

As a new president, my bearings continue to be in a state of adjustment. Although I prepared for years to assume a presidency, I am experiencing “on-the-job learning” every day. While I am extremely proud to have achieved this goal, I now know that I must learn quickly because members of the institution are looking to me as their leader, the person who has answers to the questions that arise.

My decision to pursue a presidency was made some time ago with a traditional pathway from the academic sector—including serving as a vice president for academic affairs and provost for five years, as well as spending nine years as college dean. Although this article could pertain exclusively to presidents emerging from the academic sector as the traditional “heir apparent” professionals to lead our institutions, we need to be mindful that increasing numbers of presidents come from other sectors of the academy and some are even chosen from outside higher education all together.

Presidents coming from the academic sector can have an advantage in knowing about the development of curriculum, processes of assessment and accreditation, faculty development, student development, and research/scholarship. Although the focal point of higher education is to create a framework and system to engage students in the learning process, much more happens in higher education outside the academic sector that a president must be aware of, able to understand, and able to facilitate in the best interest and success of the institution. So, while an academic might have an advantage in assuming a presidency, the scope and complexities of today’s institutions of higher education lead me to believe that a new president must have the ability to understand all facets of the institution in order to succeed. Premises for success that I suggest are imperative include:

- Remove your myopic lenses that focus predominantly on any one sector of the university;
- Remember to respond to situations as the president of the institution;
- Rely upon your cabinet and their collective experience and wisdom;
- Ask open-ended questions, not leading questions to confirm a pre-determined assumption;
- Consider yourself an anthropologist, learning about a new culture;
- Don’t continue to perform your previous job. Although it is your “comfort zone,” you must expand your perspectives and your efforts;
- Don’t expect that with the sudden assumption of authority over an institution that you will have all of the answers. It’s okay to admit that you don’t know and will have to take an issue under further consideration;

- Ask staff members their opinions, they have great insights;
- Ask questions to ascertain the current status of major concerns, such as regional accreditation;
- From an organizational theory perspective, you are leading a complex institution. Consider that:
 - ▶ All areas of the institution are interdependent, to some degree;
 - ▶ Your job as president is to facilitate forward momentum; and
 - ▶ You are expected to actively facilitate change(s) that improve the institution and

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the outcomes achieved, all while serving as an energizing leader with a fresh perspective.

I admit that being a new president is similar to being a new dean or vice president in that the expectations for performance are higher. I would presume that we all knew this before accepting these positions, however, the realities of the job can be sobering. Despite these realities, I am energized by the challenges and the opportunity to serve my campus and higher education in my new role.

Wishing all of my colleagues every success as campus leaders in higher education. Our collective contributions to education are critical to the success of our communities and the nation! **P**

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