

Introduction

College and university leaders face a dizzying array of complex challenges. In 2017, two of us worked with a colleague to produce an edited book that discussed and offered advice to higher education leaders on many of these challenges.¹ As we argued in that volume, a great number of these leadership challenges were unprecedented. Yet, we also argued that several of these challenges were more nuanced and complex incarnations of the types of challenges that have vexed leaders for generations.

Recent history is replete with examples of higher education leaders who have crashed and burned, made catastrophic errors of judgment that placed their entire institutions at risk, and have been ill-prepared to understand the complexities of the issues they faced. Higher education leadership roles are unforgiving, and the contemporary perils are many. As a result, leaders often inadvertently miss important opportunities for institutional innovation and progress. Our 2017 book intended to be part of the solution to poorly executed higher education leadership. Our goal was to outline the big issues and offer concrete advice to leaders at all levels, helping them to understand these issues and to devise their own paths toward greater leadership success.

Our original book was well received. We heard from several leaders (including deans, vice presidents, and provosts) who told us that it was a welcome addition to their repertoire of resources. Most of these higher education leaders admitted to us that the training they received for their first leadership roles amounted to no more than simply being handed the keys to their new office, and that our book helped them frame what they knew and identify areas in which they needed to become more well-versed. But we also heard that they wished the book had gone further—specifically, by helping them imagine what they would need to know to eventually become a college or university president.² Many told us that there was no reliable resource aimed at new college or university presidents, let alone one that could help aspirants to these roles learn more about how they needed to prepare themselves. We believe this book meets that demand.

The college or university presidency has always been an important position. Yet, these days, it is an increasingly imperiled role because many terrific people shy away from it, given the constant headlines describing the pressures and failures of college and university presidents. From managing draconian state budgets, navigating dwindling support for higher education, and facing increased pressures for transparency and communication in an era of instant media exposure, to the soul-crushing impact of the COVID-19 era on the lives of faculty, students, staff, and their families (not to mention colleges' and universities' operations), long-gone are the days when a president was simply the intellectual leader of an institution. Presidents are now required to have a broad skill set that few possess inherently. Therefore, the professional development of these senior leaders is paramount to their long-term success. Presidents who have developed their leadership skills can have a positive impact on an institution. Conversely, individuals who lack the experience and have not developed the insights necessary to manage complex challenges (or, worse, who have not learned and internalized important lessons from others' failures) can not only doom their own careers but also set their institutions back significantly.

When a college or university has a dynamic, high-impact president, great things can happen for the institution. Many colleges and universities have suffered under poor leadership or, equally challenging, have found themselves subjected to a carousel of constantly changing presidents. These institutions miss the opportunity to serve their students, faculty, staff, and communities in ways that produce long-lasting impact or that help them change, for the better, the lives of all whom they serve.

DESCRIPTION OF BOOK AND CONTENTS

There is no shortage of topics that could appear in a volume such as this and, consequently, certain choices have been made. This book contains twenty-four chapters, all written by current and former presidents. The book begins with three narrative essays from Ana Mari Cauce, Kathleen McCartney, and David W. Oxtoby. The goal of the narrative essays is to offer overarching commentary on the following ideas: *Why be a president? What do you wish someone had told you before you took your first presidency? How should you work with your board of trustees? What should the first years on the job look like?* These ideas are among the most essential that all new or aspiring presidents need to think about critically, and understand strategically, before any other work can get done. These narrative essays set the stage for the next major section of the book, what we call the tactical chapters.

Every tactical chapter offers concrete advice, written in a way that ensures the issues addressed cut across institutional types—we have asked all the authors, regardless of their specific institutional background and experience, to offer advice that any

potential president working at any kind of institution will find useful. Moreover, the tactical chapters—just like the opening narrative essays—are written by a diverse array of presidents: some are from major research universities, whereas others are from liberal arts colleges, comprehensive public institutions, and community colleges. In this way, we ensure that a wide range of perspectives is offered. One benefit of this approach is that the advice given across the book is representative of the institutional diversity in American higher education. Another benefit, we hope, is that a wide range of readers will find the book appealing and useful.

Each tactical chapter addresses a specific presidential leadership area. In chapter 4, Carol T. Christ discusses how to choose a presidency, providing insights from her extensive experience leading multiple institutions. In chapter 5, Michael H. Schill explains shared governance, grounding his advice in research universities but also providing lessons that cut across different institutional types. In chapter 6, Mary Sue Coleman offers advice about how to work with a board of trustees, helping future presidents think about the many nuances of this important aspect of their role. Chapter 7 delves into the challenges and opportunities of working with state and federal legislators and agencies, with Janet Napolitano offering detailed advice and recommendations. In chapter 8, Bob Kustra explores the tricky terrain of college athletics, helping frame the broad issues any future president must consider. Because many large universities also are composed of academic medical centers and health enterprises, Michael V. Drake, MD, in chapter 9 offers detailed descriptions of these entities and discusses how to manage and lead these institutions. Eduardo J. Padrón, in chapter 10, challenges us to consider the issues of access within American higher education, rooting his advice in his extensive experience leading one of the nation's most comprehensive community colleges.

Cynthia Teniente-Matson, in chapter 11, turns our attention to the president's executive team, offering her thoughts on how to select members, how to work with them, and how to benefit from a well-functioning team. Because managing financial resources is such an important aspect of the presidency, the book contains two chapters on these issues. In chapter 12, Susan D. Stuebner addresses managing financial resources and how to dovetail that process with comprehensive strategic financial management approaches. In chapter 13, Ross Gittell explores strategic financial management, drawing on his experience leading a state community college system. In chapter 14, the book pivots to Sheila Edwards Lange's discussion of the role of the president in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, demonstrating how to effectively advance the goals of inclusion. Susan E. Borrego, in chapter 15, then explores the issues every president faces when working with and supporting students. Barry Mills, in chapter 16, addresses the critical topic of fundraising and advancement, while Patricia McGuire explores the importance of alumni relations in chapter 17.

Turning the book's focus to communication issues, Santa J. Ono discusses the power of communication in chapter 18, while in chapter 19 Ronald A. Crutcher (with Andrew R. Tillman and Ashleigh M. Brock) highlights how to navigate and communicate during controversial situations. Gayle E. Hutchinson picks up from there in chapter 20, explaining how to lead through disaster with courage, purpose, and resilience. Michael M. Crow and Derrick M. Anderson, in chapter 21, offer advice on how to implement a design-based process for facilitating institutional transformation. Finally, in chapters 22 and 23, the book turns its attention to the personal aspects of presidents' lives and careers, with Pamela J. Gunter-Smith discussing the all-important issue of work-life balance and Daniel R. Porterfield exploring purposeful planning for life after the presidency.

After the tactical chapters, we offer a conclusion to the book. In this conclusion, we address the recent COVID-19 pandemic, making an effort to frame some ideas that every potential president should consider. The spirit of this concluding chapter is to help aspiring presidents think about what they have learned during this challenging time. It is quite likely that future presidential searches during the coming years will ask candidates to discuss how they led throughout the pandemic. What did they learn? What did they struggle with and overcome? How do the lessons of that time inform the leaders they intend to be? The conclusion challenges readers to consider the advice from the authors in this book, coupled with their own lived leadership experiences during the pandemic, as they make sense, or find personal meaning, that will guide their future leadership work.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

We believe the best way to digest this book is to read it cover to cover. However, we recognize that busy readers may choose to hop around, pulling a chapter from the book at one time or another based upon perceived need or interest. That works too. We would like to offer framing questions—questions you might consider keeping in the back of your mind as you read through this book—regardless of the approach you adopt:

- Why do you want to become (or have recently become) a president? What are your primary personal and professional motivations?
- What do you see as the principal roles and responsibilities of a president, and how do you intend to fulfill them?
- From a strategic standpoint, what are your biggest strengths, and how do you intend to leverage these strengths to help make you a successful president?

- Conversely, how will you identify what you are not good at, and what specifically do you intend to do to make sure you surround yourself with people who can help fill in any leadership gaps?
- How will you go about hiring and supporting the very best people—individuals who will help you advance your strategy and overall goals? What will you do to foster their careers and aid their development?
- What overall approaches will you use to manage the inevitable challenges that arise from such matters as athletics, budget constraints, and your work with various internal and external constituents?
- What is your approach to communication, and how will you strive to become the kind of communicator who helps your institution?
- As you think about working with your board, what are your priorities? What should you keep in mind?
- What is your vision for building diversity in your institution?
- What do you imagine your long-term, post-presidency years to look like?

This book will help you develop your own answers to these questions and to many others. Ultimately, we hope this book will help you get started on the path of a presidency. If you have already recently begun a presidency, we hope this book will provide concrete advice that will make your time as a president even more effective. The authors we have asked to contribute to this book have cherished the opportunities they were given to lead their institutions. All of them agree that being a president is both an honor and a sacred duty, and that one of your most important responsibilities as steward of your institution is to make the institution better than it was when you started. We hope this book will be part of your overall strategy to do so.

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