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10. PREPARING WOMEN TO BE PRESIDENT

Advancing Women to the Top Leadership Roles in American Higher Education

MEET THE NEW BOSS

With a play on words taken from a famous song from The Who, a 2012 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* begins with, "Meet the new boss. Same as the old boss." The article continues with a sobering statement that "in a troublingly stagnant portrait, the latest national survey of [American] college presidents finds a profession dominated by white men who have hardly changed in more than a quarter century. They're just older" (Stripling, 2012). Indeed, the 2012 American Council on Education, or ACE, data shows that women are 26.4% of college and university presidents in the U.S.[1] While "the rate of change has slowed considerably" for all women, the situation for women of color appears to be more daunting, since "between 2007 and 2012 the share of chief executives of color actually dropped to 13 percent." The ACE report reveals that when "minority-serving institutions are excluded, racial/ethnic minority presidents today lead just 9 percent of colleges and universities" (Kim & Cook, 2013, p. 1). The advances women as a whole have made are less impressive as well when one considers that women are much more likely to be presidents of community or two-year colleges in the U.S., and less likely to be presidents of doctoral institutions. If we exclude community colleges, where women make up more than one-third of presidents, and women's colleges, slightly less than 50 of which remain in existence in the U.S. and where women presidents are the norm, the percentage of women college presidents falls dramatically.

The most well-respected associations of higher education administrators in the United States recognize this as a problem. As one 2012 article in *The Chronicle for Higher Education* put it, "As far as students are concerned, men are the dominant minority, but male administrators hold a lopsided percentage of university power and the most senior leadership positions. What's more, men make most of the decisions that control women's educational lives and futures, without much input or oversight from women themselves" (Alex-Assensoh, 2012). Even when women and other diverse candidates have been named to presidencies, an ACE study finds that this so-called progress resulted from "a short-term commitment rather than a

A. Vongalis-Macrow (Ed.), Career Moves: Mentoring for Women Advancing Their Career and Leadership in Academia, 109–119.

change in culture." In a 2008 report called *Broadening the Leadership Spectrum: Advancing Diversity in the American College Presidency*, the authors found that the "immediate result is a woman or person of color as president. But when that individual leaves, boards and campus search committees often hire a white male. . . . Said one search firm leader: "I've had the experience the past several years of hearing comments . . . such as 'We've had our woman. We've had our black. We've had our Hispanic. We've had these people from out of state who are not our native sons.' And, therefore, [the insinuation is,] now it's time to get the best candidate" (Bridges, Eckel, Cordova, &White, 2008, p. 7).

The norm in terms of reality and expectation has remained white and male. In fact, one current woman provost seeking a presidency told me that, in her experience, she has come to believe she is a "pool filler" or, a more disparaging term, "the chick candidate." Search committees and search consultants know that the pool must be diverse, she said, but time after time, the job has gone to a white, male candidate. In one case, after interviewing on campus as a finalist for a presidency, she was told by the search consultant that the institution did not want to hire another woman to follow a woman president.[2]

Search Processes

The biases of the search process are well recognized. Molly Broad, president of ACE and past president of the University of North Carolina system says, "the dearth of female college presidents comes down to the hiring process. Since a president is selected by an institutions [sic] board of trustees – women, especially minority women, are virtually absent from most – tips on navigating the interview process and news about job openings tend to stay among the insiders: men" (Brown, 2009). The ACE acknowledges this in publication after publication, finding, for example, that "Women and candidates of color continue to be underestimated for their potential to lead. This can often be the result of conscious or unconscious reliance on existing group stereotypes" (Bridges et al., 2008, p. 5). Women of color confront multiple hurdles. In a study published by the *Harvard Educational Review*, Caroline Turner found that each of the women presidents she interviewed, who were Native American, Asian American, and Mexican American, experienced "gender bias, racial and ethnic stereotyping, and accent discrimination during the presidential selection process" (Turner, 2007, p. 21).

Concern about this issue has played a role in leading ACE to commission many studies on the characteristics of and pathways to the presidency, the most recent of which was released in March, 2013 (Kim & Cook, 2013). To showcase the new data and provide perspective on its findings, the ACE organized a panel, "Personal Pathways to the Presidency: A Discussion of the Presidential Pipeline," at the 2013 annual meeting. Following the panellists' descriptions of their own experiences, several audience members expressed their concerns over the relatively little progress

that has been made in recent years, and their frustration with studies, as opposed to actions that will lead to significant change. One attendee, in particular, a diversity officer who stated that he has assisted 30 searches, declared that in his experience it is the search committees that are the problem. They are sexist and racist and homophobic, he exclaimed, and we need to do research on this and take steps to eliminate these biases in higher education.

Not surprisingly, there is little public information about the inner workings of confidential presidential search committees. Since "boards alone (frequently their executive committees) appoint search committees," "Usually, more than half of the members are board members," and the "search committee chair should be a board member," scholarship as well as anecdotal evidence about the role boards play in shaping the presidency suggests to some that board composition is a roadblock for women (Johnston, Jr. & Ferrare, 2013, p. 42). A study by the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute for the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities finds that between "1981 and 2007, the percentage of trustees who are women increased to 31 percent from 20 percent." Citing other research, the report notes "women tend to have an impact, not when there are only one or two female board members, but when there is some critical mass" (Jaschik, 2009). One may conclude, therefore, that women may be less likely to be hired when the boards to whom they will report do not include a significant percentage of women.

Search committees made up largely of white men may also create an environment where members feel freer to ask what women candidates consider to be inappropriate questions. More than one woman provost I interviewed for this study described airport interviews, which in the U.S. are typically the next to the last step in winnowing down the applicants to the finalists who will be brought to campus for multiple-day interviews, where search committee members asked whether or not their husbands approved of their desire to seek a presidency. One search consultant I interviewed confirmed that lack of diversity on search committees and on boards of trustees is a real problem in diversifying the presidency.[3] Susan Resneck Pierce, the former president of the University of Puget Sound. Sound, author of *On Being Presidential*,[4] and a presidential consultant, however, is quoted as stating, "I work with boards of trustees from institutions all over the country as well as presidents and administrators and faculty members, and . . . I've encountered no bias" (Golden, 2012). I have heard similar statements made by search consultants who were invited to discuss the presidential search process on panels organized as part of professional development workshops. Yet even sitting women presidents admit that there have been gender issues in their relationships with board members. Pamela Gann, who recently stepped down from the presidency of Claremont McKenna College, for example, believes that men on boards of trustees may be "not that accustomed to working with women leaders." She revealed, "It was about my fourth year before they entrusted the college to me" (Biemiller, 2011).

Along with at times contradictory evidence and experience about whether or not boards and search committees play a role in the failure to diversify the American presidency, there are disagreements about whether or not there really is a problem. After listening to a presentation based on ACE data about the state of the American presidency, one U.S. male president at an international conference stated that the numbers and percentages shared could not be correct. To support his case, he listed the women who currently hold presidencies at top American universities.[5] S. Georgia Nugent, the former president of Kenyon College, calls this type of thinking about women presidents "the starry emporium." Instead of a "'glass ceiling,' which people often apply to the nebulous barrier keeping many women from leadership positions," we have a situation where the "presidents of Harvard, Brown and Penn are all women. That's very visible, and it gives a mistaken impression of the progress women have made in higher education" (Moltz, 2011).

Since many people in higher education recognize the lack of diversity in the American presidency and see it as a problem, individuals and organizations first turned their attention to efforts to ensure that women and other diverse candidates were in the pipeline for presidencies. Yet most now acknowledge that this is no longer the issue. The "royal road to the college or university presidency remains the Traditional path of the Scholar," and this is even more likely for women (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001, p. 209). The route, we all know, for the majority of U.S. college and university presidents goes from the faculty to increasingly higher administrative posts – most often in academic affairs – to the presidency. In fact, the immediate prior position for 44% of first-time American presidents in 2012 was chief academic officer or provost (Kim & Cook, 2013, p. 5). Women have held this position and others that typically lead to presidencies for years. ACE's *On the Pathway to the Presidency* study in 2008, for example, found that 36% of deans of academic colleges are women, and women make up 38% of chief academic officers and 50% of all "central senior academic affairs officers" (King & Gomez, 2008, p. 5). Jacqueline E. King, an author of this study, found that "With regard to women, especially white women, the pool of people is there." "We have to encourage them to apply for the president's job, and then the institutions have to be willing to tap them" (June, 2008). Over the past five years, then, women have held high level leadership positions at American colleges and universities. The most recent data reveal that 43% of senior campus leaders and 40% of CAO positions are held by women, and so "four-year institutions have ample opportunity to create greater gender diversity in the presidency" (Kim & Cook, 2013, p. 17). Yet the percentage of female presidents has barely changed.

In the Pipeline

Just because women are in the pipeline, we will not be able to diversify the presidency without further efforts. The first issue we must confront is that a great majority of women chief academic officers do not intend to become presidents. "Only 25

percent of female CAOs and 33 percent of male CAOs [the traditional most likely prior position to a presidency] say they have intentions to become presidents." "Most say the nature of the work is unappealing, they want to return to academic work or are ready to retire, and they are concerned about the time demands of the position" (Eckel & Hartley, 2011, pg. 8). More attention to this issue is clearly warranted. Further research based on interviews as well as survey data may confirm these findings for women's lack of interest in seeking presidencies, or it may reveal additional insights that will be helpful in encouraging women to seek advancement. Since many women – and especially women of color – faculty and administrators have experienced bias in graduate school and in their careers, since the presidency has remained overwhelmingly white and male, and since women who seek and hold presidencies report experiencing bias in the search process and in their role as leaders, are these factors playing a role in discouraging women from seeking presidencies? In addition, are women who have all the right credentials, skills, and experiences deciding not to seek presidencies out of a misguided understanding of what will be required, or what must be sacrificed? Do findings from the 1990s that indicate that "women choose not to pursue top positions in higher education institutions because they believe they must sacrifice their families, social lives, and sanity in order to be effective college presidents" still ring true (Brown, 2005, p. 660)? [6] Using the contemporary terminology of Sheryl Sandberg, are some women "leaning out" before they have tried "leaning in" (Sandberg, 2013)? What will be most helpful in supporting women who are poised for presidencies to take the next step to become candidates?

Encouraging women to seek professional development opportunities, and the willingness of their institutions to pay for their participation, is critically important. Programs in the U.S. include those offered for women by Higher Education Resource Services (HERS), such as HERS Bryn Mawr Summer Institute, HERS Denver Summer Institute, and HERS Wellesley Institute, and for women and men by ACE, such as the ACE Fellows Program and Advancing to the Presidency; by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), such as Executive Leadership Academy (with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities) and Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission; and by Harvard Institutes for Higher Education, such as Institute for Management and Leadership in Education and Institute for Educational Management. While these programs offer valuable opportunities for reading and reflection, for becoming familiar with the presidential search process, for broadening one's range of experience, for developing leadership skills, for learning how to lead organizational change, and for networking, the small size of the cohorts admitted into most of them means that many aspiring leaders will find it necessary to seek other means of professional advancement. Indeed, the ACE concluded in a 2009 publication that "National leadership programs do not have the capacity to meet the demand" (Hartley, Eckel, & King, 2009, p. 37).

Although they are rarely addressed in educational research or advice literature for higher education leaders, paid consultants provide assistance for aspiring

presidents. They provide a range of services from the very practical, such as reviewing a curriculum vitae or letter of application, to the more philosophical, such as discovering who you are as a leader and contemplating matters of institutional fit. Specialists who provide coaching to business leaders may also help with skill improvement, such as public speaking. Colleagues who have engaged consultants report paying fees of $200 an hour to $9000 for a six-month contract. Clearly, cost will be a factor in accessing these services for many higher education administrators.

Most American women administrators are aware of national programs for professional development, and many have applied to and completed such programs. Many have also hired consultants to assist them in a confidential way with job searches. It is mentoring, however, that is most often cited by individual women and in the educational literature as making the most significant difference in supporting female career advancement. It is the absence of mentoring that was identified by a woman provost I interviewed as the number one reason why, after serving for eight years in her position, she has not considered a presidency.[7] Her president, who is a woman, had not offered advice or encouragement, from her point of view, and, instead, had exerted "unrelenting pressure" on her to solve the college's financial problems without adequate human resources to do so. This interview provides one illustration of a problem identified two years earlier in a *Chronicle of Higher Education* article entitled, "Why Do Few Provosts Want to Be Presidents?" It reports that at private colleges and universities belonging to the CIC, "while 96 percent of respondents [who are chief academic officers] reported high levels of job satisfaction, they served an average of only 4.3 years in their current positions, about half the typical tenure of college presidents." An even smaller percentage of private college provosts are interested in seeking presidencies in comparison to chief academic officers at public institutions, which the 2010 article calls "troubling." Given "the close working relationship between provosts and presidents at relatively small private colleges, CIC president Richard Ekman thinks "that provosts would see the joy of the presidency." Perhaps the provost's role as "budget hawks," he surmises, is creating a situation where "the provosts are being the fall guys" (Fain, 2010).

Tensions and Mentoring

Tension between chief academic officers and their presidents, while not often addressed in the higher education literature, may play a role in the lack of mentoring which many women CAOs experience. The ACE uses information gleaned from its own Institute for New Chief Academic Officers and a program for CAOs and chief financial/business officers (CFOs) offered in conjunction with the National Association of College and University Business Officers to summarize what it calls "some of the recurring reactions of CAOs and CFOs regarding new presidents and their leadership." The list includes: "Being overly intrusive (micromanaging)," "Not knowing how to effectively create and lead a senior-level team," "Making too many

commitments and promises," "Being overly non-committal," "Being inconsistent with messages and actions," "Being unwilling or unable to reflect on their leadership," and "Not managing time and attention well" (Eckel & Hartley, 2011, pp. 22–23). By discussing each of these topics from the vantage point of CAOs and CFOs, the ACE acknowledges that at least some cabinet level administrators criticize, as well as praise, their presidents (particularly when the presidents are new). Tension between the two would not seem to support the possibility of a positive mentoring relationship.

Research on mentoring over the past thirty years demonstrates the significance of having experienced people provide career assistance, and the role that these relationships play in building confidence and advancing success.[8] A study of women presidents and mentoring by Terri Brown found that the problem for women is that the "college presidency is numerically dominated by men and, as a result, men have more opportunity to know the right people and have more access to sponsorship and promotions, whereas women may be excluded from these types of exposure intentionally or unintentionally." This is particularly true for women of color with presidential ability and ambitions, given the even smaller number of women of color college presidents in the U.S. Yet of the 91 female presidents Brown interviewed, a majority cited mentoring as playing "a critical role in advancing female college presidents up the administrative ladder" (Brown, 2005, pp. 659-660, 664, 663). Ruth Simmons, the first African-American president of a Seven Sisters institution and of an Ivy League institution, and the first woman president of Brown University, "credits a series of mentors who challenged, prodded, and supported her along the way" (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 59).

MENTORING

How should women gain the mentoring they need to move into presidencies? ACE recommends that presidents serve "as talent scouts for potential future leaders and . . . [provide] those identified with opportunities to gain necessary experience and develop new skills" (Hartley et al., 2009, p. 34). This may not always be possible on one's campus, given the financial strains and other tensions that, at times, permeate the relationships between women CAOs and their presidents. It is also the case that while many presidents support their CAOs in seeking professional development, their interactions with them are primarily focused on the needs of the institutions they both serve. There are also structural barriers at the national level that make it difficult for women provosts to meet prospective presidential mentors from other institutions. Some national higher education associations in the U.S. only offer meetings for presidents. Others organize separate conferences at different times of the year and in different cities for presidents and provosts. Some invite both presidents and provosts to attend the same meeting, but have separate programming for each group. Color-coded badges help to make the division between the two groups clearer. Of course none of these practices were designed to divide the

most senior higher education leaders from each other or to discourage women from seeking presidencies. Nevertheless, women CAOs report that they have difficulty finding women presidents who are willing to support their career advancement.

With the exception of the professional development programs that presidents generously offer to lead for a small number of prospective presidents, there seem to be few opportunities for presidents to meet, learn about, and work with provosts from other colleges and universities who demonstrate presidential potential. Some presidents clearly do make this their priority, however. Juliet V. Garcia, "president of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College" for the past twenty years, says "that she and other Hispanic presidents have worked to groom a new generation of minority leaders" (Stripling, 2012). Mildred Garcia, who is currently president of California State University, Fullerton, writes in *Presidency* that "we must be mindful not to maintain nor create barriers that have barred women from senior positions in the past. We must mentor others and support other women" (Garcia, 2008, p. 3).

One option is for professional associations to start formal mentoring programs for women who aspire to presidencies. This would help enormously to create the opportunities women need for sustained guidance from sitting presidents to whom they do not report. While some professional associations offer mentoring, such as CIC's Experienced CAOs as Mentors, these services are provided to members who have already attained a position and are new (and relatively new) to their jobs. In other cases mentoring is provided as part of participation in professional development programs, such as ACE's Institute for New Presidents and the Harvard Seminar for New Presidents, but, again, applicants must have already accepted presidencies. The Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences offers a Mentoring Program for New Deans & Associate/Assistant Deans that is also for those who have already attained a decanal position, but this year-long mentoring program provides detailed descriptions of "structure and implementation," requires a "mentee profile form" for those willing to serve in this capacity, lists many "areas of mentoring," and offers an evaluation component.[9] As such, this program may serve as a useful template for other professional associations which contemplate starting mentoring programs for prospective presidents.

Since research suggests that informal mentoring relationships last longer, and, therefore, provide "greater learning opportunities as well as constant guidance for protégés as they develop professionally," women also need to continue to seek informal mentors (Washington, 2011, p. 165). Studies find that "the mentoring relationship is more successful when the mentor and mentee are of the same gender and ethnicity and share similar values" (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011, p. 20). Yet we cannot expect that women presidents will assume responsibility for this task, for they are too small in number, and, in some cases, see themselves as exceptional. It is reported that, on occasion, women presidents have even discouraged other women from seeking presidencies. In one *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, administrators were advised "against moving to the next level – whether it's department head, provost, or

president – too quickly." According to one new president, "Many of these women are relatively new to that position. One hopes there will be time for seasoning" (Lively, 2000). Advice such as this, particularly when it comes from women presidents who moved very quickly up the administrative hierarchy, is perceived as discouraging to prospective women presidents. Of course we must acknowledge that "women are not immune to discriminating unfairly or to perpetuating the male-oriented system," and that many men are committed to diversifying the presidency, and are more than willing to serve as formal and informal mentors to women (Alex-Assensoh, 2012).

Mentoring alone, some feminists contend, "may unintentionally frame inequality as an outcome of women's deficiency rather than an outcome of structural or institutional barriers that impede their advancement despite having the requisite qualifications" (Allan, 2011, p. 107). So, along with mentoring, sitting presidents need to "fix structural problems and level the playing field." As one article exhorts, "If you see something, do something," . . . "draw attention to unfair advantages, antiquated procedures, and conventional wisdom that unfairly discriminates against women" (Alex-Assensoh, 2012). There is much to be done. Labor market research continues to show discrimination against American women in terms of wages, and reveals "that women are at a disadvantage for such [leadership role] positions, even when they are exactly equivalent to their male counterparts in all characteristics other than sex." Furthermore, documented resistance to women's leadership "can lower evaluations of women's personalities and skills, obscure women's contributions to group tasks, undermine their performance, and even subject them to sexual harassment" (Eagly & Carli, 2007, pp. 71, 78, 117). In a study of presidents of women's colleges and police chiefs, researchers discovered what they called the "glass-cliff" effect, where "making small mistakes on the job is particularly damaging to individuals in gender-incongruent occupations." In such jobs, women "not only are seen as unlikeable, but also are viewed as less competent than their gender-congruent counterparts after making a single mistake" (Brescoll, Dawson, & Uhlmann, 2010, pp. 1640, 1642). This suggests that in the higher education context, we have to be careful not to use higher standards in the evaluation of women candidates and administrators at every level. Most of the women I interviewed for this study believe that they have had to exceed expectations in order to achieve their level of professional success as CAOs and presidents.

Acknowledging that the pipeline problem has been solved, but that significant barriers discourage women from seeking and attaining presidencies is key. So is making a commitment to change the current conditions in higher education that perpetuate inequities, through board education and diversification, for example, and supporting women CAOs and other senior leaders through mentoring and other high-impact practices. Such measures will go a long way toward improving the prospects for women who contemplate, and, ultimately, seek presidencies. Having a goal in mind will be helpful as well. Women presidents who served on a recent panel on women in academic leadership agreed that the "percentage of female presidents should match the percentage of female students in higher education." In the U.S.

that would mean that 57% of presidents should be women at some future date, a significant increase over where we were in 2011 when this article was published, at 23% (Moltz, 2011). In answering the question, "So, Who Are the Next Generation College and University Presidents?" Richard A. Skinner and Emily R. Miller tell us they will be women. "We expect to witness the tipping point of gender within a decade at most," they promise, "followed by a time when women presidents are the rule, not the exception. The small gains by women in being selected for the academic presidency will be dwarfed in future years as women continue to succeed in higher education in much greater numbers than do men across virtually all aspects of the sector" (Skinner & Miller, 2012).

Without concerted action by both women and men, particularly those who hold presidencies, and by professional associations that are willing to take new steps to promote women's career advancement and candidacy for presidencies, these predictions will never be realized. The song by The Who, "Won't Get Fooled Again," after all, is a call to action. And it will take all our efforts to improve the prospects of American women as they seek to become presidents of colleges and universities.

NOTES

[1] Chief executive officers of American colleges and universities have the title of "president" and "chancellor"; the title of "president" will be used in this chapter to refer to those with either title.

[2] Interview with female provost who has been seeking a presidency, 13 July 2012. All interviewees were granted anonymity.

[3] Interview with search consultant, 3 July 2012. All interviewees were granted anonymity.

[4] See Pierce, S. R. (2012). *On being presidential, A guide for college and university leaders*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

[5] This occurred at the 2012 Oxford Round Table on women in higher education at Harris Manchester College, University of Oxford.

[6] Brown, T. M. (2005). Mentorship and the female college president. *Sex Roles, 52*(9/10), 660–664.

[7] Cites the work of Harrow, A. J. (1993). Power and politics: The leadership challenge. In P.T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Cracking the wall: Women in higher education administration* (pp. 42–158). Washington, D.C.: College and University Personnel Association.

[8] Interview with woman provost, 3 July 2012. All interviewees were granted anonymity.

[9] Raymond A. Noe's pathbreaking research is frequently cited. See, for example, Noe, R. A. (1988). Women and mentoring: A review and research agenda. *Academy of Management Review, 13*(1), 65–78.

[10] For more information about this program, see the Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences website at www.ccas.net. My familiarity with this program comes from serving as a mentor to a new dean, and as a member of the board of directors of this association.

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