

Enrollment Manager

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Finding and Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

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For many years, we partnered on a program for new presidents sponsored by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC). Each year, new presidents would gather prior to CIC's Presidents Institute to hear the sound advice of veteran presidents. Early on, we heard feedback about the lack of programs for aspiring college and university leaders. Both the CIC and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), along with the American Academic Leadership Institute (AALI), now offer outstanding leadership courses for aspiring vice presidents and presidents. These programs provide excellent overviews of the skills necessary to lead.

We urge potential vice presidents or presidents to take advantage of these extensive opportunities.

On the other hand, if you're a junior staffer aspiring to a leadership role, here are some time-tested recommendations:

Adopt a transformational leadership style. Supervisors promote people who see opportunities for needed changes and improvement and then pursue them. A good rule of thumb is never complain about an existing issue unless you also suggest a concrete way to remedy it.

Identify a good mentor as early in your career as possible. Successful leaders from all walks of life tend to have this connection in common. Seek someone who will be honest, yet realistic and supportive. If there is no likely candidate within your own organization, look to professional or community groups.

Display an optimistic outlook. Naysayers are morale-busters, draining team energy while sapping productivity. Look for creative ways to accomplish organizational goals, rather than reasons not to do them; leaders seek innovative ways to advance despite constraints.

Demonstrate a strong work ethic. Go the extra mile. This does not necessarily mean working longer hours. Rather, it may mean stretching yourself by taking on new assignments that contribute to your team while growing your career. Emulate the model of nine-time French Open champion Rafael Nadal, who, sportswriters note, still steps into every forehand, even in practice. Find ways to add value to your own career "brand."

Exhibit a positive, “can-do” attitude. Resourcefulness, flexibility and ability to prioritize are among the most valuable soft skills you can demonstrate. Senior managers appreciate junior staffers who anticipate organizational needs and get things done in a strategic fashion. Your career will soar if you can accomplish the one or two things most needed to measurably advance your institution.

Foster the well-being of others. Successful leaders look out for the overall health and vitality of the team and individual members. Birthday greetings, occasional personal congratulatory notes, and “atta-boy/girl” shout-outs all demonstrate awareness and concern. Deflect credit from yourself to other team members when appropriate. Be inclusive; always draw your circle larger rather than smaller. A good formula for being a caring listener: ask two questions of others before talking about yourself.

Capitalize on workshops and seminars on leadership offered by a variety of professional organizations, including those in your area of specialization. Many are now offered online, making participation affordable for almost all institutions. Identify one or two new strategies or skills that you can immediately utilize in your day-to-day job responsibilities.

Pursue advanced degrees and certificate programs in your areas of interest and expertise. An increasing number are now offered online, enabling you to enhance your knowledge while continuing to earn an income. If you’re interested in a vice presidency or presidency, an earned doctorate is the best credential. An array of programs focusing on different dimensions of higher education administration is available nationwide.

If you think of yourself and your career objectively as a professional “brand,” you will enhance your ability to think more strategically about your opportunities while adding value to your institution.

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They have collaborated on 11 books, including “President to President: Views on Technology in Higher Education” (Volumes I-III) and “Presidential Perspectives” (Volumes I-IX). They edit the popular higher education thought series “Presidential Perspectives” (Aramark Higher Education), now in its ninth year (www.presidentialperspectives.org).