

# The Transitional Leader

Patrick Sanaghan, EdD (sanaghan@aol.com)

Dorothy A Escribano, PhD (escribanodorothy@gmail.com)

# Framework of this presentation

- Issues that may put institutional sustainability at risk
- The changing face of higher education leadership
- Interim/acting leadership vs. the transitional leader
- Strategies for the quick and successful integration of the transitional leader

# Various Strategies for Onboarding the Transitional Leader

- The Strategic Leadership "Audit"
- The Learning Network
- The Cultural Travelers Network

# The Strategic Leadership Audit

Purpose:

- Manage the information overload.
- Provide the transitional leader with an informal and informative diagnostic of the senior team's level of strategic thinking, candor and communication skills.
- Begin to create a “*System’s Perspective*” about the challenges and opportunities facing the campus.

# Suggested Questions for the Transitional Leader to Ask

- What are the 5 strengths of your area of responsibility? (What are you most proud of?)
- What are 1-2 areas of needed improvement in your area. (What could be done better?)
- What are the most important challenges this institution faces over the next 1-3 years?
- What's an opportunity that excites you that we should consider?
- What are two things that need to be changed within the institution?
- What are 2-3 things that should never change? And why not?
- What is it about the mission and values of the institution that personally resonates with you?
- What is one piece of advice that you can give me in my new leadership role?

# Organizing “Cultural Travellers” Conversations

Purpose:

- Identify those individuals who deeply understand the culture and complexity of the campus.
- These are highly credible, trusted people who “*represent what's best about the place.*”
- They can move between the different cultures of the institution and be respected and can act as bridge-builders and translators.
- They tend to be well-known and accessible.

# Some Suggested Questions that the Transitional Leader Should Ask Cultural Travellers

- Will you tell me a story about the campus that represents the very best of the place?
- How do leaders earn people's trust on this campus?
- What are the “non-negotiables” on the campus, those things, values and behaviors that need to be preserved at all costs?
- What are some of the “unwritten” rules that I need to pay attention to?
- What's something that needs to change on the campus? Why?
- What are 3 words that describe the culture of the campus?
- How are decisions really made on the campus?
- Please describe the relationship between the faculty and administrators?
- How are people recognized and appreciated on the campus?

# CREATING A LEARNING NETWORK

Purpose:

- To teach the new leader about the campus complexity, its values, history, culture and politics in an efficient and effective manner
- To begin to build relationships with key campus leaders
- To create an ongoing resource for the transitional leader that will provide them with honest feedback and the “pulse’ of the campus



# Strategic Questions to help the Transitional Leader Learn about the Institution

- What is going well on the campus?
- Please tell me what I need to pay attention to?
- What are some issues that haven't been effectively dealt with that need some resolution?
- What about our history either helps us or hinders us?
- What is the one greatest strength of the campus?
- What's an area that really needs improvement?
- What are you most proud about this campus?
- What are some questions you have for me?
- What advice can you give me that would be helpful for me to follow?

# Summary Remarks

- Questions and observations



ONBOARDING THE  
**“TRANSITIONAL”**  
PRESIDENCY

A New Imperative for  
Interim Presidential Leadership

Patrick Sanaghan  
with  
Dorothy Escribano,  
Steve Titus,  
Karen Whitney &  
Mary Hinton

**The strategies in this text can apply to any senior officer who accepts the role of transitional leader.**