Book Review

Nine university presidents who saved their institutions: The difference in effective administration

Edward J. Kormondy and Kent M. Keith

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What is the current status of the endowment? What are the enrollment trends for the past 5 years? What has been the institutional role of trustees? What is the commitment of faculty members? What is the mission of the institution?

The questions above are essential for a candidate to ask during the institutional search process for a new president. *Nine University Presidents Who Saved Their Institutions: The Difference in Effective Administration* provides a qualitative inquiry through the lenses of university presidents at institutions *in extremis*. Through the use of surveys and in-depth interviews, authors Kormondy and Keith produce a collection of institutional stories and personal memoirs of presidential survivors – those who endured the institutional hurricane – as an institutional playbook for current

presidents, trustees, faculty and other institutional stakeholders.

Regional accrediting associations were able to confidentially identify and survey 51 university presidents and former presidents who were (or were previously) at institutions *in extremis*. Thirty-six surveys were completed and returned from the eight different Carnegie Classifications used during the period of the study. Kormondy and Keith extended in-depth interviews to 10 presidents primarily on the East and West Coasts; nine presidential interviews were included in the publication after being vetted for review and modification by each president.

The authors provide a limited review of the literature surrounding the role of the university president, as well as characteristics of struggling institutions in Part 1. In Part 2,

Kormondy and Keith present an introduction to the institution and the background of the president. Furthermore, the authors include transcripts of in-depth interviews of each president in his or her own words. The final question, 'Would you do it again?' was asked of each president interviewed, and concludes each presidential interview transcript.

In Part 3, Kormondy and Keith present an analysis of each president's role in saving their institution through Bolman and Deal's (1997) four frames (structural, human resource, political and symbolic). In Part 4, the authors present a limited reflection on the survey results and common themes indicated by the respondents. The actual survey instrument and responses are included in the Appendix. Finally, in Part 5, Kormondy and Keith present seven 'lessons learned' as a result of their research.

In *Nine University Presidents Who Saved Their Institutions*, readers will find redundant ruminations presented more so as presidential memoirs rather than what the authors consider 'case studies.' The inclusion of interview transcripts with multiple Carnegie Classification presidents, although outdated classifications, is noble but provides little contribution to the overall objective of the book, which is to decipher the institutional puzzle of effective administration. After reading the first two transcripts, readers will soon become more interested in the variation of analogies such as 'a ship without a rudder' presented by Dr Stephen Morgan of the University of La Verne (p. 131), or the classic one-liners such as 'I had to pick someone to talk to or I would go crazy here, and you're the one' from

Dr Peggy Stock of Colby-Sawyer College (p. 61).

Readers will also find the overall presentation of the book concerning. First, all presidential interviews were conducted in 1999 and 2000 sans one (Dr Peggy Stock), thus immediately dating the information provided. Authors Kormondy and Keith did provide random updates throughout the interviews, but almost 10 years have passed and institutions (as well as most of the institutional presidents) have changed. Second, the assessment of the 'case studies' through Bolman and Deal's (1997) four frames presents itself as an afterthought. The presentation of literature in Part 3 would be better served if the authors had presented the four frames and asked each candidate to respond to each frame, rather than assigning various presidential actions. Finally, in an editorial sense, the publication is in dire need of formatting and proof reading, which was, given the time between interviews and actual publication, disappointing and distracting.

Overall, the most significant portions of the book can be best summarized by reading the six characteristics of struggling institutions by Dr Neil Hoffman, President of Otis College of Art and Design in Los Angeles and Westchester, CA (p. 6) and a table created by Kormondy and Keith, which corresponds the nine presidential stories and actions with Bolman and Deal's (1997) four frames (pp. 170–175).

In general, the authors would be better served to focus qualitatively on two or three individual presidential cases rather than present a quantitative focus through nine different

presidential lenses. Throughout the book, I found myself wanting to know more about each institution and for presidents to reflect further on dire situations with board members or how they were able to rebuild a town–gown relationship. If readers are interested in a true case study publication, I would direct them to McLendon and Peterson's (2000) case study on Olivet College and President Michael Bassis (coincidentally, a president surveyed by Kormondy and Keith in this study). Numerous institutional stakeholders will find the ability to relate to the story of Olivet and identify lessons for their own institutional state of affairs.

Fundamentally, if readers are, in the immortal words of Bonnie Tyler,

'holding out for a hero' and seeking through this publication a presidential profile that will cure the ills of their own institution and/or provide role clarity for all institutional stakeholders, they will be thoroughly disappointed.

REFERENCES

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Angela M. Cottrell
Vanderbilt University, Tennessee, USA