress and at risk. Search committees seek leaders who can truly empathize, who not only care deeply about the people in the organization but can adeptly respond to their needs.

NO. 3: STRONG ADVOCACY OF A COLLEGE EDUCATION.

Is the degree worth it? The realities of our post-COVID world have sparked renewed questions about the value of the traditional, four-year campus experience. A pervasive idea among more and more parents: If a student can find a good job out of high school, can't that substitute for a bachelor's degree? ("Why can't my kids go to work at GM or Google and get a vocational education there?") Indeed, a recent Georgetown University study found that the pay gap is narrowing between college graduates and the pool of people who are either high-school graduates or only have limited higher education.

What does that mean for today's presidents? They must be skilled advocates of their missions and of the long-view benefits of a college degree. Theirs must be a highly public, countervailing voice that meaningfully influences both the local and national conversations. Today's presidents must inspire in this era of trying circumstances.

NO. 4: AN OPTIMISTIC, OPPORTUNISTIC VIEW OF PARTNERSHIPS.

In the past, when campus leaders talked about strategic alliances, they mostly focused on mitigating some mutual weakness — for instance, three struggling institutions in the same city that join forces to share resources and cut costs. The framing for that kind of partnership is, "We're all in trouble and we need to do something to eliminate redundancies."

Today's savvy presidents, however, seize on partnerships in the spirit of entrepreneurialism and "coopetition." Their framing is, "We're in a position of strength and could become even stronger if we engage with our fellow institutions differently." This new model is not about overcoming constraints, making course corrections, or plugging holes. It is about expansiveness and aspiration — doing something collectively that a single institution can't do well on its own.

NO. 5: A NUANCED UNDERSTANDING OF HOW TO DEFEND FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND IDEAS.

Academe's reputation as a marketplace of ideas — where freedom of expression is valued and protected — has been increasingly challenged of late. Activists on the political left argue that a college or university should not spend money or give voice or visibility to speakers whose ideas they deem abhorrent and antithetical, especially to such deeply held values as diversity and inclusivity. Meanwhile, when an institution rejects or disinvites guest speakers whose messages are said to promulgate hate and violence, or to hurt and devalue certain groups, activists on the political right rush to label it as a devotee of "cancel culture."

These often reductive arguments make front-page news and are one of the most complex issues facing campus leaders today. Presidents give each other knowing glances if they have weathered such storms and spent large sums of college money shoring up security.

This is lose-lose territory for a president, and a symbol of how fractured community life has become. More than ever, search committees value job candidates who have shown they know how to tread carefully among conflicting perspectives on all sides of an issue while remaining effective advocates for the open discourse that is the lifeblood of academe.

NO. 6: SKILL AT DIPLOMACY.

Fissures between trustees and faculty members have multiplied as both sides strive for what each sees as in the best interest of the institution. Many trustees (rightly so) believe we are in an unprecedented era that requires agility and quick, decisive action, while faculty members (rightly so) hold firm to the principles of shared governance, believing that additional perspectives and input lead to better outcomes, and asserting their right to weigh in on matters of institutional import.

A sobering statistic: Faculty participation on presidential search committees has dropped recently for the first time in a century. As a result, presidents must negotiate a fine line, engaging with two parties that are often at cross-purposes and mistrust each other.

NO. 7: AN ABILITY TO WORK FAST.

Higher education has to shift gears more rapidly than it used to. While academic tradition favors discourse, iteration, and inclusiveness, presidents today must make more decisions in less time.

We see that playing out in presidential searches: More and more committees are looking for candidates who move quickly and intentionally toward achieving concrete goals. In today's fast-paced and highly dynamic environment, pace matters. Some academics might label this "speedism" — the idea that faster is smarter and better — but, like it or not, it is a tangible reality of today's higher education leadership that has crept in from the corporate world.

Presidential candidates must check an inordinate number of boxes in order to show they are qualified and capable of leading an institution through complex and nuanced times. There are inherent contradictions in the must-have lists that search committees grapple with every day:

- The faculty wants a scholar.
- The board wants a money-raising entrepreneur.
- Students want an uncompromising advocate of diversity and inclusion.
- Lawmakers want reassurance that political correctness will not rule the day.

On our increasingly polarized campuses — as always, reflective of the state of society — candidates for presidential roles walk a very narrow path. They should prepare for discord, anticipate pushback and resistance, and, above all, recognize the noble calling that is higher-education leadership.

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The Board's Role in a Presidential Search

BY LUCY LESKE

At an American Council on Education meeting some years ago, a prominent university board chair noted that there are only two rules to remember when taking on the board chair role. Rule number one: running the university is not your day job. Rule number two: never forget rule number one.

As an executive search consultant and a member of several boards myself, this advice has served me well over many years of supporting over 75 presidential searches in higher education. The relationship between a board and senior leadership can make or break an institution, and I have seen both and everything in between. Contemporary best practices in board governance assign boards very few actual responsibilities. The relationship is primarily advisory and fiduciary. Outside of consent agendas to approve budgets, financial statements, tax returns, investment policy, tenure recommendations, bond offerings, large contracts and the like, the board's primary role is to serve as a thought partner with leadership.

The most notable exception occurs when it comes time to hire and evaluate the institution's chief executive officer. Successful transition to new leadership depends on the board understanding and carrying out its role effectively during the search process. Whether for a public university system or a private college, the board's role in the search is critical to its success. What follows are key areas where boards can and should exercise their responsibility thoughtfully and with integrity:

MISSION ALIGNMENT

Transition to new leadership is an important time for reflection on the institution's mission. Among the board's primary responsibilities is to ensure the institution is fulfilling its mission. Whether due to a sudden departure or a long-planned retirement, the change in leadership should catalyze discussions at the board level that reaffirm or realign the mission of the organization before heading out to recruit new leadership. Ideally, these discussions should not take place in isolation but allow for input from institutional constituents. Ultimately, if the board can't describe and support fully the mission of the organization, not only will candidates detect misalignment, the mandate for the new president will be muddied.

INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

Boards can smooth the path to presidential success by both conducting honest assessments of the institution's strengths and weaknesses while identifying obstacles to success. This means encouraging current or interim leadership to make tough decisions around longstanding issues that may have dogged the prior administration. Boards should move into the search process fully informed about the institution's finances, enrollment and financial aid picture, compliance issues and legal matters, then identify and/or deal with as many underlying problems as possible before the next CEO arrives.

APPOINTING THE COMMITTEE

When it comes time to begin the presidential search, higher education boards typically appoint a presidential search committee. Some states have well documented procedures for appointing committees and running the search for public institutions, but many more do not and leave it up to the board. Nearly all of the presidential searches I have supported were carried out by a presidential search committee made up of mixed constituents. There are many viewpoints on how large committees should be and who should be on them. Whatever the board's decision, it serves the presidential process and the next CEO best if the board is clear and transparent about the process it uses for committee member selection. Needless to say, any presidential search committee should include multiple board members, one of whom should chair or co-chair the committee. A good rule of thumb is to include members who represent institutional history and the future, diverse demographics including gender and race, and different fields or backgrounds.

THE CHARGE

Once the presidential search committee is appointed, the board must charge the committee. A presidential search charge typically lays out the board's expectations for committee performance and deliverables. A sample charge might include instructions for selecting a search firm, preparing a leadership profile, conducting national or international outreach, selecting and evaluating candidates, communicating updates to the board, and maintaining confidentiality. The board, in other words, is effectively delegating through the charge the responsibility for conducting the search toward a specified goal. That goal is also up to the board – whether the committee identifies a single individual to present to the board of trustees for approval, or multiple individuals, leaving it up to the board whom to select. This is an important distinction and one that should be weighed carefully at the start of the search so that the committee and the organization are absolutely clear on what constitutes a successful fulfillment of the charge.

LEADERSHIP EXPECTATIONS

Since selecting and evaluating the president is one of the board's most important roles, naturally they should be concerned with identifying the top priorities for new leadership to attend to as well as the preferred qualities and characteristics they seek in new leadership. The presidential transition is an ideal time to recalibrate what specific skills and competencies the organization needs in its CEO to address current challenges. For instance, if the organization is facing significant realignment, a leader with change management experience might be the top priority for the board. Similarly, a pending capital campaign indicates the need for an effective fundraiser. The board should actively engage with the committee during the early stages of the search to offer their collective and individual perspectives on priorities for new leadership and criteria for evaluating candidate background and experience.

CULTIVATION AND EVALUATION

Once the search commences, the board should allow the committee to do its work and not second guess it throughout. The chair and trustees on the committee are the board's delegates. As the committee goes through various stages of narrowing the pool, it may want to broaden involvement in the recruitment and evaluation process to the full board. Whether the board meets with a subset of candidates formally or informally in social settings, board members should be expected to assist in actively cultivating candidates and providing feedback to the committee on the candidates they meet.

CONFIDENTIALITY

With the exception of states with generous sunshine laws that require full disclosure of candidate identities throughout the search, every presidential search operates for some or all of its life cycle in confidence, allowing candidates to pursue the opportunity without fear of disclosure to their home institution. The search committee will often sign a confidentiality statement that commits them to silence about candidate identities and evaluations. Board members on the committee must abide by this commitment at all costs in order to maintain integrity of the process and safeguard candidate needs for privacy. It behooves all board members to resist the temptation to "help out" by doing their own backdoor checking on candidates outside of the committee's work. This runs the risk of exposing and embarrassing candidates, candidate institutions, as well as the board's own institution. Boards must respect and adhere to the search committee's confidentiality practice.

TRANSITION

Once the final candidate is identified, the executive committee or chair of the board is responsible for negotiating the compensation package which is ultimately approved by the board. The compensation negotiation is but one element of an effective transition plan, the foundation of the next president's success. Typically appointed by the chair of the board, a transition committee works with the incoming and outgoing presidents, if appropriate, to identify and schedule events, meetings and opportunities for the new president to learn as much as possible, meet as many people as possible. The board and president-elect should arrange early conversations to set achievable goals with key performance indicators so that the board and president are clear on what is expected during the first year and beyond.

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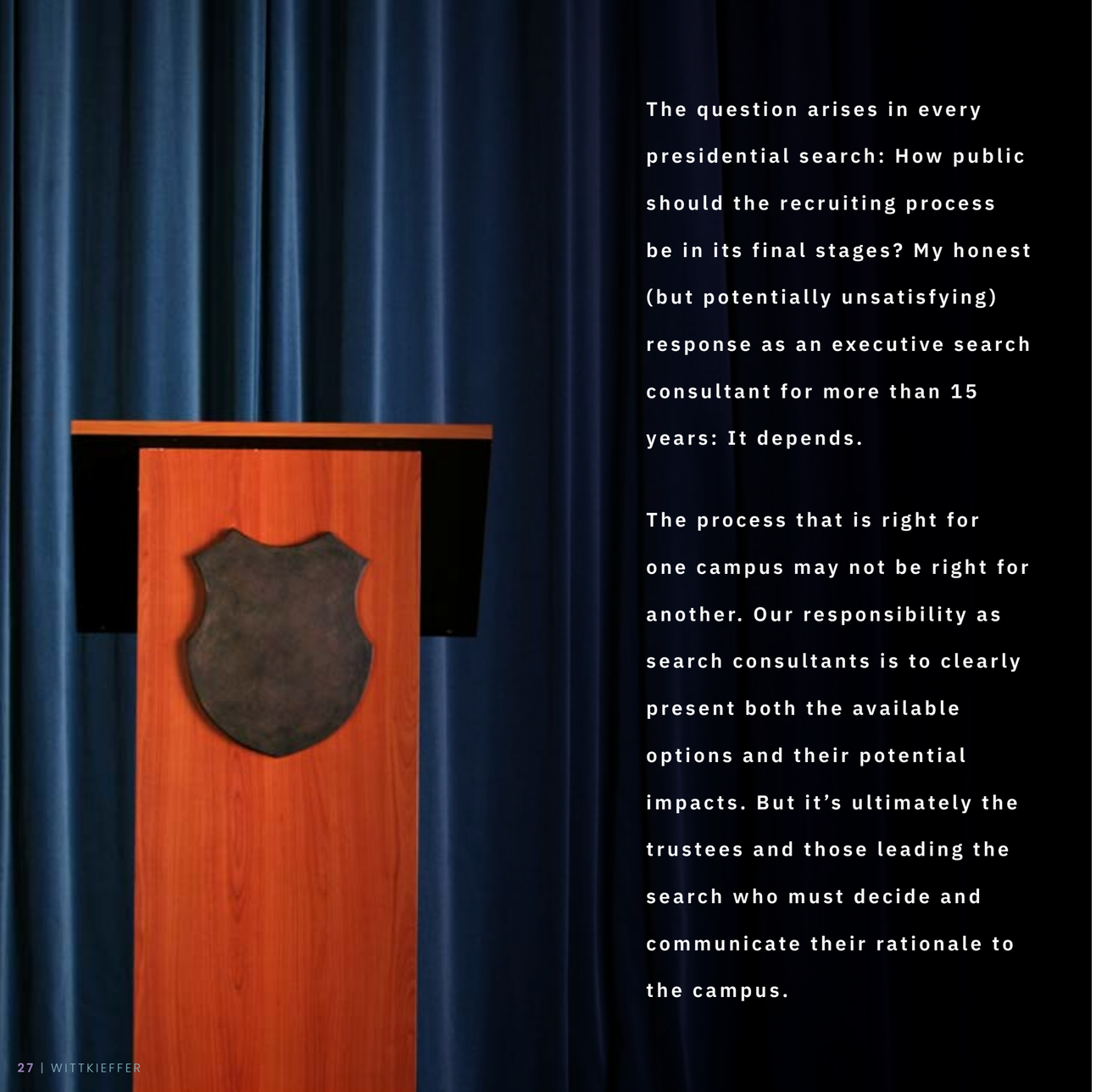
Mark Putnam, president of Central College in Pella, Iowa, proposes that the search for a new president should be one part of a larger transition to stable, sustainable leadership. He says, "Presidential continuity begins with a mind-set shared by the president and governing board that slavishness to immediacy yields only partial solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Lengthening the horizon of thought, plan and decision requires determination to combine relentless patience with relentless execution." Boards are essential factors in the presidential success equation and will serve their institutions best by staying out of the weeds (remembering it's not their "day job") while focusing on the future.

Open, Closed, or Hybrid?

Confidentiality and the Presidential Search

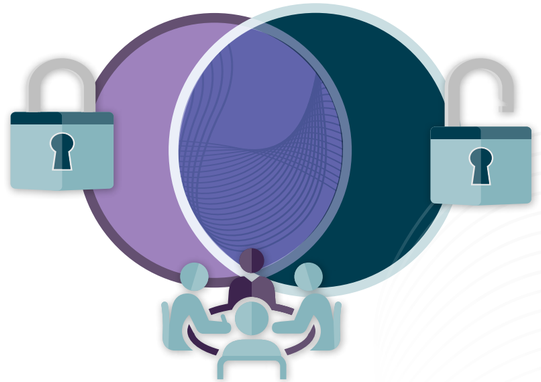
BY RYAN CRAWFORD



The question arises in every presidential search: How public should the recruiting process be in its final stages? My honest (but potentially unsatisfying) response as an executive search consultant for more than 15 years: It depends.

The process that is right for one campus may not be right for another. Our responsibility as search consultants is to clearly present both the available options and their potential impacts. But it's ultimately the trustees and those leading the search who must decide and communicate their rationale to the campus.

CLOSED SEARCH (25%)
Only the search committee and board/hiring authority are engaged in meetings/interviews



OPEN SEARCH (34%)
Candidates are publicly announced; likely includes a campus presentation

HYBRID SEARCH (41%)
Small representative groups (who have likely signed an NDA) are engaged in the late stages

When it comes to confidentiality, we see three types of searches, broadly defined:

1. An **open search** is one in which the search committee does the initial vetting of candidates and then selects finalists who will come back to the campus for public visits. This includes an announcement of names and a public presentation, with no assurance that a finalist's candidacy will not get back to their current employer. Of the more than 70 presidential searches WittKieffer completed over the last four years, 34 percent have been open searches. The majority of those were at public institutions where state regulations required that multiple finalists meet with the campus community.

1. A **closed search** is one in which only the search committee and the board engage with the candidates over the course of the search process. In the past four years, 25 percent of our clients have chosen closed presidential searches.

1. A **hybrid search** is one in which the search committee does the initial vetting and interviews of candidates and then identifies finalists who will meet with select groups representative of key campus constituencies (e.g., faculty members, students). These groups commit to maintaining the confidentiality of the finalists, typically through a nondisclosure agreement. This process can take many different forms and it is the one we have seen clients choose the most (41 percent) over the last four years.

As you weigh which process — and which degree of openness — is right for your institution, here are the three key factors to consider:

HOW INVOLVED SHOULD CAMPUS GROUPS BE IN THE SEARCH?

Every institution has its own history to consider. Still, a "we've-always-done-it-this-way" mentality should not be the leading factor driving your decision on going public in a leadership search. You also must consider the current environment at the institution. What are the campus expectations of how public the leadership search will be, and how much information will be shared as it progresses? How do those expectations align with the governing board's preference? How might the search process, and the degree of openness, affect the next president's transition into the position?

Open searches lead to significant campus debate and discussion across a variety of constituents. Hybrid searches can vary greatly in terms of how involved and informed various groups are during the end stage of the process. In some hybrid searches, a very narrow group of people (members of the departing president's cabinet, at a minimum) interacts with the finalists. Other hybrid searches are open to a broad array of constituents, such as one recent search in which every faculty member had a chance to participate and meet all of the finalists after signing a nondisclosure agreement.

If your institution is going to invite people to participate in the search, you must consider the type of input you would like to receive and how much weight it will carry. Search committees and boards can gather campus feedback in a variety of ways — including anonymous surveys, group debrief sessions, and individual conversations.

Outside of the search-committee members, people on the campus often have limited time with finalists and in a structured setting — a public presentation, for instance. That gives the attendees a glimpse into the candidate's leadership, but a narrow one at best.

It's important that the search committee absorb feedback from other constituents but their feedback is only one of many considerations. Ultimately, the search committee and the trustees will have had the most intensive interactions with the finalists across a variety of settings. And the board could very well select a candidate who does not have strong support from professors, students, or other constituents. In that case, it must be prepared to explain and champion its decision.

Campus involvement isn't just about opening up the search so that constituents can provide feedback on candidates. It's also an effective and oftentimes necessary recruitment tool to give the finalists enough information about the institution.

The evaluation aspect of a search works both ways. Candidates are gauging the institution to understand if their leadership skills and experience align with the goals of the place. Ideally, the search committee is representative of campus constituents. But further engagement with campus leaders, professors, staff, alumni, and students provides finalists with helpful details and context around the budget, enrollment, priorities, and organizational culture of the campus, and gives a sense of its people and values.

> *"I learned an awful lot from the faculty, staff, and leadership I met,"* one finalist told me after small-group sessions in a hybrid search. *"It really helped me think about what I would need to do early in my tenure to be successful."*

WHAT LEVEL OF CONFIDENTIALITY WILL DEVELOP (OR INHIBIT) THE CANDIDATE POOL?

The clear downside of a more-public process is its impact on some candidates' willingness to put themselves forward for the job. We live in a time where information and opinions are ubiquitous and have the potential to live on the internet forever. In a shortlist of four finalists, each of them must seriously weigh the risk versus reward of pursuing a position that they have a 25 percent chance of getting. Some candidates may view their odds of being selected as even lower if there is a strong internal candidate among the finalists.

Sitting presidents are considered to be the group least likely to pursue another presidency in an open search. Each has a lot at stake in their relationship with their current board and in their ability to raise funds and advance strategic goals — all of which is jeopardized when word gets out that they threw their hat in the ring to lead another institution.

But we also see leaders in positions further down the organizational chart who cannot be public finalists for similar reasons. I regularly speak with provosts, vice presidents, and deans who are concerned about the reaction of their current boss if word got out, or worry about how the news would damage their relationship with their faculty. Others have put themselves forward in a public search before and, in doing so again, fear being seen as not committed to their institutions.

My president is supportive of me taking this step in my career, but being a public finalist in a search again would cause too much disruption on our campus,

one sitting provost told me after having recently been named as a finalist in a presidential search.

In an environment in which administrative turnover has become more frequent, the decision to be a public finalist can have real consequences for one's career and ability to lead at their current institution.

There are ways to minimize the impact on candidates. In an open search, their names and résumés can be put behind an internet firewall that requires credentials to access. But that can be of limited help, given that names can easily pass through the gossip network. Likewise, presidential searches often have media attention that can lead to names being widely publicized.

Even in hybrid searches that utilize nondisclosure agreements, the possibility exists of confidentiality being breached. As a general rule, the more people involved in a search, the less likely confidentiality will be maintained. These are factors that candidates have to weigh in their pursuit of a new role.

Comparing candidate pools across dozens of searches, my fellow consultants and I can say, unequivocally, that an open search narrows the candidate pool. But that does not mean that a great candidate cannot be found within that smaller pool. An institution simply has to weigh that reality against how its campus culture values openness in a leadership search.

HOW MUCH WILL CONFIDENTIALITY INHIBIT THE VETTING OF CANDIDATES?

A key argument in favor of an open search is that it allows you to leverage networks to investigate each finalist's background. Once a name is announced publicly in an open search, it's common for administrators, professors, and staff members at the hiring institution to reach out to friends and colleagues at the candidate's current and former employers. Or, hearing news of the search, people from the candidate's present and past may also reach out to the search committee, the board, or others with unsolicited (and sometimes anonymous) information about a finalist.

The danger is that, while some of the information coming forth will be insightful and valuable, another portion of it could be misleading, false, and damaging. When candidates have been in administration long enough, odds are high that they will have made their share of unpopular decisions. Critics affected by those decisions may have an ax to grind. Difficult choices are the norm for leaders these days and few people know all of the context behind what may have driven a particular decision.

Such negative reports are unavoidable in an open or hybrid search. Certainly they should be vetted further but they should not be an automatic disqualifier. That is equally true of negative media reports: There is often more to the story than what was published. We regularly read unfavorable articles that offer one side of the story, but not the candidate's version of events. There are many personnel and other sensitive matters that a leader cannot and should not discuss publicly.

Consider the sources of negative information and their motivations. Do they seem to be trying to discredit one finalist in favor of another? We see that occur when a particular campus group is out of alignment with the broad direction of the institution or the perspectives of the board.

Ultimately, the search firm, search committee, and board should be deeply engaged in the vetting process. They are responsible for exploring potential problems and assembling a well-rounded picture of the finalists over the course of the search process. Most search consultants have national networks that can be leveraged to the advantage of clients. However, we also encourage search-committee members to leverage their networks and be involved in the vetting process. A thoughtful, coordinated approach can lead to a thorough and equitable vetting of candidates.

Boards and search committees must weigh a variety of factors in deciding which shape their presidential search should take. For some institutions, a more-open search provides an opportunity for healing or demonstrates a commitment to shared governance. For others, a seasoned leader may be required to move the institution forward and confidentiality will help attract more of those candidates. The hiring of a president is perhaps the most significant charge of the board, and that body will have to make the decision that it believes is in the best interest of the campus.

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The Best Search Committees

BY ZACHARY A. SMITH, Ph.D.

Higher-education search consultants – people like me who manage and help steward what is often the bumpy recruitment process of academic leaders – do our work in close collaboration with campus-wide search committees. Such committees are unique to academe, a byproduct of shared governance. My fellow consultants working on executive searches in other sectors like to joke, "*How do you finish?*"

As a former campus administrator and now a recruiter for higher education, I've had the opportunity to observe hundreds of campus search committees. Some are highly productive, with members who are focused, efficient and collaborative. Others are less so – spending hours, for example, debating missing commas, H-indices, or unfounded assumptions about candidates. Search committees, by nature, are imperfect and varied.

Every so often I have the pleasure of working with a committee that seems to get how to carry out its charge expeditiously and effectively. I'll think, "This is the best search committee I've ever seen." What makes it so? Allow me to offer a few defining characteristics. Invariably (and in no particular order) this type of committee:

APPOINTS A STRONG CHAIR.

So much of a search committee's success flows from this one person. What makes a strong chair? A thick-skinned individual who can stand up to a sabotaging committee member. Someone who leads by example and provides opportunities for everyone on the committee to speak and be heard, but has the strength to push back against those who filibuster or try to control committee outcomes. Good chairs express their own opinions but also put personal biases aside for the greater good.

A strong chair keeps the committee on task and moving forward. Committees need an appropriate (and, these days, increasingly aggressive) timeline, and it is the chair's responsibility to avoid unnecessary delays. When a committee is deadlocked, the chair must make difficult decisions, all while balancing the best interests of the institution.

During a search the chair becomes the public face of the institution for top candidates, speaking with them directly, hosting campus visits and dinners, selling the merits of the campus, and ultimately helping the new hire make the transition into the job. It is no easy task.

SOLICITS BROAD INPUT.

Good committees appreciate all voices. Not all of those voices have comparable credentials, but their varied perspectives support collective, thoughtful decisions. The corollary here is that all committee members must be dedicated to asserting their opinions.

FOCUSES ON THE KNOWN.

Search committees can fall victim to making hasty presumptions about candidates:

> Why would Candidate A want to relocate to our area?
>
> Candidate B is clearly using us as a stepping stone.
>
> Google says that Candidate C's former student's student was caught plagiarizing — she must have known, which gives me reservations about her.

And my personal favorite:

> I hear that Candidate D is in another search; we must be his backup plan.

Good committees don't get caught up in speculation. They understand the risk in presuming a candidate's motivations before speaking to that person. A good search consultant, by the way, contributes by keeping the focus on the known and filling in details that may be lacking.

LISTENS TO THE SEARCH CONSULTANT.

Of course I'm biased, but let's apply some logic to that statement. An institution hires my company to provide advice and experience. We are experts at managing executive leadership searches, in the same way that committee members are specialists in their academic fields. We have talked to thousands of candidates and worked on hundreds of searches. We know the hard questions to ask, the red flags, and the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate pool. We apply a level of due diligence during the search that removes significant risk from the process.

Some committees are tempted to ask the consultant to leave the room during candidate interviews or critical discussions. I was once asked by a faculty member to stand in the hall during committee deliberations. Fortunately for me, the committee chair pushed back and encouraged me to stay.

My point is that search committees should listen carefully to their consultant. Whether or not our advice is followed is ultimately up to them.

ADVANCES CANDIDATES ON POTENTIAL RATHER THAN EXPERIENCE.

That might sound counterintuitive, but those of us in the search business know that a candidate with high potential is often the best candidate.

Good committees focus on competence and fit over work history, so long as candidates meet appropriate levels of experience and job requirements. Soft skills and qualities — like work ethic, social and political acumen, diplomacy, leadership presence, and effectiveness — are often better predictors of success in a position than experience alone.

BALANCES EVALUATING WITH SELLING.

For academics, it's second nature to question and contest, and vetting candidates is a primary charge of the search committee. But the strongest and most effective committees know how to do this with sincerity and warmth. They understand that the candidate is interviewing them as much as they are interviewing the candidate. They balance evaluating the applicant with selling that person on the opportunity.

I have seen strong candidates withdraw after being treated poorly by search committees. Something that committee members should keep in mind: The best candidates are going to be the least tolerant of bad committee behavior. Desperate or over-eager candidates are more likely to overlook an inappropriate comment or the committee member who is paying more attention to a smartphone than to the candidate. Likeability, effort, and attentiveness matter on both sides of the hiring table.

MAKES DIVERSITY A PRIORITY.

The best search committees not only advocate for inclusion and diversity but ensure that semifinalist and finalist pools present candidates from different molds. I believe committees (in addition to consultants) have an obligation to be proactive in recruiting a diverse pool.

So the next time you are asked to serve on a search committee, take some time to reflect upon these and other characteristics that can make it great. Applying what you learn increases the likelihood of hiring the right person.

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How Search Committees Can Benefit from Intellectual Humility

BY MICHELLE JOHNSON

Often during an emotionally-charged discussion, my husband or I will make a claim of some sort that isn't, on its surface, open to debate: "*It's important for kids to participate in team sports*," one of us might say. To this the other might challenge the assumption: "*But what if their talents lie elsewhere?*" The clear (and tension-inducing) implication is this: *Have you considered the possibility that you're mistaken?*

This kind of interaction is a way of playing Devil's Advocate, a concept that's been around long enough that we all understand its purpose. We can play Devil's Advocate for others, but we can also play it for ourselves, as a way of reexamining our beliefs and opinions. There is now a more expansive version of this concept, and it has a new name: Intellectual Humility.

In short, intellectual humility is "the acceptance that one's beliefs and opinions could be wrong." (See also: The Joy of Being Wrong.) It is in short supply in this hyper-divided world. According to one study, four out of five people believe that, when faced with a disagreement with another person, they themselves are in the right. In certain situations, the lack of intellectual humility can negatively impact how we make decisions about some really important things. There is an increasing amount of research into the idea of intellectual humility, from where it comes, and how it (or the absence of it) impacts individuals and groups.

I've been reflecting on this concept. In addition to improving our interpersonal relationships, developing this "IH" muscle could have significant impacts in our professional lives. As an executive search advisor, I often encourage clients to keep an open mind in evaluating candidates and to ensure critical thinking skills are engaged throughout the process. Now, I've begun to discuss the concept of intellectual humility and its importance in the process of finding and selecting a new leader for an organization.

If you were to observe an executive search process in action, you probably wouldn't notice any significant deficiencies. I have yet to meet a search committee member who doesn't take their responsibility seriously. They show up for meetings. They actively listen to the insights and information we provide, and they engage in thoughtful discussion with their committee colleagues. They understand the incredible privilege and responsibility that comes with serving on a search committee that will ultimately identify and recommend a successful candidate to lead their institution into the future. (This is not lost on search consultants, either… leading an executive search is an incredible honor, and collectively, we feel enormous pressure to get it right.)

However, even the best-intentioned search committees can conduct a substandard recruitment if members don't entertain the possibility that their long-held beliefs and their instincts about candidates could be wrong.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

It is helpful to see how different search committees might, or might not, use intellectual humility to their advantage. Let's consider Search Committees A and B:

Search Committee A (Lacking Intellectual Humility):

- Treats the search firm as a vendor, as opposed to a strategic advisor and partner with whom responsibility for a positive outcome is shared.
- Has a narrow view of the type of candidate who will be successful in the role.
- Underestimates the degree to which implicit biases influence decision-making and/or opts out of educational opportunities to become better informed on these matters.
- Places too much weight on candidate interviews without fully considering the various other data points that emerge throughout the course of a search (e.g., insights into their depth and breadth of experience, DE&I considerations, the results of psychometric assessments, information gleaned through reference checks and background reviews, etc.).
- Forms an opinion about a candidate — often very early in the process, when less information is known — or "goes with their gut", without examining evidence, analyzing assumptions, and acknowledging implicit biases.
- Can suffer from fear-based thinking, often choosing the "safe" candidate, which may not be the candidate best-suited for the organization given its leadership needs and strategic priorities.

Search Committee B (a High Degree of Intellectual Humility):

- Understands and appreciates the importance of a disciplined, comprehensive process, using executive search consultants (if they have been retained) as trusted advisors.
- Views an executive search as an important investment of time and resources, and understands the potential return on that investment for the organization, its staff, patients, and community for years to come.
- Welcomes the growth that comes with learning new insights and information during the course of a search, including education on implicit biases that often emerge and can derail the decision-making process of an otherwise well-intentioned search committee.
- Recognizes — and calls out — biases when they occur. Examples from actual search committee members: "I realize I have an affinity bias here, so I would like to know what others feel about [candidate name]"; and, "I'll hold my opinion until after the straw poll. I know we're supposed to be careful about conformity bias."
- Has the creativity and intestinal fortitude to consider qualified candidates from different backgrounds, many of whom bring new perspectives, represent next-gen leadership, and/or are capable of leading transformational change.
- Is willing to think outside the box, broaden the scope of a search, and uncover talent in new and different places.

GETTING HUMBLE: TIPS FOR TRANSFORMING A COMMITTEE

How might a search committee reframe its thinking and tap into individual and collective intellectual humility? A few recommendations include:

1. **CHECK EGOS AT THE DOOR.** Discuss the concept of intellectual humility and create a safe space for committee members to be vulnerable and open-minded. Ask committee members to entertain the possibility that some of their thoughts, ideas, and perspectives could be misguided or incomplete.
2. **CHECK YOUR BIASES.** Be aware of members' predispositions and potential biases (about gender, race, age, and so on) that can creep into a search process. Combat them by openly discussing common implicit biases, seeking training or coaching, or even taking Implicit Association Tests through Harvard's Project Implicit. My colleagues in higher education have worked with committees who designate a "bias disruptor" for search committee processes.
3. **PAINSTAKINGLY CRAFT A COMPREHENSIVE LEADERSHIP PROFILE.** The process of outlining the job specifications and expectations for candidates allows the committee to discuss, specifically, what it wants in its next leader and the various types of candidates it will consider. Getting input from all committee members plus a wide variety of constituents will help the committee to question its assumptions and draft language that, while specific, leaves the door open to an unconventional or "out of the box" leader.
4. **DESIGNATE A DEVIL'S ADVOCATE.** Ask someone on the committee to serve as Devil's Advocate during deliberations. This person might ask questions such as, "Why are we placing so much emphasis on years of experience?"; or, "Couldn't this candidate gain the required financial knowledge if we asked them to work closely with our CFO?" Your search consultants can (and should) play Devil's Advocates as well.
5. **PAUSE BEFORE PICKING FAVORITES.** Encourage committee members not to fixate on one or more candidates until enough information has been gathered to make educated decisions. It's fairly common for a candidate to wow a committee in an initial interview, only to lose their luster once the committee digs deeper into their motivations, past performance, or suitability for the role. Trust the process of gaining knowledge about candidates over a period of time and coming to agreed-upon decisions as candidates progress through the semi-finalist and finalist stages.

Intellectual humility doesn't come naturally to many of us. It requires self-awareness, a growth mindset, and a learning personality. It is something to be honed over time. Since search committee members spend countless hours together over the course of a recruitment, they can become increasingly open to the possibility that they may be wrong and that others' opinions may be right, or at least that an intellectually honest and open process will yield the best candidate selection. And through such a process, the hope is that the newly hired executive will display a healthy measure of intellectual humility as well.

How to Manage a First-Round Executive Interview

BY RYAN CRAWFORD

As a search consultant for higher education, I have introduced thousands of candidates to executive-hiring committees for the initial interview. Before COVID-19, I would often meet candidates in a hotel lobby and escort them into a room full of committee members. Today, candidates frequently join a screen full of unfamiliar faces via Zoom.

Whatever the medium, as soon as the interview starts, I'm reminded how unique and varied this "first date" can be. Some search committees are warm and welcoming, others come across as rigid and intense. Either way, the initial meetup tends to be an uncomfortable and somewhat artificial setting to enter as a candidate.

Leadership candidates know they must be at their best. Everything they say — and how they say it — will be dissected and analyzed. And the committee members' personal and professional experiences are often projected onto the candidates.

With the right choreography and perspective, however, the delicate dance between candidate and committee can produce positive outcomes. Keeping in mind that the goal of identifying the candidate whose experience and qualifications best align with the committee's expectations, I offer the following advice for how a search committee can best structure and evaluate its first-round interviews.

SCRIPT THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.

Many committee members prefer a free-flowing conversation because that is how they approach job interviews in a one-on-one or small-group setting. However, don't assume that approach will translate well to an interview by a large group. Given the variety of viewpoints on the committee, and the number of topics that it will want to cover, it is better to stick to a script — for the most part. Experience has made me a believer that consistent questioning of candidates leads to a more-level playing field. Some committees may want to limit the number of questions in order to allow time for follow-ups. In planning the number of questions that will fit within the allotted time, a good rule of thumb is to expect a five-minute response to each question.

KEEP QUESTIONS SIMPLE.

I have been a part of many committee deliberations that reached an impasse over the question list. We knew we only had time for 10 questions, for example, but our list ran to 15 so the committee started combining the questions. Resist the urge to shorten your list by drafting convoluted, multi-part questions. The more complicated the questions become, the less likely you are to get thoughtful, substantive responses. If your committee thinks the two most critical qualities for success in the position are experience with strategic planning and resource management, then ask two separate questions on those topics rather than packing them into one. A search committee must learn how to prioritize and make difficult choices. Selecting interview questions is often the first (and easiest) of the many decisions the group will have to make along the way.

ASK BEHAVIOR-BASED QUESTIONS, RATHER THAN HYPOTHETICAL ONES.

For administrative searches, I strongly recommend asking candidates to talk about what they have done rather than what they would do. For example, rather than ask, "In this new role, how would you respond to budget cuts?," it would be more productive to ask, "Tell us about a time that you faced budget cuts in your organization and how you responded in order to achieve your goals." The best answers don't just demonstrate what the candidates did (that's what the cover letter and résumé are for), but give context to explain how they approached different situations, and why. It is easy for candidates to talk philosophically about what they would do, but actual experience and leadership style become evident when candidates provide detailed examples of their past actions.

DON'T LEAD THE WITNESS.

If you want responses that best reflect candidates' leadership experiences and values, try not to point them in the direction you want them to go. I have heard many committees add a preamble to their question, framing it in a way that alerts the candidate to what they want to hear. For example, "We have a history of transparency, open communication and shared governance in decision making. Can you provide an example that best illustrates how you approach making and communicating decisions?" While that may be helpful to the candidate, the best leaders for a position are the ones who will touch on such areas of importance without being prompted.

ASK ABOUT VISION, BUT NOT ONE FOR YOUR INSTITUTION.

One of the most important leadership attributes is the ability to think about the future and help an organization chart a path toward achieving its goals. Understandably, many search committees want to ask, "What is your vision for us?" That puts candidates in an incredibly tough position, given the limited information at their disposal. Before rendering a future plan, most leaders would want to meet with various campus groups, examine internal data, and better understand the history and context of the place. Information gleaned from the position profile, the campus website, and the conversations with consultants is not enough to shape a substantive vision. Instead, focus your questions on what the candidates see as emerging trends in a particular region, administrative sector, or type of campus. Or, ask about past experiences that candidates have had in shaping institutional vision and achieving goals over the course of their careers. A few good questions to get at vision include, "What do you see as opportunities and challenges for institutions like ours in the future?" or "What trends do you think will most affect this particular field moving forward?"

DON'T RUSH TO JUDGMENT.

I have heard search-committee members say, "I know in the first five minutes if someone is a good candidate." But snap assessments can often be offbase. First, some candidates are more adept (and practiced) than others at being interviewed by a large group of strangers — that does not mean they are the best candidates. Second, I've seen many candidates struggle during the Q&A yet shine when they reach the end of the interview and are able to ask questions of the committee and engage in more of a dialogue. It's surprising how many seasoned, capable leaders I have seen walk into a first-round interview and show nerves. Finally, remember to focus on substance, not just style. While presence is important for executive and administrative positions, give a candidate a chance to work into the interview and really listen to what they've done and how they have done it.

KEEP THE INITIAL INTERVIEW IN PERSPECTIVE.

It's an important winnowing step in the process, but remember, it is just one step. And it is a unique environment that can lend itself to favoring charisma. Be sure to take the time to revisit the candidate's application materials. The first-round interview should build on — but not replace — what you have seen in the materials the candidate has submitted. Similarly, remember that more extensive interactions are to come. The first-round interview is a time to assess, "Do we want to know more?" Detailed insights into how successful they might be in the position will come later in the process, based on the campus visit and reference checks. All of these steps are intended to create a more complete picture of the potential hire's experiences and style, and how those things align with your job opening and your institution.

TAKE A TEAM APPROACH.

Remember why a large committee was appointed in the first place: to bring a wide variety of vantage points to bear in assessing candidates for a major leadership position. The best search committees are open and willing to listen to an array of viewpoints. From choosing interview questions to choosing candidates, there will be differences of opinion. But committees that establish an open, honest dialogue and focus on their common goals and the common good tend to end with the best results.

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Negotiating the President's Contract

BY ZACHARY A. SMITH, Ph.D.

While negotiating compensation and terms of the employment contract for a new president can seem like a mere formality, it can also – if mishandled – be the source of unanticipated stress and delay in bringing a new leader on board. In a worst-case scenario, an institution may lose a candidate of choice due to irreconcilable differences over contract conditions.

Institutions and the search consultants they partner with typically provide candidates with the basic components of the compensation package as the search plays out, well in advance of the negotiation stage. The hiring institution and consulting team can learn about any sticking points or deal breakers individual candidates may have regarding compensation, benefits, relocation, and other potential barriers (such as spousal or partner accommodations) and allay them well before it comes time for contract signing. Frequent, clear, and open communication between the candidate and the search consultant early in the recruitment process is necessary to help drive down risk associated with potentially losing a preferred candidate due to failed negotiations.

AT THE START OF THE SEARCH

As part of preparations for conducting a comprehensive search for its next president, the board and/or CHRO/HR team should outline expectations for what it will offer the selected candidate in terms of salary, bonuses (including a potential signing bonus), fringe benefits (such as housing, car allowances, club memberships, etc.) and other key variables of the contract. This preparation requires pulling presidential compensation data from peer institutions – such as schools from within the same athletics conference, peer institutions, and/or aspirant institutions. The search consultant can help the institution think through the market rate for the role, sharing information from recent, similar presidential hires. For most public institutions, presidential compensation data is readily available and thus it can be easier for state schools to draw direct comparisons.

Some institutions will hire compensation consultants with the express goal of assembling a market-aligned but attractive compensation package. This is more common among private institutions who have less publicly available information to draw from in crafting a compensation package for their presidential hire.

One significant caveat: Presidential salaries can change markedly from one year to the next. Given that a presidential search can sometimes take up to nine months to a year to complete, an institution's initial compensation target can become outdated by the end of the recruitment. Thus, the board and/or CHRO may need to revisit comparable compensation data before initiating final negotiations with a chosen candidate.

It's not unusual for an institution to discover that its initial compensation range for its next president is lower than market expectations. The presidency today is a tough, often thankless role, putting additional upward pressure on compensation packages, which have expanded steadily over time. This often creates tension across campus and, particularly for state institutions, often negative public perceptions over the value proposition of how much a new leader is being paid. Boards must consider the optics of hiring a highly paid institutional leader and, therefore, often lean more conservatively when settling on an appropriate compensation package.

To avoid failed negotiations, schools need to prepare early and think of creatively to attract their candidate of choice. To enhance the elements of an offer, including things like a signing bonus, retention bonuses based on number of years in the role, performance-based bonuses, or perks like club memberships, tuition discounts, discretionary funds for new initiatives, deferred compensation, spousal accommodations, tenure (if academic qualifications are appropriate), and so on can often make a big difference.

Ultimately, compensation should not be the primary factor to attract a top candidate to the role, and the negotiation process should be viewed within the broader context of a candidate's overall motivation for and interesting in the position. Compensation is important and must be competitive. However, campus communities will be quick to pick up on someone's enthusiasm – or lack thereof – for the role if the preferred candidate is overly rigid on what they will or will not accept.

CLOSING THE DEAL

How can the institution ensure that final negotiations won't get derailed? As previously mentioned, a candidate should have communicated well before this time regarding any special requests or non-negotiable factors (e.g., a given start date that aligns with their personal/professional needs). The hiring institution, supported by the search consulting team, will have communicated its responses to the candidate and willingness to comply with any special demands. Providing a copy of a "dummy" contract is important at the beginning of the finalist stage of the search so that candidates can carefully review terms and raise questions well in advance. On occasion a candidate will remove their name from consideration over a stipulation in the contract or compensation package they find unacceptable. While not ideal, in most cases this happens well before final negotiations, saving both the candidate and institution the inconvenience and embarrassment of a breakdown in the search's latter stages.

In some situations, an issue arises at the eleventh hour. This might relate to, for example, the president's reporting relationships, authority to hire their own cabinet members, a separation clause, or even a misunderstanding regarding moving costs or housing arrangements. The matter may be something the institution could not have foreseen, such as a sudden material change in the candidate's personal life or ability to carry out their role. Even the most experienced, savvy candidate can get cold feet. Whatever the issue, it is imperative for the board chair or ultimate hiring authority to have hands-on, direct involvement with the candidate, so that the two may iron out potential issues together in good faith. The crucible of final negotiations can be an opportunity for these two key participants to forge a trusting, lasting relationship.

During negotiations with the chosen candidate, every effort should be made to stay in communication with other candidates whom the search committee deemed qualified and deserving of the role. It's not out of the realm of possibility for negotiations with the preferred choice to break down and for the institution to turn to another option put forth by the search committee.

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Final negotiations over salary and terms of the president's contract must be handled with care. It is important to come to agreement in such a manner that everyone involved – and especially the president – feels like the process was conducted with good will and a collaborative spirit. These final negotiations can set the tone for a mutually supportive relationship between the president and board of directors and for success in the new leader's tenure.

Seamless Transitions

BY MELODY ROSE, Ph.D.
& CATHY DOVE, Ed.D.

We've all heard about the criticality of the first 100 days in a new role. But not enough attention is given to the critical period before a new leader steps onto campus. The days and even months before a new leader starts their job are just as essential to ensuring a successful presidential transition.

Presidential success doesn't depend solely on the skills and abilities of the person assuming the office. There must be forethought, planning, and systematic support on the part of the board and institution to enhance the likelihood of initial presidential success and set the stage for what is hopefully a long, accomplished tenure. With intentional planning and a little luck, the presidency will be a joy.

We've all heard about the criticality of the first 100 days in a new role—so true. But not enough attention is given to the critical period before a new leader steps onto campus. Our experience is that the days and even months before a new leader starts their job are just as essential to ensuring a successful presidential transition. While both of us, as former presidents, had terrific board and campus support when we officially started, our observations are based on how much we would have valued even more deliberate activity that began long before we arrived in the president's home on that first (sleepless!) night.

Unfortunately, succession planning, where the transition process is thoughtfully planned for months, if not years, is the exception rather than the rule in higher education. So, assuming the new president is being selected through an open search, it is essential that planning for a successful transition begin in earnest at the start of the search process, well before the next leader is chosen.

Current campus leaders should support their boards and search committees by recommending and launching a Transition Plan. The plan should include three phases:

- **Pre-candidate selection:** From the beginning of the search process until a candidate has been selected.
- **Pre-start date:** Important pre-work that the incoming president should do in advance of their first day in the position.
- **Once on campus:** Transition activities for the new president's first six months in the role.

In this article, we consider the first two phases above, leading up to the first day in office. So much can, and we believe must, be done prior to the start date. In a successive piece, we will outline best practices for the third phase, the first six months in the role.

PHASE 1: PRE-CANDIDATE SELECTION.

As soon as the board has determined that there will be a transition, the transition work begins! Activity often focuses on communications to the community. Steps must also be taken to address the important topics that serious candidates may need to know about, as well as prepare the campus to fully brief a new president on priorities, emerging issues, key stakeholder profiles, and more.

Create a Transition Advisory Council: Foundational to all of this is the early formation of a Transition Advisory Council that will proactively guide the campus, and ultimately support the board and new president during the transition. Thus, we recommend that a Presidential Transition Advisory Council (TAC) be established with dispatch, and well before the president is selected. The TAC should be appointed by the board, outgoing president, and cabinet and be comprised of a small number of the institution's trusted ambassadors, and necessarily include a member or two from the search committee and the board for continuity. The chair of the TAC serves as Champion, Collaborator, and Confidant, developing the Council's charter and eventually working alongside the selected president. These individuals should be selected not by title but by the trust the community places in them and by their ability to help accelerate the president's learning and, therefore, success. They are quintessentially "horizontal" thinkers, motivated by the good of the enterprise not their own units or "verticals."

Anticipate candidate questions and transition needs: Early on, the TAC should establish campus readiness, ensure that a communications plan is in place, and prepare onboarding material that is ready as soon as a candidate has been selected.

Ensure alignment with the search committee: While the TAC can operate independently of the search committee, its work can be informed by information gathered during the recruitment process (e.g., key issues or concerns candidates are asking about). This speaks to our suggestion that one or two committee members also serve on the TAC.

PHASE 2: PRE-START DATE.

This pivotal phase is critical to both positioning the new president from the outset, and preparing them for the myriad people and issues that will be waiting for them on day one. Key activities to focus on during this period include:

Connect the new president and the TAC: The TAC should assist with tactical aspects of onboarding, including the communications plan and introductions, and also point out potential pitfalls that lay ahead. The TAC also advises the new president on the values they wish to convey, how those values align with the institutional mission, and the "voice" the president should establish on campus and off.

Connect the new president and the board chair: Developing a deep president/board chair relationship should begin immediately upon selection, or better yet, beforehand with a thoughtful finalist interview process. A well-designed search process culminates in multiple interactions between the finalist(s) and the board, but especially the chair. In addition to the support of the TAC, the chair should step in with a series of informal calls with the new president leading up to the official start date. These calls can have structure but primarily serve to give the two individuals time to get to know each other and forge a working relationship.

Identify critical issues: Begin advance planning for day one. A typical framework for orienting the new leader and establishing a plan for success should include the following core "PACE" components:

- **Purposeful priorities:** Determine what truly matters and is the best use of the president's time.
- **Alignment:** Take steps to ensure the president is on the "same page" as the board, the cabinet, and the community; this includes time for re-assessment and recalibration if needed.
- **Culture:** The president should be intentional about which aspects of the culture they hope to sustain or shift, with feedback loops built in to allow refinement over time.
- **Energy:** Self-care is critical if the new leader is to find and sustain success

Work on gaps: No candidate is perfect! The board chair, TAC, and incoming president should identify a short list of areas for knowledge development. For example, the new president might want to become well-versed in the academic areas most important to the new institution, as well as study accreditation and audit reports, previous board meeting minutes, and other important documents.

Get a trusted advisor: In today's climate, every president needs a thought partner or advisor. Advisors and thought partners, often former presidents themselves, can provide confidential one-on-one counsel to the new president, apart from the TAC. The official advisor should be an independent thinker with whom the president can test ideas, get clear-eyed advice, and frankly, vent occasionally. With a trusted personal advisor, especially one who has sat in the presidential seat themselves, a new president can have an instant confidant – something not possible to find within the new campus, where literally every person is the president's employee. The advisor should be engaged as soon as the president is named, as they will assist the appointee in developing a 90-day action plan. The advisor may have even been involved in the search process, thereby coming to the advising assignment with institutional awareness and relationships on campus. They also serve as a critical partner with the board, encouraging their meaningful involvement in the president's onboarding process and sharing knowledge regarding proper roles and responsibilities through transition and beyond.

Develop key messages: It is important to craft a handful of critical talking points before engaging with the community. First impressions are often lasting, so a new president should think carefully about what topics to address and how to respond to sensitive issues. The institution's Communications leader can advise this process.

Make friends with the outgoing president (or not): The exiting president has a responsibility to convey publicly and privately their complete faith in their successor. For the institution's benefit, the outgoing president can also accelerate their successor's learning curve and impact through knowledge and relationship transfer. Unfortunately, some presidents leave precipitously, due to a personal or family illness, for example, or irreconcilable differences with the board or campus community. In these unfortunate circumstances, maintaining a healthy distance from their predecessor may be in the new president's best interest. The board may request that other key institutional leaders such as the provost, CFO, key academic and administrative leaders, and community members play a larger role in transferring institutional knowledge and providing a support network before and after the president's start date.

Develop a meet-and-greet schedule: With the TACs guidance, a carefully crafted schedule needs to be created for the first few months of the presidency. Everyone will want to meet the new leader! It is easy to fill a president's day with introductions, which will both exhaust the new leader and leave little time for critical planning and action. The TAC must help prioritize and sequence activities.

The recommendations above beg the question: Is it too much, too soon? Could these activities overburden the newly selected leader, especially as they are transitioning out of their previous position? Potentially, and sensitivity to the president-to-be's capacity is needed. However, we also know that starting a new presidency is akin to drinking out of a fire hose. Campus leadership has a duty to accelerate the new leader's impact and increase the odds of a smooth, impactful onboarding. It is time to consider a well-constructed transition plan table stakes.

Successfully Transitioning as a New President: Remember, You Wanted This

BY BOB DAVIES, Ph.D.

The transition into a college presidency is not just a personal milestone; it is a carefully scrutinized period that can set the tone for years to come. A successful transition builds confidence, while a rocky one creates roadblocks that may be difficult to overcome.

When I was a sophomore in high school, my civics teacher had us watch *The Candidate*, a 1972 movie starring Robert Redford. The film follows an idealistic young candidate, Bill McKay, who unexpectedly wins a Senate race. In the climactic moment, amid cheers and falling balloons, McKay turns to his consultant and asks, "What do we do now?" I had that same feeling in 2009, after being named president of a university in Oregon. Every newly minted leader experiences it — the weight of expectation settling in.

The transition into a college presidency is not just a personal milestone; it is a carefully scrutinized period that can set the tone for years to come. A successful transition builds confidence, while a rocky one creates roadblocks that may be difficult to overcome. As a former university president and now a leadership adviser for academe, I have been through my share of executive transitions. And I've read plenty of transition advice for institutions. Here, I'm aiming to help new leaders execute this vital, sensitive period.

Your presidential transition will unfold in three phases:

- The president-elect stage runs from the announcement of your appointment until you take office.
- Then comes the first 90 days, which is the immersion and learning period of your presidency.
- Finally is what I call the "Go! Phase" — the point at which you shift from learning to leading.

Each phase requires distinct strategies to help you avoid common pitfalls, build trust, and establish credibility. We live in an era when higher education is under tremendous stress, but as my colleague Melody Rose noted in "Why You Should Still Want to Be a College President," the challenges of the role haven't erased its many joys. Your presidential transition can determine how well you will handle the difficulties and enjoy the satisfactions.

THE PRESIDENT-ELECT PHASE: PREPARATION AND POSITIONING

From the moment of the announcement, a new president must manage first impressions. That includes a well-orchestrated press conference that sets the right tone — acknowledging your past but quickly pivoting to your new role with confidence and clarity. The way you handle this period will shape campus perceptions of you. It's best to avoid making ambitious promises or offering prepackaged solutions until you know a lot more about the place. Here's what should be on your agenda as president-elect:

- Gather key institutional reports: strategic plans, financial and enrollment data, accreditation reports, market research, and SWOT analyses (the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats).
- Visit the campus. Meet with key stakeholders, including professors, staff members, students, donors, and community leaders to establish early rapport.
- Begin laying the foundation for your relationships with direct reports, key administrators, and trustees.
- Shape a communications strategy that ensures clarity and transparency across all key constituencies, both internal and external.
- Assess early reputational challenges and potential crises that may require your immediate attention upon taking office.
- Gain a firm grasp of the institution's unique culture, traditions, and expectations to avoid early missteps.

If that sounds like a lot to manage, you don't have to do it all by yourself. In fact, including others in this process offers immediate and lasting benefits. You can secure some help formally or informally.

For example, on the formal side, it's handy to have a transition advisory council, made up of key players from the college and the region. Ideally the governing board will have created such a council by the time your appointment is revealed. But if one is not in place, you can create it with the aid of the board chair, the head of the presidential-search committee, and the departing president.

Speaking of your predecessor, he or she can become a trusted partner in the transition and beyond (depending on the circumstances of their departure). An exiting leader has invaluable insights and experiences, and can share perceptions from the president's chair that other insiders may not fully understand.

Another good source of guidance is former presidents from other institutions. Enlisting one as a senior adviser (or what Chip Conley refers to as a "modern elder") can offer a new leader critical insights into the transition and provide a longer-term view of the position. Many new presidents underestimate the learning curve and the sheer volume of information they must process quickly. A senior adviser from outside the institution can be a trusted confidant who listens objectively and shares applicable advice and knowledge based on lived experiences.

During this phase — which usually lasts between three and six months — a president-elect is very likely to be serving two institutions. Both sets of obligations must be managed, as you balance extricating yourself from one institution and avoiding the common traps of transitioning into your new role. By the time you officially start the job, you should have a concrete plan for your first 30 days in office and a broad road map for the first 90.

Also, before Day 1? Take a vacation (two weeks or more). A well-rested leader is better equipped for the nonstop demands ahead.

THE FIRST 90 DAYS: IMMERSION AND CONNECTION

This phase is about learning the culture of your new campus and building relationships. As a new president, you must be visible — attending events, interacting with faculty and staff members and students, and absorbing the institution's traditions and dynamics. These early days will shape the level of trust and buy-in you receive from the campus community. To make the most of them, you should:

- Avoid talking about your previous institution(s) — people want their new leader to focus on their campus.
- Spend a lot of time listening and asking questions. Develop a systematic approach for listening tours, ensuring that you hear voices from all corners of the institution.
- Identify and execute a few "quick wins" — high-impact, easily implemented changes to demonstrate momentum and responsiveness.
- Work closely with the board and senior leadership to clarify expectations and decision-making processes.
- Strengthen your relationships with the college's external partners, including state and local officials, business leaders, and alumni networks.
- Assess internal power dynamics and identify key influencers within the campus community.
- Develop a solid working relationship with the trustees. Fully understand their expectations: How do they want you to communicate major developments to them? Which types of decisions does the board reserve for itself and which for the president? What specific results does the board expect, and by what timelines?

One of the biggest pitfalls of this phase is prematurely proposing solutions to longstanding challenges. New presidents often feel pressure to act quickly, but resisting that impulse can prevent missteps that damage trust and credibility. By the end of this period, you should have a structured approach to decision-making in place — one that includes a method for evaluating and prioritizing plans and a practice of involving faculty members in meaningful ways early on.

THE GO! PHASE: FROM LEARNING TO LEADING

After 90 days, a new president must shift from observation to action — articulating a clear direction, making key leadership decisions, and starting to shape policy. It's crucial here to balance urgency with thoughtful deliberation. Among your top priorities:

- Make key personnel decisions: Who will remain in the president's cabinet and who needs to be replaced to build a strong leadership team? Those decisions are crucial — in fact, they are, arguably, the most important the president will make. Be intentional and deliberate as you identify each member's strengths and weaknesses in leading their respective areas and in what they bring to the total effort of the team and the campus. Be open, listen, ask probing questions, and observe how they make decisions, interact, and support their peers. Above all, trust your instincts. A good mantra to guide these decisions: "Fire fast; hire slow." That approach minimizes the impact of a bad fit and prioritizes being selective about who will bring value to your team.
- Prioritize major institutional challenges such as budgeting and enrollment strategies, as well as long-term projects that will define your presidency.
- Build a productive, collaborative relationship with faculty-governance leaders. It is amazing what you can learn and gain by walking around the campus and chatting with faculty members in their offices and in hallways. Lead by asking questions and seeking suggestions, and resist the temptation to offer predetermined solutions.
- Strengthen campus culture. Dig into the history of the institution — know its traditions, stories, and fabled leaders. Understand the symbolism of major activities and events. Use your team to prioritize and ensure your active attendance at these critical events.
- Leverage media and public-relations strategies to enhance the institution's reputation and visibility. This is a time in which it is easier to engage journalists on nonconfrontational matters. Use every opportunity when people are eager to learn about you to shift the focus to the university, its promise, and future. You can offer a fresh approach and a sense of enthusiasm.
- Continue to communicate and refine (based on informal feedback) a strategic vision that aligns with campus priorities and expectations. With each conversation you have — by focusing on what you are learning, hearing, and seeing — you will be able to craft an inspiring message for people to rally around.

One of my personal mentors in my first presidency was the late Steven B. Sample, former president of the University of Southern California. As he told me and wrote in his book, *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership*, presidents should make only two types of decisions: (1) hiring and firing members of the president's cabinet and (2) having the final say on far-reaching changes with the greatest potential impact on the campus. The first set of decisions, he said, was the most important because people in cabinet positions make most of the regular decisions affecting the institution.

Here are a few other dos and don'ts, handed down to me over the years, to help you start your presidency:

- When the football team wins, it's because of the players. When they lose, it's the coach's fault. You are the institution's coach.
- Don't let all the positive press releases go to your head — remember, your team wrote them.
- Don't dwell on what you did at your former institution or position. Keep your focus on what's next for where you are at.
- Do remember it's about the campus, not about you. The payoff is that what's good for the campus is usually good for your professional reputation, too.
- Do make time for personal reflection — staying grounded is essential for long-term effectiveness.
- Do take the office seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously.
- In that spirit, I leave you with this closing thought from a dear mentor of mine: "One day, something will go terribly wrong, and when it does, remember: You wanted this job."

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Offense and Defense: A Checklist for Launching Your Presidency

BY MELODY ROSE, Ph.D.
& **CATHY DOVE, Ed.D.**

The success of a college presidency depends on the planning as well as the person. For a newly selected president, it's imperative to approach the transition planfully, working with new colleagues to get acclimated leading up to and following the first day on the job.

The success of a college presidency depends on the planning as well as the person. Well before beginning the search for a new president, an institution should plan for the type of leader it needs for its next chapter, how it will recruit them, and how it will support the leader's success. In a previous article, we wrote about key steps colleges and universities can take before and after the selection of a new president, leading up to the official Day One. This includes creating a Transition Advisory Council (TAC) and identifying a professional advisor to facilitate the selected leader's transition. Together, the advisor and TAC can play an ongoing role after a president takes office, if only as a constant source of information and moral support for the new leader.

For a newly selected president, it's imperative to approach the transition planfully as well, working with new colleagues to get acclimated leading up to and following the first day on the job. We write this article for these individuals, with the hope that it will inform those around them who are integral to their success.

As former presidents, our best is advice is to simultaneously play offense and defense. You'll have priorities and change initiatives you'll want to pursue but be sensitive to the current zeitgeist and adapt to what's happening in the moment on your campus and across academia. Remaining sensitive to the current climate has never been more important than it is now, as higher education experiences unprecedented disruption and uncertainty across multiple fronts. The ability to be attentive to change – or even anticipate it – and to adapt to that change will be critical to a new president's success.

PLAY OFFENSE

- **Create your identity:** A new role at a new institution is a great opportunity to build a new identity while, at times, shedding an old one. Presidents who come from a provost or dean seat need to pivot – relinquishing direct oversight of accreditation, curricula, and faculty to their provost, or inadvertently undermine that critical partnership. Former deans may be suspected of carrying disciplinary biases into the presidency and must pay close attention to their new institution-wide perspective. New presidents from outside higher education may need to work harder than traditional candidates to learn our industry's traditions, lexicon, and processes. An internal hire may have a hard time being viewed as presidential among long-time colleagues in the short run. These particular learnings, based on the individual president's path to the seat, augment all presidents' transition issues, making for a unique set of challenges for each person and creating an even greater need for a thoughtful TAC and personal **advisor.**
- **Leverage an advisor who's been in the role:** Seek out a former president as wise counsel. Lining up an experienced advisor even before officially starting is critical in order to set the right tone on Day One. The advisor can help map out strategy and priorities, and serve as a sounding board from a neutral position. In the current environment, the best advisor has lived through significant change events (e.g., led through Covid) as crises and existential threats are part and parcel of every presidency today.
- **Assess and build your team with an eye toward their ability to handle pressure and uncertainty.** Reconfiguring one's cabinet and broader leadership team is part of any presidency. It is imperative that early on, you build a team that is capable and enthusiastic for the current times and future institutional needs. Along with assessing individuals for their competence and expertise in their functional areas, evaluate them for their resilience, adaptability, and ability to exhibit grace under pressure. We have learned that it is possible for a leader to be technically proficient but emotionally ill-equipped for the moment. Whether done informally or formally via leadership assessments, evaluate whether your team members are pressure-tested and can thrive in this highly ambiguous, volatile environment.Take time to consider team dynamics as well. Even with strong individual contributors, teams can be suboptimal or dysfunctional. New presidents often find it helpful to bring in outside help to review the team and its members and advise on changes if needed.
- **Build personal relationships.** Do a quick pulse check in your community. Knowing what's really happening in classrooms, labs, and dorms requires engaging with people face to face, one-to-one or in small groups. And they need to get to know you. There is no better way to understand your constituents, build trust, and bank goodwill than meeting people in their daily lives. Communicate with them what you know, what you don't know, and when you can follow up with more information. Understand how your community truly feels about key issues.

- **Establish board relationships and set a collaborative tone**. The best presidents request early and ongoing feedback from the board chair to establish trust and make necessary and timely course corrections. The president and board chair will establish a regular cadence of check-in meetings, with more lengthy information sharing during regular board meetings. They will also discuss meeting structures, roles, and perhaps even launch a board advisory process to assess board effectiveness. Beyond the chair, every president must spend time to establish relationships with each individual member of their board.
- **Know what you'll talk about.** And what you won't: Today's presidents are pressed to comment on political and cultural issues often outside the campus walls, expected to represent the institutional viewpoint for public consumption (and critique). Working with the board and your team, determine what territory you'll wander into and what matters you'll refrain from addressing – and why. You shouldn't comment on everything – prioritize expressing opinions on matters that concern your institutional values and mission and where you are aligned with the board. And if your institution does not have guidelines for commentary, consider developing them soon, with board consultation.
- **Embrace cultural conditioning:** All contemporary presidents – regardless of their experience or unique paths to the presidency – face time-sensitive matters requiring decisions upon their arrival. What makes this need for action challenging is understanding the impact of culture. Quick decisions can run headlong into the reality that acclimating to a new institution requires steeping oneself in the environment. And nothing can set a new president back faster than a cultural faux pas or tone-deaf comment, however well-intended. A new president must anticipate and seek close counsel from a personal advisor, the TAC, and trusted internal leaders on how to respect traditions and norms when impactful actions must be taken. Campus constituents will welcome thoughtful change from a new administration as long as it is informed by culture and respects what makes the institution special.
- **Network and make friends:** Recognizing that the presidency can be a lonely position (though one is rarely alone), the new president must seek out presidents and peers across academia who share similar experiences and with whom one can truly commune and commiserate. In our experience, having colleagues and friends in leadership positions outside of higher education is also illuminating – we learn a great deal from how executives in other sectors face their challenges. Find "friends" wherever they may be.
- **Do not abandon vision.** While the current environment is certainly filled with disruptive, even chaotic shifts in direction or context, it is vitally important not to be consumed by firefighting. As the saying goes, do not sacrifice the important for the urgent. While addressing emergencies is vital, retain a "this too shall pass" mentality, remembering that strategic vision will be necessary for your institution's long-term success.

PLAY DEFENSE

- **Get crisis management and communications training.** As former presidents, we can attest that no one ever prepared us for some of the crises we faced. It was baptism by fire but it need not be for you. Insist that one of the early investments in your onboarding is training in crisis management and communications. This may come from an external public relations or communications firm, and it is well worth the investment for when (not if) your first crisis happens. Consider including cabinet members and board leadership in media training as well.
- **Conduct scenario planning.** Today's unprecedented times require planning for potential and present risk, including both fiscal and reputational risks. Work with your team to develop action plans for what-if scenarios: What will we do if we lose a large percentage of our international students? What steps will we take if our research funding is halved? Don't overplan – you can only anticipate so much amid uncertainty – but have a good sense of how to move forward when the next curveball or full-blown catastrophe comes your way.
- **Monitor the media.** In an era of 24/7 news and ceaseless online commentary, know what's being said about you and your institution, almost on a daily basis. Oftentimes presidents are caught off-guard by a media story or message board thread related to important institutional matters. Charge your PR team with setting up Google or other alerts to track online activity and sentiment. Monitoring certainly doesn't mean acting upon or responding to everything said about you (you'll also be judged on your ability to tune out the noise) but don't be caught unaware by what's percolating in the digital universe. Related to the item above, seek out communications training as part of your job transition.
- **Nip crises in the bud and share the good news.** Ward off major predicaments before they gain momentum. Know when a molehill is morphing into a mountain and be ready to address it with support from your team, your board, and your advisor. You won't be able to prevent every crisis but you'll develop muscles and strategies for dealing with each one. And nothing substitutes for risk mitigation better than a consistent flow of positive, genuine achievements shared and celebrated in your community.

WIN THE GAME

At every turn, try to have some fun. College presidencies are some of the most challenging yet rewarding leadership positions, even today. Don't forget why you took the job. Find time to meet with students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Visit classes. Find joy. Being a president is still a privilege to cherish.

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