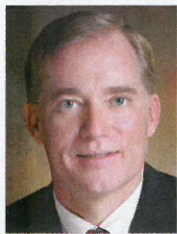


The President and Enrollment

Strategic CEOs involve themselves in recruiting and retaining students.

BY DR. SCOTT D. MILLER AND DR. MARYLOUISE FENNELL



THE RELATIONSHIP between the college president and the chief enrollment officer, a critical member of the senior leadership team, is essential to institutional success. Because enrollment is the single most important revenue driver at most colleges and universities, this staff position requires multiple talents. They include relentless advocacy of the institution, a marketing focus and command of details. Most of all, the chief enrollment officer must share the president's vision for building and sustaining the desired student population.



We all know what can happen when a gifted athlete takes his or her eye off the ball for even an instant. The same is true when it comes to institutional stewardship of enrollment and

retention, observes Dr. Joe Pace, a nationally known specialist in student retention and chairman of the board, PX2 Youth and Higher Education.

"What we almost always find when we are retained by institutions with slipping recruitment and retention is that the little things that make all the difference to students have slipped through the cracks," says Pace.

Challenging Assumptions

The visible CEO challenges the status quo, setting priorities while engaging the community and openly linking enrollment to the financial health of the college. This transformational leader also needs to challenge key assumptions, including those on which we have often based enrollment-management practices. Pace, for example, recommends a student-focused approach to the perennial and complex issue of retention.

Relentless Advocacy

The president must continually champion enrollment, engaging key leaders in the process while allocating the resources needed to get the job done. He or she defines the desired profile, establishes an organizational structure to facilitate productivity, frames issues and policy and pilots institutional strategies. The president must also ensure that whatever the title, the chief enrollment officer is an active institutional spokesperson, a superb motivator and communicator and a bottom-line, results-oriented manager and team builder.

Although effective CEOs must champion enrollment management as a foremost institutional priority, a successful outcome

represents a cohesive team effort. All employees need to be models, mentors and monitors. Experts agree that the stronger the connections they foster with students, the higher the rate of student achievement and retention. Every employee of the college must embrace what has been promised by the institution to its students, and everyone must work to deliver those promises.

A Journey, Not a Project


"Strategy creation is a journey — and an inherently messy one at that," emphasizes a recent report by *The McKinsey Quarterly*, a leading management journal. "Shaping keen insights into good strategies requires deep interpersonal engagement and debate from senior executives, as well as the ability to deal with ambiguity in charged and often stressful circumstances." Transformational CEOs think of strategic enrollment as a journey, not a project.

Although the "vision thing" is critical for CEOs, steady progress requires a business approach and demands weekly reports from the chief enrollment officer.

An effective enrollment president always has command of the following information:

- **An overall report** that includes, but is not limited to, contacts, inquiries, applications, completed applications, acceptances and confirmations/deposits;
- **individual reports** for counselors and call-center personnel that include volume of contacts and conversions; and
- **financial aid reports** including, but not limited to, pre-awards, awards and acceptances.

No Quick Fixes

Finally, while we sometimes view successful enrollment management strategies as relying on big, bold measures, we should remember that even small changes in institutional behavior can produce measurable results over time. Combining these big-picture and detail-oriented factors leads to a successful outcome, with the result exceeding the sum of its parts. 

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