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ABSTRACT

To be effective, community college presidents must understand what leadership is, particularly as it applies to higher education. They must also understand the evolution of the role of the president over the last 30 years, from "manager" or "builder" in the early years to the more recent position of "motivator." There is little agreement in the literature on a definition of leadership; moreover, it has been suggested by some researchers that leaders can be more effective if they are able to shift styles according to the situation in which they find themselves. Often referred to as "moderate leadership style," this ability to shift styles results in a flexibility community college presidents must have in order to lead a diverse institution and deal with broad constituencies. In the 1950's and 1960's, presidents were seen as "builders," or strong, authoritarian figures responsible for planning and developing the colleges. In the 1970's, presidents were forced to deal with financial crises, demands for shared governance, increasingly agitated faculties, and, most controversial of all, collective bargaining. The emphasis during this time was on accountability, cost-effectiveness, and productivity; the role of the community college president became that of "manager." Today, however, there is recognition that good management is not enough. Effective community college presidents must be creative and charismatic and they must recognize the importance of exerting leadership in four key areas: (1) interpreting and communicating the college mission and goals; (2) creating a climate that encourages people and groups to work with the college; (3) establishing systems of governance that enable colleges to operate efficiently and effectively; and (4) providing educational leadership. (ALB)

EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENT

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Introduction

A group of graduate students in a seminar on higher education was recently asked to list the traits they associate with leadership, and they quickly produced a long list: visionary, energetic, confident, empowering, risk-taking, consensus-building, articulate, honest, courageous, capable of giving meaning and context to situations, resourceful, and so on. The list was discussed, and there was general agreement that these attributes were, in fact, associated with leadership.

But as the seminar went on, it became clear that the concept of leadership is elusive. Those who have written about leadership--and there are many--have provided many different definitions of leadership and have described various kinds of leaders. Some authors have spent time explaining the difference between the terms "leader," "manager," and "administrator." Others have written about specific leaders, those who are loved and those who are hated, those who have triumphed and those who have failed.

But underlying the discussion and the recent literature on the subject are two themes: 1) People seem to know a leader when they find one, and 2) they wish there were more to be found. Our society in general and higher education in particular can claim people in the past who were leaders, but it is more difficult to develop such a list today. It is almost as if the problems that exist are so overwhelming that people reject the very individuals who might provide the leadership necessary to solve these problems. After all, anyone who thinks that he or she could solve these problems must be crazy and, therefore, could not be a true leader. Warren Bennis (1989) writes, "Though we need leaders as much as ever, we have never held them in lower regard" (p. xi). He goes on to describe an "unconscious conspiracy" of bureaucracy, selfishness, lack of cooperation, "cocooning," and hopelessness that keeps leaders from leading.

Fortunately, despite the "gloom and doom," there are people willing to assume positions of leadership, people who believe they can have an impact in a particular arena or institution. This is good news for all of society, including higher education.

This paper will focus on leadership at one level of postsecondary education--the community college--and at the person most often looked to for leadership in that institution--the president.

The community college is at an especially important place in its history (Cross, 1986). It is still somewhat young, and yet it has been a part of American higher education long enough to have finished its major growth period and settled into a somewhat uneasy early adulthood. Roueche, Baker, and Rose (1988) see today's community college suffering a "crisis of confidence" (p. 49) because it is being criticized for not living up to its potential. Vaughan (1983) echoes this concern when he describes the community college as having "pr sed too much . . . [trying] to be the Ellis Island of higher education" (p. 9).

However, concern over the mission and effectiveness of the community college is only one issue among many. These colleges face other challenges as well: uncertain enrollments, increasingly diverse and poorly prepared students, limited and unstable financial resources, militancy among faculties and often among support staff, increased oversight from legislatures and state coordinating agencies, outdated and poorly maintained facilities and equipment, large numbers of upcoming faculty retirements, limited numbers of qualified applicants to fill faculty vacancies, affirmative action requirements, calls for better accountability, and criticism regarding a perceived lack of quality in the educational offerings.

Community colleges can meet these challenges only if their presidents are effective leaders. To become effective, presidents must do three things. 1) They must

understand what leadership is, especially in the context of higher education and the community college. 2) They must see how the role of the president has evolved in the last twenty-five to thirty years in order to understand why being a "builder" or a "manager" is no longer appropriate for the needs of today's colleges. 3) They must recognize the importance of exerting leadership in four key areas: mission, goals, and effectiveness; climate; governance; and the educational program. This paper will explore each of these three requirements in detail.

Leadership

The subject of leadership arouses strong feelings and much discussion. Many people would argue that it is very easy to recognize a leader, and, yet, "little is actually known about the phenomenon we refer to as 'leadership'" (Birnbaum, 1988a, p. 22). Gardner (1986a) defines leadership as the "process of persuasion and example by which an individual (or leadership team) induces a group to take action that is in accord with the leader's purposes or the shared purposes of all" (p. 6). Hersey and Blanchard (1982) define it as "the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in efforts toward goal achievement in a given situation. From this definition of leadership, it follows that the leadership process is a function of the leader, the follower, and other situational

variables . . . [all emphases appear in original]" (p. 83). Cohen and Roueche (1969) explain that a leader must have a group, and groups must have goals; it is the leader "who moves the group toward its goals" (p. 8). It would appear, then, that there are at least three elements involved: a leader, a follower or followers (a group), and a goal or goals. But how the relationship among these three elements is played out remains somewhat unclear.

For example, how do leaders influence their followers? Hersey and Blanchard (1982) argue that it is through power, which they define as "the resource that enables a leader to induce compliance from or influence others" (p. 177). They go on to summarize the different kinds of power that have been described over the years, starting with French and Raven (1959) who identified the following kinds of power: coercive (based on fear), legitimate (based on the position held by the leader), expert (based on the leader's expertise, skill, and/or knowledge), reward (based on the leader's ability to reward the follower), and referent (based on personal traits that make people like and admire the leader). Raven and Kruglanski (1975) added information (based on information the leader has or has access to) as providing another kind of power, and Hersey and Goldsmith (1979) developed the idea of power based on connection (the leader is connected with influential people either inside or outside the organization) (pp. 178-9). Fisher (1984) emphasizes the importance of charismatic power, which is

similar to referent power since it is "based on the admiration and liking that people feel for an individual" (p. 39). He suggests that the best leaders use charismatic, expert, and legitimate power with only an occasional use of reward power and "little or no coercive power" (p. 40).

In an attempt to define leadership more accurately, many people have tried to differentiate among "leadership," "management," and "administration" although this same distinction is not made in the private sector (Roueche et al., 1988). The basic distinction seems to be that management is more concerned with the operational aspects of an organization, getting things done, planning, using resources effectively, etc. Leadership, on the other hand, is concerned with vision, mission, goals, change, direction, and meaning (Eaton, 1984; Gardner, 1986a; Green, 1988a; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Roueche et al., 1988). Bennis (1989) sums it up this way: "Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right. Both roles are crucial, but they differ profoundly" (p. 18).

However, Bogue (1985) uses the terms interchangeably while Green (1988a) believes that the actual differences between the terms are not particularly important; it is "the symbolic differences that are meaningful for higher education" (p. 17) in that "leadership . . . provides shape, direction, and meaning, and is therefore far more intellectually respectable [than management]" (p. 16). Even though the term "management" has become widely used in

higher education, there are those who dislike the term and feel it is inappropriate. Faculty especially are uncomfortable with "management" and its connotations of the business world while leadership is perceived as being concerned with issues on a higher plane.

These concepts are difficult to deal with in any setting, but as Birnbaum (1988a) points out, "The study of leadership is even more difficult in colleges and universities than in other settings because of the dual control systems, conflicts between professional and administrative authority, unclear goals, and the other unique properties of professional, normative organizations" (p. 22). When one looks at the college president, the situation is even more complicated, largely because of the stereotypes of college presidents that exist. It is assumed that presidents are leaders because that is their role. They "are visible and prominent, [they] spend a great deal of time doing leader-like things . . . , and people have the need to believe in the effectiveness of individual control. Leaders are people believed by followers to have caused events" (Birnbaum, 1988b, p. 23). The expectation of leadership colors the way a college president is perceived so that it is difficult to know if the person is really a leader who makes things happen or if he or she is assumed to be responsible simply because of the position held.

Whether based on perception or reality, people who study higher education, including the community college,

often focus on the president as the key to an effective institution. Millett (1980) and Hammons (1987) both see leadership centered in the president, who is the key to institutional effectiveness. Fisher (1984, 1988) emphasizes the need for a strong presidency, seeing the president's "effective, empowering leadership [as] the key element in an institution's success or failure" (1988, p. 65). Fisher, Tack, and Wheeler (1988) go so far as to predict the demise of higher education if this strong leadership does not surface.

But is there agreement on what strong leadership means? While there is some agreement, it appears that the focus shifts depending on the time and the setting. Fiedler (1967) developed the Contingency Model of Leadership Effectiveness, which posits that leadership style is relatively fixed but situations change so that success is based on the fit between style and situation. Bogue (1985), Hall and Alfred (1985), and Gardner (1986a) also emphasize that leaders have different styles and qualities, and must operate in a wide variety of settings.

Not only are there different kinds of leaders; but, some writers suggest, leaders can be more effective if they are able to shift styles depending on the situation (Berg, 1978; Hall & Alfred, 1985; Wenrich, 1980). Hall and Alfred (1985) refer to this ability as a "moderate leadership style" (p. 39). Berg (1978) and Wenrich (1980) argue that this flexibility is especially important for the community

college president who is expected to lead a diverse institution that attempts to meet the needs of a broad constituency. A review of the recent history of the community college presidency illustrates this flexibility.

The Evolving Role of the Community College President

Clearly, the role of the community college president has changed over the years. In the 1950's, 1960's and early 1970's, community college presidents were "builders," the people who planned and developed these colleges (Kerr, 1985; Vaughan, 1983). New institutions were being built at the rate of one a week (Rushing, 1976, p. 5-7); money was readily available; and presidents were strong, authoritarian figures who knew what they wanted--and usually got it (Alfred, 1984; Alfred & Smydra, 1985; Richardson & Rhodes, 1983). People talked about the "community college movement," implying "that some force greater than any single college or any single person was moving the community college toward its manifest destiny" (Vaughan, 1983, p. 1), but there is little doubt that these early presidents were an essential part of this "force."

However, in the years between the early 1970's and mid-1980's, life was quite different for community college presidents. The years of astonishing growth (a 47% increase in the number of community colleges between 1966 and 1976 [El-Khawas, Carter, & Ottinger, 1988, p. 7]) were over. The

bubble burst, in a sense, and presidents were forced to deal with financial crises, demands for shared governance, increasingly militant faculties, collective bargaining, and a highly politicized environment, both internally and externally. Solomon (1976) sees this change as the president going from a "nuts and bolts" and "bricks and mortar" person to "a conceptual, creative, human relations specialist" (p. 93); but others describe the change in less positive terms. Cohen and Brawer (1982) report that the president's authority and power were declining (pp. 110-111, 118). Alfred (1984) and Alfred and Smydra (1985) discuss the fact that the president's role became more complex and more political because of the increased number of "publics" involved in decision-making: state legislatures, coordinating boards, the executive branch of state government, even local constituencies. The president was forced to seek the support of these sometimes hostile groups in order to keep the college open.

The emphasis during this time was on "effective management, efficiency, and financial control" (Green, 1988b, p. 31). Community college presidents were managers who were concerned about productivity, management by objectives, accountability, cost-effectiveness, and retrenchment (Glenny, Shea, Ruyle, & Freschi, 1976; Kintzer, 1980; McClenney, 1978; Richardson & Rhodes, 1985; Rushing, 1976; Wygal, 1978). Millett (1980) even described the college president during this time as "manager-in-chief"

(p. 111). According to Millett, the president should be concerned with "work planning," "work performance," "work resources," and "work evaluation" (pp. 113-4).

The major concern, of course, was how to cope with shrinking financial resources (Alfred, 1978a; Alfred, 1978b; Rushing, 1976). Presidents had to focus on the bottom line, which led to decisions to eliminate programs and services that had a low priority. These decisions required new and different management skills (Alfred, 1978a).

But currently there is recognition of the fact that good management is not enough. Today, higher education needs leaders (Green, 1988b), and community colleges in particular need leadership "to rekindle the enthusiasm and spirit of adventure that marked the community college during the 1960s and 1970s" (Vaughan, 1983, p. xv). Cross (1986) calls for "strong leadership to identify the new ideals that can unite and inspire to move community colleges off the plateau" (p. 238). Hammons (1987) says the colleges need leaders, not caretakers (p. 10).

And what is it that leaders need to do? Gardner (1986b) lists nine tasks that leaders perform: envisioning goals, affirming values, motivating, managing, achieving workable unity, explaining, serving as a symbol, representing the group, and renewing. To accomplish these tasks effectively, college presidents need a variety of skills and characteristics. Fisher (1984) stresses the

importance of charisma, as described above. The "three principal conditions for charisma are distance, style, and perceived self-confidence. And the most clearly documentable of the three charismatic condition is distance [all emphases appear in original]" (p. 43). Fisher argues that presidents can be effective leaders only if they remain aloof from their "followers."

In later works, Fisher (1988) and Fisher and others (1988) add to the characteristics of effective presidents. These leaders have a strong belief in what they do; they take risks; they are committed to a vision for their institution; they are action-oriented; they work hard and long; they are courageous; they have a sense of humor; and they "exude strength, confidence, intelligence, insightfulness, and decisiveness" (Fisher et al., 1988, p. 110).

On the other hand, Birnbaum (1988a, 1988b) sees the president as operating in an environment that is decentralized, loosely coupled, and based on "conflicting authority systems" (1988b, p. 17). Effective presidents are able to function in this complex and ambiguous world by understanding and protecting the institution's culture and by being satisfied with making only modest changes. They are realists who understand that they can influence others only if they allow others to influence them (1988b, p. 19).

Even though Birnbaum presents what is probably a more realistic picture of college presidents, in that their

impact is often rather limited, those who write about the community college president tend to side with Fisher's belief that presidents need to take an active role in shaping their institutions. Typically, effective community college presidents are described as having a sense of direction, providing educational leadership, thinking in global terms, creating a structure to implement plans and goals, delegating, taking risks, acting more than reacting, making timely decisions, resolving conflicts easily, maintaining a positive outlook, being energetic, motivating others, having integrity, communicating effectively with constituents both on and off campus, being flexible, building consensus, and tolerating ambiguity (Cosand, 1979; Gleazer, 1980; Roueche & Baker, 1987; Vaughan, 1986). These skills, qualities, and actions are those associated with leadership in today's environment. Certainly they echo Gardner's nine leadership tasks.

So, in the last twenty-five to thirty years, the community college presidency has changed in some rather significant ways. The "builders" of the 1960's were a particular kind of leader--strong, committed, authoritarian. They had colleges to plan, facilities to build, faculties to hire; and they could not "waste" time being flexible and working toward consensus. In contrast, the "managers" of the 1970's displayed few of the characteristics typically associated with leadership; and, yet, perhaps keeping institutions afloat during troubled times--even if it means

counting pennies and cutting programs--is in its own way a demonstration of leadership. If survival is the institution's goal, and the president achieves this goal, that achievement should count for something.

Now, in the late 1980's, there appears to be much more of a need for leadership, for vision and direction and motivation. But today's leaders cannot rely on using their authority alone to accomplish goals; they must be willing to communicate, compromise, and share the authority and power they have. This is a vital lesson for community college presidents who seek to shape and influence their institutions.

Providing Leadership in the Modern Community College

There are four areas in particular where community college presidents need to exert leadership: 1) establishing and communicating the mission and goals of the institution and determining if those goals have been reached; 2) establishing a climate on campus that will encourage all the constituencies to work toward those goals; 3) establishing a governance system that enables the institution to operate effectively; and 4) providing leadership to the educational program. The rest of this paper will examine these four areas.

Mission and Goals

As early as 1969 Cohen and Roueche discussed the important role leaders play in helping community colleges live up to their unique mission. It is primarily the president who interprets the community college mission to both the internal and external constituencies; the president clarifies the direction the institution will take and keeps everyone focused on its central purposes, values, and goals (Kauffman, 1983; Roueche & Baker, 1987; Roueche et al., 1988; Vaughan, 1983).

Sometimes, in order to fulfill its mission, the college must change; and it is the president who envisions, nurtures, and manages change (McClenney, 1982; Roueche et al., 1988). Often, the change can take place only through careful planning, and, again, the president plays the key role in providing leadership to the planning process (Armes & O'Banion, 1983; Baldridge, 1978; McClenney, 1982; Rushing, 1976). In fact, Richardson and Rhodes (1985) emphasize that the president must be visibly involved and participating in planning efforts or else other people at the institution will not believe that planning is important. Unfortunately, presidents are often caught up in more routine matters and do not set aside time specifically for planning (Armes & O'Banion, 1983; Bennis, 1989).

Another related key issue is determining how well the college is fulfilling its mission and achieving its goals. Institutions are being asked to measure their effectiveness

through the accreditation process (Andrews, 1983; Kirkwood, 1981; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1987; Western Association of Schools and Colleges, 1987), and state governments are increasingly interested in outcome measures. Presidents need to exert leadership in defining the issues, that is, helping people to understand the complexity of institutional evaluation; they also need to use their leadership skills in working with faculty to design ways of measuring institutional effectiveness, to implement such programs, and to use the result for improving the college.

Climate

Certainly community college presidents have a certain amount of influence and power (Wing, 1972) as do all college presidents, but their effectiveness is limited if they cannot create a climate that encourages people and groups in their institutions to work with them. The president clearly sets the tone for the college and creates an environment of open and honest communication (McClenney, 1982). It is the president who promotes a shared pride on the part of faculty and staff who are part of a college with "dirt under its fingernails" (Rushing, 1976, p. 13) or whatever identity the college embraces. And the president creates an environment conducive to growth in order "to bring out the best in people" (Richardson & Rhodes, 1983, p. 195).

Recently this kind of leadership has come to be called "transformational," especially in recent work by Roueche et al. (1988). After an extensive study of Miami-Dade Community College in Florida, these researchers concluded that the transformational leadership of Miami-Dade's president, Dr. Robert McCabe, was the primary reason for this college's great success with disadvantaged students. This kind of leadership starts with the creation of a vision, followed by the creation of a plan for getting the institution mobilized to change. Throughout the process the president stimulates thinking, suggests new directions, creates trust and understanding, and helps other people to see the need for change. The president actually creates a new community college culture by challenging and empowering others so that there are leaders throughout the college. Through this sharing of power, the college is transformed.

Of course, not everyone shares the view that transformational leadership is the answer to problems faced by community colleges or higher education in general. Alfred (1984) downplays the importance of this somewhat "heroic" leadership stereotype, and Birnbaum (1988a) suggests that while transformational leadership is important, it is also important not to lose sight of the value of "the skilled and able administrator who is able to keep an institution functioning effectively in turbulent times. Few administrators are charismatic, but all

administrators can be competent" (p. 204). However, quiet competency probably does not create the kind of climate that empowers people and leads to revitalization.

Governance

In addition to creating a positive climate, community college presidents need to exert leadership in establishing systems of governance that enable colleges to operate efficiently and effectively. Historically, community colleges were bureaucratic. Local boards established policies, but it was clear that presidents had a great deal of influence over the boards, which led the presidents to become rather authoritarian (Kintzer, 1980; Richardson & Rhodes, 1983; Vaughan, 1986; Zoglin, 1976). In the 1970's, however, participatory or shared governance began to appear on community college campuses. Faculties, which traditionally had not been interested in governance or had not had the power to assert a right to be involved, gradually began to demand a role in institutional decision-making (Baldridge, 1978; Gleazer, 1973; Zoglin, 1976).

Often this demand was translated into a formal structure involving a union so that community college presidents were suddenly faced with the challenge of dealing with collective bargaining. Some presidents had been successful in modifying the traditional bureaucratic structure to allow for participatory governance, but unionization changed these informal arrangements forever

(Richardson & Rhodes, 1983; Vaughan, 1986). A political model of governance became the norm, and presidents had to deal with the power of interest groups, conflict, coalition-building, and formal written agreements (Alfred, 1985; Cohen & Brawer, 1982; Richardson, 1975).

The challenge to presidential leadership in an era of collective bargaining is to minimize the conflict and hostility that a "labor-management" mentality can produce and to emphasize the value of shared governance in enabling an institution to achieve its goals. Richardson and Rhodes (1983) suggest that shared governance enables the president to be a leader by using personal credibility to develop commitment on the part of others. Through participating in important decisions, people increase their sense of professional responsibility and commitment to the college.

There is a danger, however, that shared governance can go too far. Fisher (1984) believes that shared governance can facilitate presidential power, but it is important to remember that presidents have the final authority in making decisions. The president is still responsible to the board (Foresi, 1974), and even faculty, in a recent survey, agreed that the president was obligated to make decisions (Vaughan, 1986). While returning to the model of the autocratic president of the 1960's is not desirable (Vaughan, 1986), there is some concern that "the role of the president as college leader has been eroded" (Vaughan, 1986, p. 87). Fisher and others (1988) suggest that one reason

for the lack of leaders in higher education is because of too much shared governance so that no one knows who is in charge and leaders are simply expected to go along with majority rule.

Establishing and maintaining a workable governance system will challenge the most effective leader, yet without such a system, other attempts at leadership are likely to fail. It is difficult for a president to exert leadership in a hostile, combative environment where no one is willing to be a follower.

Educational Program

A final area in need of presidential leadership is the educational program. As early as 1969, a Cohen and Roueche study examined the role of the community college president in providing educational leadership to the institution. Although this responsibility is often assumed to be part of the president's role, their study revealed that boards seldom assigned this responsibility explicitly to the president and that presidents seldom addressed the issue in their formal or informal reports. But, Cohen and Roueche ask, if the president is not the educational leader on campus, then who is? (p. 6). The answer, of course, is that it must be the president (Foresi, 1974; McCabe, 1984; Silber, 1988).

Unfortunately, other issues and concerns often take the president's attention away from the educational program (McCabe, 1988; Vaughan, 1986). Alfred (1984) discusses the importance of external issues for presidents now, especially fund-raising. Therefore, presidents may have little connection with the academic program, which is usually handled by a vice president. Kelly (1988) believes that presidents can support innovative ideas, professional growth, and inter- and intra-departmental cooperation; but they seldom try to effect change by influencing instruction directly.

However, not everyone is satisfied with presidents taking a less active role in educational leadership. Roueche and Baker (1987) suggest that presidents must have a strong commitment to the educational program and must demonstrate this commitment by their actions. This focus on instruction and learning starts with the president and radiates throughout the rest of the administration. Vaughan (1986) found that presidents who were identified by others as leaders saw themselves as educational leaders, people concerned about the educational environment. McCabe (1988) makes what is perhaps the strongest plea for community college presidents to be educational leaders. These presidents can shape the institution's direction by supporting needed changes or improvements. In fact, the "primary priority as a college president is that of providing educational leadership" (p. 21).

Conclusion

The last three decades have been turbulent times for community colleges and their presidents. The president of the past was an authoritarian figure, used to doing things to suit himself (and, yes, it almost always was a man). In contrast, today's president is looked to for visionary and empowering leadership, especially in identifying and measuring the college's mission and goals, establishing a favorable climate, ensuring effective governance, and emphasizing the educational program as the heart of the institution. Some authors argue that the president's authority has been weakened by shared governance and collective bargaining, but a more common opinion is that the president can still exert power and influence through strong leadership that relies largely on consensus building and conflict resolution.

Only Fisher, Tack, and Wheeler in their 1988 study of effective presidents concluded that presidents should not be particularly concerned with maintaining collegial relationships (p. 73). This point, which was also stressed in Fisher's earlier book (1984) on the college presidency, concerns Vaughan (1986), who argues against what appears to be Fisher's call for a return to the autocratic president of the 1960's. Leadership, not authoritarianism, is what community colleges need as they move into the 1990's.

To be effective, today's presidents must understand leadership: what it is, how it works, and when the setting requires an emphasis on a particular leadership style or attribute. They should be familiar with the role of the community college president and how it has evolved in the last twenty-five to thirty years. And, finally, they must find ways of exerting leadership throughout their institutions but especially in the four critical areas described above.

It is not an easy task. In fact, serving as the president of a community college is a difficult and demanding job. The college president "is the executive, administrative, academic, and symbolic head of an organization whose performance cannot be measured and that resists leadership" (Birnbaum, 1988b, p. 14). Yet, presidents are necessary and important in enabling institutions to function effectively (Birnbaum, 1988a). For those who are willing to accept the challenge, the community college presidency offers a great opportunity to exercise leadership in a complex and exciting institution.

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