

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

There are many contrasting perceptions of a university president. In many countries, the post is traditionally an honorific position elected by the faculty. In nations with strong central ministries of education, it is not uncommon for the university president to be considered an administrative bureaucrat. Even in the United States many trustees and some faculty members tend to think of the president as a hired hand of the governing board. However, the charters of most American colleges and universities define the president as a chief executive officer, with ultimate executive authority and responsibility for all decisions made within the institution.

This leadership role is complicated by the scale and diversity of the contemporary university, comparable to that of major global corporations or government agencies. Today's university conducts many activities, some nonprofit, some publicly regulated, and some operating in intensely competitive marketplaces. Universities teach students, conduct research for various clients, provide health care, engage in economic development, stimulate social change, and provide mass entertainment (e.g., college sports). Of course, the university also has higher purposes, such as preserving our cultural heritage, challenging the norms and beliefs of our society, and preparing the educated citizens necessary to sustain our democracy. Yet, despite the

fact that university presidents have executive responsibilities for all of these activities and purposes, the position has surprisingly little authority. The president reports to a governing board of lay citizens with limited understanding of academic matters and must lead, persuade, or consult with numerous constituencies (e.g., faculty and students) that tend to resist authority. Hence, the university presidency requires an extremely delicate and subtle form of leadership, sometimes based more on style than substance and usually more inclined to build consensus rather than take decisive action. The very phrases used to characterize academic leadership, such as “herding cats” or “moving cemeteries,” suggest the complexity of the university presidency. Universities are led, not managed.

There are numerous approaches to university leadership. Some presidents focus on sustaining momentum and stability during difficult times; others attempt to take their institution up a notch, improving the reputations of academic programs (or, God forbid, building a winning football team). Many presidents view the complex, tradition-bound nature of a university as quite resistant to major change and soon conclude that it is perhaps best, or at least safest, to focus their attention on a small set of issues where their leadership can have an impact. Others view their presidency as simply another step along a career path, either from one university to another or, perhaps, between public and private life. Hence, they are disinclined to stir things up, letting the institution drift along until they jump to their next ship. Fortunately, most university presidents, even if passing briefly through a particular leadership assignment, set institutional welfare as a high priority. On rare occasions, one encounters presidents who view themselves as change agents, setting bold visions for their institution and launching strategic efforts to move toward these visions. Like generals who lead their troops into battle rather than sending orders from far behind the front lines, these leaders recognize that winning the war sometimes requires personal sacrifice. The risks associated with proposing bold visions and leading change are high, and the tenure of such leaders is usually short. But their impact on both their institution and higher education more broadly can be considerable.

Regardless of personal proclivities, successful presidential leader-

ship styles must be responsive to both the nature of the institution and the demands of the times. The character of each institution—its size, mission, and culture—and, most important, its institutional saga will tolerate certain styles and reject others. Authoritarian leadership might be effective or even demanded at some institutions, but the culture of creative anarchies, such as Michigan, Berkeley, or Harvard, will demand a more subtle approach to building grassroots support for any initiative. Similarly, the turbulent 1960s and financially stressed 1980s required different leadership styles than the market-driven challenges and opportunities of the early twenty-first century. It is important that university presidents be capable of adapting their own leadership styles to fit the needs of their institution. Rigidity is not a particularly valuable trait for either the effectiveness or even the survival of university leaders.

In earlier chapters, I have described my own path to the presidency of the University of Michigan (from faculty member to campus politician to academic administrator), throughout which I learned the trade of university leadership from several of the most distinguished academic leaders of our generation. Yet presidential leadership cannot be learned only as an understudy. It requires on-the-job training—rather, baptism by fire—in facing the challenge of day-to-day decisions of major import, defending the university against hostile forces both from without and within, and enduring the slings and arrows of those who view the university president as a convenient target to promote their particular issue or concern. In a sense then, the chapters in part 2 of this book, on the arcane topic of presidential leadership, are taken from my own “course notes,” compiled from personal experiences, occasional successes, and predictable failures.

THE ELEMENTS OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Rather than beginning this discussion with such issues as presidential style and philosophy, it seems more constructive to consider the various facets of leadership that are required by the important position of university president. Each of these elements of presidential leadership will be considered in more detail in subsequent chapters, but it is useful to summarize them here at the outset.

Clearly, as the chief executive officer of the university, the president has a range of executive leadership responsibilities, such as supervising the university administration; ensuring the quality and integrity of academic programs; managing human, financial, and capital assets; and being accountable to the governing board (and the public) for the welfare of the university. In a sense, the responsibility for everything involving the university usually ends up on the president's desk—where the buck stops—whether the president is directly involved or even informed about the matter or not. The corporate side of the university—the professional staff responsible for its financial operations, plant maintenance, public relations, and so forth—generally functions according to the business hierarchy of command, communications, and control. After all, major universities are in reality very complex multibillion-dollar enterprises, with all of the accountability and demands of a modern business. Yet the academic organization of the university is best characterized as a creative anarchy. Faculty members possess two perquisites that are extraordinary in contemporary society: academic freedom, which means that faculty members can study, teach, or say essentially anything they wish; and tenure, which implies lifetime employment and security. Faculty members do what they want to do, and there is precious little that administrators can do to steer them in directions where they do not wish to go.

As chief executive officer, the president is responsible for recruiting the key leadership of the university, not simply the executive officers, but also the deans and even, on occasion, key faculty members. This headhunting function is absolutely essential, since universities are only as good as the leaders of their academic programs, whether in administrative roles (e.g., department chairs and deans) or in intellectual roles (e.g., chaired professors). Equally important is the president's capacity to manage the relationship between the governing board and the university. Since most governing board members have little knowledge and even less experience with the core teaching and research activities of the university, a university president must devote considerable time and effort to educating the board, helping to shape its agenda, and providing the necessary background on key issues. Woe be to the president—and the university—whose govern-

ing board members believe they know more about the institution than the president.

In terms of executive leadership, the Office of the President is usually ground zero in any university crisis. Whether the university faces a student protest, an athletics scandal, a financial misstep, or a political attack, the president is usually the point person in crisis management. This has serious implications for scheduling the president's calendar, since in such a complex institution as the contemporary university, a considerable amount of the time of the leadership will invariably be consumed by unanticipated crises. Crisis management and all the other elements of executive leadership—building a leadership team, financial management, building campuses, and leading governing boards—are covered in some detail in chapter 5.

Another role of university presidents is academic leadership. Although the faculty usually expects the university president to focus on government relations, fund-raising, and keeping the governing board out of its hair, the most successful university presidents are capable of not only understanding academic issues but also shaping the evolution of academic programs and enhancing the academic reputation of the university. To be sure, academic leadership must be exercised with great care (even sleight of hand)—through the appointment of key academic leaders (e.g., deans or department chairs) or by obtaining the funds to stimulate the faculty to launch new academic programs. However, since it is my belief that the most successful university presidents, regardless of institutional type, are deeply involved in academic matters, I devote considerable attention to this subject in chapter 6.

The same ambiguity characterizes another role of university presidents, political leadership. The management of the university's political relationships with various constituencies—state government, federal government, and various special interest groups—rests eventually with the president. Just as faculties may resist presidential involvement in academic matters that they regard as their domain, governing boards (particularly those for public universities) can pummel a president for overinvolvement in public or political issues—at least those not aligned with their particular political persuasion. Yet both constituencies will demand some expertise in academics and politics dur-

ing the presidential search process. Moreover, most successful presidents find that their credibility as proven academics and their skills as politicians, both on and off campus, are essential to their ability to lead their university. Chapter 7 is devoted to a discussion of political leadership, replete with some lessons learned from my personal school of hard knocks.

Although institutional needs and opportunities are different today than, say, a century ago, universities—just as our broader society—still require moral leadership. Universities, their communities, and their constituencies do seek guidance on such key moral issues as social diversity, civic responsibility, and social justice. Skillful presidents can transform crises—such as a racial incident, student misbehavior, or an athletics scandal—into teachable moments for moral leadership. Moreover, while the moral voice of the university president is sometimes drowned out by the din of political chatter, most presidents have ample opportunity to use their bully pulpit to speak out with courage and conviction on moral issues faced by our society, thereby providing role models for their students and perhaps even illuminating the discussion of moral issues with the perspective of the learned academy. Furthermore, through personal behavior, a leader can frequently influence the values and practices of an organization. If presidents value integrity, openness, truth, and compassion in their personal activities, these characteristics are more likely to be embraced and valued by those within their universities. By the same token, if a president is arrogant or insensitive, deals harshly with subordinates, or is truth- and candor-impaired, these traits, too, will rapidly propagate throughout the institution.

The presidential family also plays a pastoral role. In a very real sense, the president and spouse are the dad and mom of the extended university family. Students look to them for parental support, even as they routinely reject official actions in loco parentis. Faculty and staff also seek nurturing care and sympathetic understanding during difficult times for the university. To both those inside and those outside the system, presidents are expected to be cheerleaders for their university, always upbeat and optimistic, even though they frequently share the concerns and are subject to the same stresses as the rest of the campus community. The topic of pas-

toral care and that of moral leadership more generally are considered in chapter 8.

Finally, there is the “vision thing”—providing strategic leadership of the university toward significant goals. All too often, the tenure of presidents is sufficiently brief and their loyalty to a given institution is sufficiently shallow that acting in the long-term interests and evolution of the university is not a major priority. So, too, it is not uncommon to find presidents who tend to prefer backing into the future, by lauding the past with a nostalgic glow that confuses myth with reality. Strategic leadership requires a sense of institutional saga, a keen understanding of current challenges and opportunities, and the ability to see future possibilities. It also requires the skills necessary to engage a university community and build support for a vision of the future, as well as the energy, determination, and courage to lead toward these objectives. Strategic leadership is not an easy task, to be sure, and deserves the attention provided to it in chapter 9.

SEVERAL UNIQUE ASPECTS OF UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP

Today’s university president is expected to be part chief executive officer, intellectual leader of the faculty, educational leader, occasional parent to the students, political lobbyist with both state and federal government, cheerleader for the university, spokesman to the media, fund-raiser, entertainer, and servant to the governing board. Large institutions require strong executive leadership; public institutions need political acumen; and smaller institutions seek a greater degree of hands-on engagement with faculty and students in academic issues. And the performance in any particular one of these roles is usually considered as the singular basis for evaluating the president’s performance by the correspondingly affected constituency.

Of course, this multiplicity of leadership roles is not unique to the university presidency. Corporate and government leaders must also contend with multidimensional roles. Yet there are several aspects of university leadership that set the university presidency apart from other leadership roles in our society. Perhaps the most significant difference is in the authority of the position, since universities are led more by building consensus than issuing orders. University presidents rarely

enjoy the authority commensurate with the responsibilities of their positions. Although the responsibility for everything involving the university usually floats up to the president's desk, direct authority for university activities almost invariably rests elsewhere. This mismatch between responsibility and authority is unparalleled in other social institutions. As one colleague put it, universities may have shared governance, but nobody wants to share power with the president.¹

Faculty members resist—indeed, deplore—the command-and-control style of leadership characterizing the traditional pyramid organizations of business and government. Most among the faculty are offended by any suggestion that the university can be compared to other institutional forms, such as corporations and governments. The academy takes great pride in functioning as a creative anarchy. Yet the faculty also recognizes the need for leadership, not in details of teaching and scholarship, but in the abstract—in providing a vision for their university and in stimulating a sense of optimism and excitement. They also seek protection from the forces that rage outside the university's ivy-covered walls: politics, greed, anti-intellectualism, and mediocrity that would threaten the most important academic values of the university.

The corporate side of the university—the professional staff responsible for its financial operations, plant maintenance, public relations, and so forth—might be expected to behave more according to the business hierarchy of command, communication, and control. After all, as I noted earlier in this chapter, major universities are very complex multibillion-dollar enterprises, with all of the accountability and demands of a modern business. Yet here, too, one finds an erosion of the normal lines of authority, almost as if the culture of the faculty (“I’ll do it only if I choose to”) has infected the professional staff. Indeed, this blurring of academic and corporate cultures has been one of the great challenges in putting into place the effective total quality management programs so successful in the business world.

So, too, the student body generally tends to resist leadership. After all, many young students are at the age when challenging authority is an important part of growing up. Whether a situation involves a residence hall supervisor, a classroom instructor, or even the president of

the university, student refusal to accept the authority necessary for effective leadership can be problematic. Yet students are generally the first to demand that the president speak out on important issues about which they feel strongly.

One might expect that governing boards would seek and support strong leadership for their universities. Yet such characteristics as energy, vision, and even experience are sometimes viewed not only as of low importance but perhaps even as a threat to the authority of the board. This is particularly the case for public universities, where the politics surrounding board selection and action can become dominant. Although most members on the boards of public universities approach their responsibilities as a high calling to public service, there are always a few who impose on their roles a wide array of extraneous political agendas, and to these latter individuals, a strong president may be viewed as an inconvenience.

It is little wonder, then, that many people, including some university presidents, are quite convinced that the contemporary university has become immune to leadership. Presidential leadership does occur and, in many cases, is extremely effective. But it usually is accomplished through subtle influence rather than pushing ahead—by first seeding awareness and discussion of issues and building support to prepare the way for decisions, preferably reflecting grassroots participation (even if the seeds have been quietly planted by the administration). Although organizational theorists view such an approach as a small-win strategy,² it seems appropriate to quote the advice given by a more ancient authority, Lao Tzu, who says:

Undertake difficult tasks
by approaching what is easy in them;
Do great deeds
by focusing on their minute aspects.
All difficulties under heaven arise from what is easy.
All great things under heaven arise from what is minute.
For this reason,
the sage never strives to do what is great.
Therefore
he can achieve greatness.³

Of course, there are those times of urgency when a “just do it” approach is necessary, such as when confronting a financial or political crisis. Furthermore, blockbuster goals are sometimes the key to igniting necessary levels of institutional excitement and energy. But universities move like ocean liners, ponderously but with considerable momentum.

The rapid and profound nature of the changes occurring in our world today poses formidable challenges to tradition-bound institutions, such as the university. The pace of a university is quite different from that of a corporation responding to quarterly earnings statements or a government reacting to election cycles. In business, management approaches change in a highly strategic fashion, launching a comprehensive process of planning and transformation. In political circles, sometimes a strong leader with a big idea can captivate the electorate, building momentum for change. The creative anarchy arising from a faculty culture that prizes individual freedom and consensual decision making poses quite a different challenge to the university. Most big ideas from top administrators are treated with either disdain (under that assumption “This, too, shall pass”) or ridicule. The same usually occurs for formal strategic planning efforts, unless, of course, they are attached to clearly perceived budget consequences or faculty rewards. The academic tradition of extensive consultation, debate, and consensus building before any substantive decision is made or action taken poses a particular challenge in this regard, since this process is frequently incapable of keeping pace with the profound changes swirling about higher education.

One of the biggest challenges for academic leaders is to avoid becoming a slave to the in-box, spending most of their time on the hundreds of microissues that arise in a university. The myriad issues and an overloaded calendar can distract a president from the broader issues that can only be addressed by the chief executive officer of the institution. Too many presidents, perhaps frustrated with the slow pace of the academic decision process or the anarchy of the faculty, become preoccupied with more routine activities, such as fund-raising, campus construction, or even intercollegiate athletics.

Because of the unforgiving political environment of the president, even the seemingly most inconsequential decision can explode in

one's face. A decision not to accept a speaking request from a key constituency, denial of a personal request by a board member to admit a relative to a selective academic program, or a slip of the tongue with a politically incorrect phrase at a public appearance—all can bring disaster. Hence, the challenge to the president is how to keep the focus at the strategic level when the routine flow of activities through the Office of the President contains occasionally explosive elements. Part of the answer is to make certain that the office has at least one politically sensitive staff member who can act as the canary in the mine shaft, always on the alert for possible danger. But sooner or later, no matter how experienced, all presidents get blindsided by a seemingly innocuous decision or action that creates a political firestorm. Hence, damage control can become as important as the presidential decision process.

There is a growing epidemic of presidential turnover that is both a consequence of these problems and a factor that contributes to them. The average tenure for the presidents of major public universities is about five years, too brief to provide the stability in leadership necessary for achieving effective change.⁴ While some of these changes in university leadership are the result of natural processes, such as retirement, others reflect the serious challenges and stresses faced by universities, which all too frequently destabilize their leadership. The politics of college campuses (from students to faculty to governing boards), coupled with external pressures (exerted by state and federal governments, alumni, sports fans, the media, and the public at large), make the presidency of a public university a very hazardous profession these days. At a time when universities require courageous and visionary leadership, the presidency position's eroding tenure and deteriorating attractiveness pose a significant threat to the future of these institutions.

Finally, it is important to stress once again just how critical the relationship between the governing board and the president is in determining the success of a university presidency. Of course, the authority necessary to lead the institution is delegated directly from the board. Furthermore, the board has the primary responsibility for evaluating the performance of the president. Faculties can take votes of no confidence, students can protest, and politicians and the media

can complain, but if the governing board supports the president, then the position is secure. In fact, when a university presidency crashes and burns, it is usually the consequence of a poor search by the governing board or the eroding support it has provided an incumbent president that has caused most of the damage. Successful presidents and capable governing boards usually go hand in hand.

THE MANY STYLES AND PHILOSOPHIES OF PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP

Over the years, I have had the privilege of studying under and working with scores of university presidents who were, for the most part, talented leaders with distinguished academic credentials striving to do the best for their institutions. The leadership styles and philosophies of these academic leaders were just as varied as those among leaders in any other walk of life. In fact, they were more so, perhaps because of the random paths that led to a presidency and the awkward process of being selected by a board of lay citizens.

Perhaps long ago some university presidents could be characterized as gentlemen scholars—for example, Tappan of Michigan, Eliot of Harvard, and Gilman of Johns Hopkins. However, there is probably as much myth as reality to this legend of the giants of the past. A more careful reading of the historical papers of university presidents (including those of the University of Michigan) reveals that as many rogues and scalawags populated these high leadership positions as did scholars and visionaries.

Today, we find many styles of leadership. Of course, most university presidents have at least a modicum of political skill. Otherwise, they would have never been selected for these positions, nor would they long survive. But some take this political approach to an extreme, as did several of my colleagues who heavily populated their personal staff with press relations experts (always sending an advance team to scout out any public appearance) and would likely get lost en route between the airport and a meeting in Washington without a personal escort. Some university presidents become so skillful at the political arena that they easily move into public life, Woodrow Wilson of Princeton being the most noted example. While this is both

understandable and commendable, today's counterflow of politicians moving into university presidencies raises some flags of concern, since the caldron of political life is not necessarily the best training ground for those who are to lead academic institutions. While those universities led by politicians sometimes prosper for the near term due to enhanced appropriations or federal largesse through legislative earmarks (pork barrel), they rarely improve in academic quality.

As this chapter has stressed, the executive responsibilities of university presidents require some degree of management skills. Fortunately, most presidents have developed these through a sequence of earlier leadership experiences (e.g., department chair, dean, and provost). But this can also be taken to the extreme, where the president becomes more of a technocrat or corporate CEO than an academic leader. Still others adopt more of a military approach, commanding their executive staff much as a general would command the troops. Of course, while the administrative staff of a university can adapt to such authoritarian styles, the creative anarchy characterizing the faculty will rebel or simply ignore general-presidents and continue with their own agendas.

Other presidents adopt more of an imperial style, viewing their anointment by the governing board as conferring a divine right to behave as an emperor-king. Occasionally, these are benign rulers, more in the Louis XIV mode, who enjoy the perquisites of presidential life—the president's mansion, chauffeur-driven limousines, trips to exotic destinations, and mixing with the rich and famous—and focus their leadership activities on personal whims. Far more sinister are those who become carried away with their own sense of privilege and importance, evolving into imperial rulers more along the lines of Henry VIII, taking perverse pleasure in power as well as perks and propagating a sense of fear and dread throughout the institution ("Off with their heads!"). While this description may sound like an extreme, power-obsessed presidents installed and tolerated by inattentive governing boards occur more frequently than one might expect and have caused great damage in higher education. Universities have a relatively weak form of the check-and-balance mechanisms characterizing other social institutions (e.g., governments with voters and corporations with shareholders), since their governing boards

tend to be isolated from campus happenings and unaware of abusive leadership.

At the other extreme of presidential style is the stylish charmer,⁵ those presidents who mesmerize the naive with their articulation of such academic phrases as “the life of the mind,” are capable of balancing a teacup on their knee while discussing estate planning with aging dowagers, and keep the board happy with perks and flattery. These talents are not necessarily bad, of course. But all too frequently, the charmer president is also hopelessly hapless, either uninterested in or incapable of dealing with the myriad of complex academic and administrative issues that determine whether the university flourishes or flounders.

Just as there are many leadership styles, there are also many different philosophies of presidential leadership. Some presidents adopt a fatalistic approach, taking to heart the idea that the university is basically unmanageable. They focus their attention on a small set of issues, usually tactical in nature, and let the institution essentially drift undirected in other areas. They view their role as representing the university rather than leading it. This *laissez-faire* approach assumes that the university will do fine on its own. Indeed, most institutions can drift along for a time without strategic direction, although they will eventually find themselves mired in a swamp of commitments that are largely reactive rather than strategic.

Typically, such minimalist presidents will focus on a few external activities, such as schmoozing state politicians to build political support or achieving elite frequent-flier status flying about the country prospecting for donors in fund-raising efforts. Some presidents become consumed by institutional character flaws: for example, rogue governing boards that require excessive time, attention, and pampering; or building winning football programs that dominate the attention of the institution, its alumni, and the public. Others fall into the “Yes, Minister!” trap, essentially allowing their calendar to be determined by personal staff and allowing themselves to be enslaved to the in-box and to all of the flotsam and jetsam, minutia and trivia, that flow through the Office of the President. Although certainly frustrating—and certainly not strategic for the institution—minimalist presidents are probably better than those presidents who float at the

periphery of institutional concerns, pursuing their own personal agenda while the rest of the university burns, out of sight, out of mind. Furthermore, some presidents can be quite effective focusing their attention primarily on tactical issues when they are convinced that the institution is already headed in the right direction.

Of course, there are obvious deficiencies in all of these stereotypes. Major university campuses require, at least somewhere in the upper echelon of the university administration, the full suite of leadership skills—academic intuition, financial skills, political acumen, public relations, strategic vision, people skills, and a deep understanding of the fundamental values and nature of an academic community. This is particularly the case at very large institutions, such as the University of Michigan, which has an unusually challenging combination of breadth, quality, tradition, and capacity—the largest campus, the largest budget, the largest university hospital, the largest sponsored research activity, and of course, the nation’s largest football stadium. In fact, the great challenge of the Michigan presidency is to protect the fragile character of the university’s academic programs from being overwhelmed or pulled asunder by the ever-present distraction and threat of the Athletic Department on one end of the campus and the Medical Center on the other. Needless to say, presidents detached from the academic enterprise, surrounded by inexperienced executive officers, and overly influenced by the whims of ambitious athletic directors or hospital administrators can soon drive the university into the ditch.

Far more constructive are those presidents who are determined to uplift the academic quality of the institution, by raising standards, challenging weak promotion cases, and recruiting top-notch faculty. Perhaps the best Michigan example of this approach was Harold Shapiro, who, from his early days as provost and then through his presidency, was absolutely insistent on the highest academic standards for the university. Although his determination to raise the bar on faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure sometimes rankled complacent faculty and occasionally undermined deans, it clearly elevated the quality of the university to a degree that few others were able to achieve. It also demonstrated quite convincingly that academic leaders can have a major impact on institutional quality—if they are

determined enough, have the academic background to recognize quality, and have the courage to point out where it is weak.

Some presidents are particularly skillful at grasping opportunities, or rescuing victory from the jaws of defeat. Robben Fleming exhibited this skill at a particularly important moment, when campus disruptions could have seriously and permanently damaged the University of Michigan. His long experience as a labor mediator had taught him that sometimes conflict is necessary to create the most effective path to compromise.

Perhaps the rarest of university leaders are those capable of strategic vision, who view themselves as change agents, setting bold visions for their institution and launching efforts to move toward these visions. These leaders recognize that winning the war sometimes requires personal sacrifice. The risks associated with proposing bold visions and leading change are high, and the tenure of such leaders is short—at least in public universities. Michigan's own experience suggests that visionary leaders, such as Henry Tappan, are rarely appreciated in their time by their faculties and particularly their governing boards, but they can have great eventual impact on their universities. In the case of a leading institution like Michigan, they can have a broader impact on the evolution of higher education, as demonstrated by the long-standing influence of Tappan on American higher education.

ADAPTING LEADERSHIP STYLES TO THE TIMES AND THE INSTITUTION

Presidential styles are rarely powerful enough to change the culture of an institution, much less its institutional saga. Presidents can lead universities in new directions or boost its quality. But prospects for a long tenure—or even survival—are slim indeed for those presidents whose styles are incompatible with the institutional saga of a university.

For example, the postwar years of the 1940s and 1950s were a time of prosperous economy, growing populations, and an expanding demand for higher education, first as a consequence of returning veterans under the GI Bill and later through the efforts of the Truman Commission to extend the opportunity for a college education to all

Americans. Hence, it was a time for university presidents who could grasp the opportunity to grow their institutions, for example, Harlan Hatcher at Michigan and John Hannah at Michigan State.

In contrast, the 1960s and early 1970s were a time of protest, triggered first by the Free Speech Movement and civil rights and later by the Vietnam War (and the draft). Universities sought leaders with the skills to handle dissent and confrontation. Many came from backgrounds in labor mediation, such as Robben Fleming at Michigan and Clark Kerr at the University of California. There were also many casualties among those presidents from an earlier time who simply could not adapt to the confrontational climate of the 1960s.

The late 1970s and 1980s required still different leadership styles as the economy weakened, driven first by rising energy prices (the OPEC oil embargo) and later by industrial competition from Japan. While the nation fell into recession, many industrial states, such as Michigan, faced depression-level hardships, with serious shortfalls in tax revenue and, consequently, deep cuts in appropriations to higher education. This was a time of retrenchment, focusing resources on highest priority, and generating new revenue streams through private fund-raising and student fees. Leaders with strong financial skill (and intuition)—such as Harold Shapiro at Michigan, Jack Peltason at the University of California, and Arnold Weber at Northwestern—were key to the abilities of their institutions to restructure themselves financially to thrive in an era of constrained resources.

Although financial pressures relaxed—at least temporarily—in the late 1980s and 1990s, universities required strong entrepreneurial leadership capable of grasping the opportunities presented by the end of the cold war, the increasing diversity of the American population, the forces of globalization, and the extraordinary transformation of the U.S. economy from making things (manufacturing) to creating and applying new knowledge, driven in part by such rapidly evolving technologies as the computer, telecommunications, and transportation. Perhaps indicative of the needs of higher education during this period was the appearance of university presidents with science and engineering backgrounds. While these university leaders were comfortable with the technology reshaping our society, even more important was a leadership style stressing teamwork, risk taking, and entre-

preneurial energy and capable of providing new visions for the university of the twenty-first century.

Equally important is a presidential leadership style compatible with (or adaptable to) the unique character of the institution. Let me again illustrate this with the University of Michigan. Because of Michigan's exceptionally large size, intellectual breadth, and complexity, power is very widely distributed among academic and administrative units. Michigan is clearly a deans' university, in which the authority and responsibility of deans as academic leaders are very strong. At least over the long term, good things happen in academic programs because of good deans and good department chairs (and conversely, good programs attract good deans and department chairs). Yet, despite this dispersal of power, Michigan is also an institution where team building is greatly valued. Deans come together quite easily as teams—particularly if encouraged by the provost and president—and willingly work on university-wide priorities. Similarly, effective presidents can mold the executive officers of the university into teams rather than playing one off against another: for example, it is more effective to say, "I would like you folks to work together to give me your considered opinion on this matter," rather than to say, "Each of you tell me what you would recommend, and then I will make a decision."

The trailblazer character of the Michigan saga demands a risk-tolerant environment in which initiatives are encouraged at all levels—students, faculty, and staff. For example, the university intentionally distributes available resources among a number of independent funds, so that entrepreneurial faculty with good ideas rarely have to accept no as an answer but instead can simply turn to another potential source of support. The most important play in the Michigan playbook for entrepreneurs is the end run, since Michigan administrators not only tolerate but encourage faculty, students, and staff to bypass bureaucratic barriers. For example, it is quite common for faculty to bypass deans and appeal directly to the provost or president, just as many, including the deans—and occasionally even a coach or athletic director—will occasionally find opportunities to execute an end run to the regents, a relatively easy thing to do since half of them live in Ann Arbor. Once faculty, chairs, and deans learn the Michigan cul-

ture, they quickly learn that the university also tolerates end runs to state or federal government (e.g., the governor, the legislature, Congress, or federal agencies). To be sure, sometimes a senior administrator might growl at them—particularly a vice president for government relations who is worried about coordinating university relations with the state or a president who is worried about inappropriate influence on a regent. Most Michigan presidents soon learn that since these end runs are so ingrained in the culture of the university, they will happen quite naturally. Presidents come to understand that attempts to stifle end runs are not only likely to be ineffective but could discourage many of the most creative, loyal, and well-intentioned people in the university. Hence, it is far better to accept the end run as a Michigan tradition. Some of us even quietly encouraged this practice, since we had used it quite effectively ourselves during our own roles as faculty and deans.

A final characteristic of university leadership as it is evidenced at Michigan is worth mention here: perhaps because of Michigan's long tradition of decentralization (even anarchy), university-wide faculty governance through a faculty senate has been relatively ineffective at Michigan. Just as with the administration, the real power among the faculty and the ability to have great impact on the institution resides at the school, college, or department level, where powerful senior faculty, executive committees, chairs, and deans have the authority to address the key challenges and opportunities facing their academic programs. Should this power structure become distorted with poor appointments or weak faculty, the end-run culture acts as a check and balance by rapidly communicating such problems up or around the chain of command to the provost, the president, or even the regents.

From this discussion, it should be apparent that a top-down leadership style is quite incompatible with the Michigan culture. Those presidents who have chosen to ignore this reality or who have attempted to reign in this distributed power (i.e., to tame the Michigan anarchy) have inevitably failed, suffering a short tenure with inconsequential impact. This does not mean that Michigan will tolerate a weak president. Presidents unable to adapt to the Michigan trail-blazing saga—that is, presidents who are hesitant to push all the chips into the center of the table on a major initiative or incapable of keep-

ing pace with the high energy level of the campus—will soon be rejected or at least ignored by the faculty. Michigan embraces bold visions, and without these, effective leadership of the university is simply impossible.

Of course, Michigan probably represents one of the extremes of a highly decentralized academic anarchy, although many other institutions with exceptionally strong faculty lie in a similar regime of the governance spectrum. There are other institutions that not only tolerate strong, centralized leadership but actually require it. Some are at an early stage of evolution and require strong, top-down leadership to set the priorities and make the tough lifeboat decisions to move the institution to the next rung in quality.

So, too, different institutional types will require a different balance and priority among the various leadership roles of the president. While competent financial management and energetic fund-raising are essential to all institutions, the roles of academic, moral, and pastoral leadership are perhaps more critical to the presidents of smaller institutions, particularly those with the missions of liberal arts colleges. Here, the size of the faculty and student body demand a more hands-on engagement in campus life by the president. In sharp contrast, the executive leadership demands on the president of a multi-campus system become far more important, since recruiting campus leadership, managing the financial operations, and working closely with the governing board become the key priorities. In fact, many system presidents are quite detached from the campuses of the system and are similar to corporate CEOs, much to the frustration of system presidents who miss the excitement of an academic campus. Yet there are also frustrations for campus chancellors unfortunate enough to have the university system's office close by, since there is an inevitable tendency for the system president to become overly involved on the campus. Not surprisingly, the chancellorship of campuses with system offices tends to turn over quite rapidly.

A MATTER OF PERSONAL STYLE

As I mentioned earlier, I always viewed myself first and foremost as a member of the faculty of the university, regarding academic adminis-

tration not as a professional career in itself but, rather, as public service to my institution. Perhaps this explains my tendency to bring a value system formed in the groves of academe to my various leadership assignments. This is best illustrated with several examples.

It was my good fortune to have as mentors some quite distinguished university leaders, along with some exceptionally capable administrative colleagues. Although I always sought and listened carefully to their advice, it is also clear that my style was considerably different. For example, most of my colleagues tended to stress the importance of approaching issues in a very measured, low-key way: encouraging staff to analyze issues and bring forward recommendations, always trying to stimulate ideas at the grassroots level, letting them simmer a bit before revealing support, and never moving rapidly with an initiative associated with the Office of the President (or with the Office of the Provost or any dean's office). I was warned about leaping ahead of people during conversations (a personal character flaw of mine), since this can be misinterpreted as not listening rather than quickly grasping their points and moving ahead to consider their implementation. I was cautioned to be always very sensitive to the political implications of any issue. This extended to tolerating even the most offensive behavior of individuals if they had sufficient political clout (e.g., legislators, congressmen, or governing board members). A president (or provost or dean) was never supposed to be seen as critical of such behavior, even if it was damaging to the university or its people. Instead, I was advised to find someone else to beard the tiger, to carry the bad news, to take the flack. Academic leaders were praised for their Teflon coats, not their courageous defense of the institution.

Unfortunately, try as I might to adopt such a laid-back style, I could no more do this than a pig could fly. While such a passive style might make everybody feel better, the challenges and opportunities of the times (not to mention my particular leadership skills) demanded a more activist style, based on decisiveness and action rather than conversation and contemplation. I preferred an open management style, playing all my cards face up so that folks always knew where I was coming from. I also tended toward a more kamikaze style, perhaps dating from my football days, since I preferred to confront challenges

rather directly, usually by leading the troops into battle rather than giving orders from far behind enemy lines.

More fundamentally, I had a very deep-seated belief that universities were profoundly human endeavors, that good things happened because good people made them happen with their talent and dedication, especially when they were provided with the support, encouragement, and freedom to push to the limits of their abilities. In this spirit, I always sought to build and work with teams of talented people, much as I had during my engineering days. I sought to surround myself with people smarter and more talented than I was, recognizing that this was the key not only to my own success as a leader but, more important, to the future of the institution.

Years of laboring in the trenches had taught me that the best ideas and creativity flowed upward through the university from its faculty, students, and staff. Hence, I viewed my leadership challenge as that of a farmer, planting questions and issues, cultivating discussion and debate, and then harvesting and implementing the best ideas. The key was always tapping into the energy, interest, and creativity that exists in great abundance at the grassroots level of the institution.

In each of my leadership roles, I also felt a sense of deep responsibility to act always in the best interests of the institution and its people, with little concern about my own future. After all, my administrative assignments (dean, provost, president) were brief excursions from my fundamental role as a faculty member (scientist and engineer), not an all-consuming career in and of themselves. Hence, my approach to important issues tended toward “Damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead!” rather than “What do you think we should do?” If the decision was obvious and the need (or opportunity) was great, I preferred just to go ahead and get it done. It mattered little to me and my leadership teams who had the great idea or who would get credit (although I was likely to take the blame); the only concern was that the institution would benefit. To be sure, some toes were trampled: the political reaction could be intense (particularly on such controversial issues as tuition, diversity, and gay rights), and the risk could be considerable. But whether the job was to rebuild the College of Engineering or to transform Michigan into a university for the twenty-first century, I was appointed to get it done, I was determined

to get on with it, and I did. Key in this approach was a determination to never believe that my position was more important than my objectives. Job security was never first priority. As dean, provost, and then president, I was quite comfortable putting my job on the line, not as a threat or ultimatum, but, rather, as a quiet recognition on my part that I was prepared to face consequences of failure in high-risk activities if they were important to the institution.

Yet another personal leadership characteristic of mine—perhaps arising out of my background as a scientist and engineer—was that I tended to be somewhat more concerned about the future than the present. One of our regents suggested that I differed from many other Michigan presidents because I envisioned the university as it should be in 10 or 20 years rather than just 5. He added, “Considering how slowly the ship turns, it takes a lot of time to make those course adjustments.” I did indeed view my strength as strategic leadership, providing the vision, energy, and excitement to move toward blockbuster goals rather than delving into the details of tactical decisions.

Many organizations are characterized by a bimodal distribution of leadership, consisting of young leaders who know what to do but have little experience on how to get it done (and, as a result, get very frustrated) and more senior leadership who know how to get things done but have either forgotten what to do or lost their will (becoming recalcitrant). I sought to build a bridge between bold visions and pragmatic experience. We spent a great deal of time working with next-generation leadership, identifying potential leaders, placing them in key positions, and trying to pair them with wise, experienced old salts. Those who were both smart and able took advantage of this, learning and developing into capable leaders. Those who were headstrong and stubborn usually flamed out at a low level of administration.

Not surprisingly, I had my share of critics. Many believed I pushed too hard, not respecting or using the traditional university process of consultation and collegiality—or, perhaps more appropriately, delay and procrastination. Some regents complained about the pace I set, their complaints fed in part by faculty set in their ways. Some of my executive officers and deans would have preferred that I spent more time fund-raising out of town (and out of their hair). Special interest groups appreciated my concern and support, but they

worried about a “white European male” getting too involved in influencing their agenda, even if I managed to achieve many of their objectives at a rapid pace. Folks absorbed in process tended to favor building bottom-up consensus over decisive action. The list of examples could go on and on. I was even criticized for being too visionary, perhaps too far ahead of the faculty.

But as Theodore Roosevelt stated, “Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the grey twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.”⁶ My presidential leadership style proved capable of achieving rapid, permanent change and very significant enhancement of quality, momentum, and excitement in extremely short time periods. Hence, I finally concluded, or at least rationalized, that my “go for it” style was just what was needed to bring the sleeping Michigan giant to life. I decided not to worry too much about the carping and, instead, to just nod politely, grow an extra layer of skin, and push ahead. I explained once to some critics of the Michigan Mandate, our diversity agenda: “I guess the real point is that people have to look at what actually happens rather than conjecturing about whether I meant what I said. If these things do not happen, then I deserve to be harshly criticized if not ignored. But if we succeed, then folks should acknowledge success, respect that action for what it delivered, and get on with things.”

MOVERS AND SHAKERS, PUSHERS AND COASTERS: THE IMPACT OF THE PRESIDENCY

It has always amused me how universities, much like other social organizations, tend to cycle back and forth between periods of acceleration, coasting, and perhaps slowing to a halt or even sliding back down the hill. As president, I always used to view my role of leadership as pushing as much as pulling. I likened it to pushing a stalled car until it achieved sufficient momentum to start again. Yet it was always possible that my successor would back off and enjoy coasting, though hopefully not rolling to a halt.

This ebb and flow in leadership should not be so surprising, since

it characterizes most of the history of a university. In Michigan's early years, Tappan, Angell, Burton, and Hatcher were clearly pushers, determined to build the university, taking it to higher levels of achievement and capacity. Each was followed by successors who tended to accept the resulting quality or capacity of the university as they inherited it, consolidating gains and perhaps addressing other issues, sometimes dictated by challenges beyond the campus, such as the Great Depression, the world wars, and the social disruption of 1960s activism.

Both Harold Shapiro and I pushed hard to build the quality, financial strength, and leadership of the university. We restored reserves, built new revenue streams, and increased endowment by a factor of 10. We rebuilt the campuses; established new standards for faculty hiring, promotion, and tenure; and raised expectations for the performance of academic and administrative units. We decentralized authority and accountability with strong incentives and launched a number of important community and world leadership projects (the Replacement Hospital Project, the Michigan Mandate, and building the Internet). Fortunately, at least in the history of the University of Michigan, the pushers seem to have achieved sufficient momentum for the institution to ride through the next coasting period with quality intact.

LEADERSHIP FOR A TIME OF CHANGE

Because of the imbalance between responsibility and authority, the presidency of a university is certainly one of the more challenging roles in our society. Yet it is nevertheless a position of great significance. While a particular style of leadership may be appropriate for a particular institution at a particular time, the general leadership attributes outlined in this chapter seem to be of universal importance.⁷

Governing boards, faculty, students, alumni, and the press tend to judge a university president on the issues of the day. However, the true impact of presidents on their institutions is usually not apparent for many years after their tenure. I believe that the most effective university presidents are those capable of always setting institutional wel-

fare above personal objectives—or, at times, even professional survival. While political skill is a valuable trait in avoiding confrontation, appeasement is rarely the route to institutional greatness. Successful university presidents must occasionally take risks and demonstrate courage. Decisions and actions must always be taken within the perspective of the long-standing history and traditions of the university, and they must be taken not only for the benefit of those currently served by the institution but on behalf of future generations.

All too frequently, particularly in universities, the environment is simply not tolerant of strong leadership. It is not surprising that many university presidents and other academic leaders take the easy way out, deferring to the whims of outspoken faculty members or the political agendas of governing boards and accepting that their role is to act more as representatives of their institutions than as strong leaders. Why should they rock the boat when their tenure is only a few brief years? It is little wonder that weak leadership characterizes much of higher education. In many institutions, the other partners in the academic tradition of shared governance—the faculty and the governing board—would not have it any other way.

There is a growing epidemic of presidential turnover that is both a consequence of these problems and a factor that contributes to them. The average tenure for the university president is too brief to provide the stability necessary for institutional advancement, much less achieving effective change. Hardly a week passes without another report of a university president swept aside by a faculty vote of no confidence, abandoned by a rogue governing board, or leaving an institution behind in search of greener pastures. At a time when universities require courageous and visionary leadership, the eroding tenure and deteriorating attractiveness of the university presidency pose a significant threat to higher education in America.

We live in a time of great change, an increasingly global society, knitted together by pervasive communications and transportation technologies and driven by the exponential growth of new knowledge. It is a time of challenge and contradiction, as an ever-increasing human population threatens global sustainability; a global, knowledge-driven economy places a new premium on workforce skills and hence education; governments place increasing confidence in market

forces to reflect public priorities; and shifting geopolitical tensions driven by the great disparity in wealth and power about the globe trigger new concerns about national security. More than in any previous time, the strength, prosperity, and leadership of the United States require a highly educated citizenry and, hence, a world-class system of higher education capable of meeting the changing educational, research, and service needs of a knowledge-driven society. Yet at the same time, changing population demographics, social priorities, and economic constraints require both university leadership and policy makers to reconsider the most fundamental public purposes of higher education.

We will need strong leadership in the years ahead, as academia faces even more fundamental questioning. Politicians, pundits, and the public increasingly challenge us at the same time that social, economic, and technological forces increasingly drive us. No question is out of bounds: What is our purpose? What are we to teach and how are we to teach it? Who teaches under what terms? Who measures quality, and who decides what measures to apply? Who pays for education and research? Who benefits? Who governs and how? What and how much public service is part of our mission? What are appropriate alliances, partnerships, and sponsorships?

To face these challenges and respond effectively to the rapidly changing needs of society, the university requires strong, visionary, and courageous leadership. This, in turn, requires governing boards, faculties, and a public understanding that will not only tolerate but demand strong presidential leadership. Clearly, those universities capable of attracting and supporting strong, decisive, and visionary leadership will not only survive with quality intact but will likely flourish during this era of great change in higher education.