

# THE COLLEGE CEO POSITION

## ADVICE FOR THE NEW CEO

BY

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# Introduction

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Overseeing the operations of a college and/or district combines the elements of a financial wizard, a logistics magician, a political demagogue, a Baptist preacher, and a prognosticating soothsayer. It's particularly challenging for new CEOs. The following is advice for such new CEOs and for those just interested in a shared perspective. The layout begins with a topic title and subtitles for each area and then a few personal recommendations and examples. Finally, a few scenarios test your mettle as a CEO.

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## Written Communication

*Regular College Operations.* As a CEO, members of the college community often take what you say as a decision even when your intention is to inform. Written communication about college practices should thus be worded carefully to emphasize the developmental nature of the issue. One of the most effective ways to accomplish this is to regularly publish the non-confidential discussions which you hold with your senior staff, typically called the Cabinet. As a suggestion, send this report via email to the entire campus/district with the communication at three levels. First, the email itself can contain just bulleted phrases to describe the topics discussed. Second, the email can contain a link to a posted document that contains paragraph level summaries of the non-confidential topics which were discussed in Cabinet. Third, this posted document can have imbedded links to resource documents and web pages with detailed background information that was reviewed in Cabinet. Follow this [link](#) to view an example of this system at Mt. SAC. When I first started this Cabinet reporting, folks here at Mt. SAC assumed these were reports of Cabinet decisions, but soon they realized that this transparency of information enabled them to be involved in providing feedback to senior management on projects under development. The resulting feedback often helped with early course corrections. In addition, the transparency greatly increased our credibility, especially with constituent representatives.

*Board of Trustees.* Chancellors and Superintendent/Presidents have a unique role in communicating with trustees. For sake of discussion, this communication is categorized as 1) immediate response, 2) regular reporting, and 3) individualized contact. First, Board members should be encouraged to make direct inquiries of the CEO. It is particularly helpful if trustees ask questions in advance about Board agenda items. Even if a dean or vice president would have the answer to the trustee's question, the trustees should be encouraged to go through you and let you delegate to the right person for an answer. Stress to your management team that, if they are contacted directly by a trustee, they should refer that question to you—even if that just means that you authorize that manager to respond to the trustee's question. Urge trustees to fill you in when they are contacted by college/district employees. This may be delicate with respect to union contacts, but remind the Board that YOU are their direct employee and can only function well if YOU know everything that they hear. When you respond to individual Board member inquiries, respond to the Board as a whole unless the matter is confidential to that individual

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Board member. Remember, the Board makes decisions as a whole and should be equally informed by you, the CEO. Second, make regular written reports to the Board as a whole. It is good practice to make separate reports on general information and on confidential matters. It is my practice to make general reports once or twice a month and to summarize confidential communication about once a month. See examples of this practice at Mt. SAC by following this direct [link](#). Topics for these regular general reports are matters within the scope of Board authority (budget, facilities, planning, accreditation, etc.); issue analysis at the national, state, and local levels (see *External Environmental Scanning* below); and kudos and happenings that you pass along about achievements and activities of individuals and groups at the college/district. Managers, and really everyone on campus, pass these along to me, and I dump them in an electronic folder to pull out for the once-a-month Board Reports. Third, have regular one-on-one meetings with each trustee. Typically, these individual encounters happened naturally with the Board members every month or two. However, I keep track of those that do not meet individually with me, and I schedule such a meeting at least once every two months.

*External Environmental Scanning.* As a CEO, it is essential to anticipate changes that are in the works nationally, statewide, and locally. Get on list serves, hook up to RSS feeds, subscribe to newspapers and magazines, and go to visionary conferences. Read, read, and read. More than that, analyze and communicate the results. This takes real discipline and time management. Read on the plane, read at lunch, read before going to bed, read when a meeting is cancelled. Analyze this information with the lens of how it will affect your college/district. For example, on the proposed new growth formula, read analyses by the LAO, CCLC, CCCCCO, and even [California Competes](#)—then figure out the impact on YOU and articulate it well! Use information like this in strategic planning, enrollment management, new program development, and so on. Report your insights as part of your *Written Communication* (see above) and as part of your *Inspiration and Visioning* (below).

*Inspiration and Visioning.* As the CEO, you must articulate a vision for the college/district and inspire others to follow that vision. It is human nature to be motivated more by the WHY of your organization than by the HOW. Those at your college and in your community need to believe in the core values of your institution; they need to feel a part of the goals your college seeks to achieve. So you embody that vision. Do that by telling YOUR story and the stories of those

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whose lives are transformed by your institution. Keep your eyes on the horizon and inspire others to take that journey with you. As changes deluge community colleges, tie those initiatives to that vision. Articulate WHY the college/district needs to take the directions on each issue that advance that vision. Connect to your passion and compassion for what has been your life's work.

*Community and Partners.* As CEO, you are an important bridge between the college/district and the community and to partners with whom you work. There are four important elements of that bridge: 1) messaging, 2) serving, 3) leading, and 4) advancement. First, Get on and stay on the speaking circuit within your district. I give five or six of these presentations annually. See an example by following this [link](#) or this [link](#). Use the above information to craft a message that both informs and inspires the community. Freshen that message regularly. 2) Serve the community in a manner that connects to the college/district mission and matches your professional skills and interests. For example, I serve on the board of the San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership and on committees for three local cities. 3) Look for leadership roles in the community, again in areas that match your professional skills and interests. For example, I chair our regional CTE consortium and co-chair an organization of regional business and government CEOs. 4) Be the chief fundraiser for your college/district foundation. (For more on this latter point read *Presidential Perspectives on Community College Advancement*, and my chapter entitled “Getting to the Next Level: What Does It Take?” [link](#))

*When NOT to Write.* As a CEO, everything you say, write, and do will be scrutinized. There is no line between your “personal” position and that of you as the CEO. So write your emails, reports, cover notes, and Christmas cards from the perspective of your position as CEO. If you need to discuss a sensitive matter with a subordinate, have that conversation face-to-face, just you and him/her. If a situation creates strong feelings—either way, for good or ill—do not commit those feelings to written words. Yes, I know, this is extremely restrictive. Nevertheless, many talented and experienced CEOs have found themselves in unrecoverable situations because of a momentary loss of composure captured in flaming prose.

## **Oral Communication**

*Audience and Messaging.* As a CEO, you will regularly be called upon to speak in public. Each person has a unique public speaking style. It is actually a very good idea to refine that style with

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some professional training. You would be surprised how much that helps. We all have our different ways of preparation, but whatever means that might take, be sure that you are well prepared for each opportunity to speak. Spend some time researching the audience. Tilt the message toward their interest. Their level of engagement will be much higher if you speak on their terms. Keep your basic message simple. Repeat the theme often. Tie each point you make to that theme. Done well, they will remember your passion and engagement and they will remember the key theme to your message. That's all, and that's enough.

*Speech 101 (Death by PowerPoint).* Google “Death by PowerPoint” and then follow the advice of folks like Forbes and Kapterev. PowerPoint is a good way for the presenter to organize ideas but it is NOT a good way to present complex ideas. Seriously. I am as much a perpetrator of bad PowerPoints as of good ones. A bad example of my creation is at this [link](#). However, I had a small audience of about 30 people and handed out full page copies AND gave out flash drives with the document as well. A better example of mine is at this [link](#) but still not at the Forbes level. Oh, well.

*Importance of Face-to-Face.* As a CEO our time is the limiting factor in what we can accomplish. So we have a tendency to use electronic communication and group meetings for communication. (Just open your calendar for the last month or so.) However, do not neglect the importance of one-on-one, face-to-face meetings. Four essentials: First, meet face-to-face with each of your direct reports no less than twice a month. I know, you see them all the time in Cabinet and so forth. Let me tell you that the direct solo conversations are unique and cannot be replaced. Let your hair down. Talk confidentially—and protect the confidentiality of information shared with you. Build bonds of trust and camaraderie. Second, walk around campus at least an hour a week. Stop by offices unannounced—but without an agenda. Poke your head into faculty offices. Sit down and chat. Let them talk. Ask questions perhaps, but don't pontificate. Listen. Third, have scheduled meetings with all middle managers at the end of each year. Walk over to THEIR offices. Let them talk about whatever they want. Encourage them to brag or even complain. Listen. This works at small colleges AND big colleges. Finally, have in-person meetings with students. Not just student leaders, but let your Student Activities folks set up a time once or twice a month for students to talk directly with you. Provide pizza and lemonade. Have staff set up the group of students each time and be sure they know the ground rules, e.g., no

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gripping about individual faculty or staff. You'll be surprised about the insights on existing practices and the good ideas for new practices!

## Transparency

*Policy and Procedure Development.* As CEO, you oversee development and approval of Board Policies and Administrative Procedures. If you are a President/ Superintendent, you oversee this from beginning to end. If you are a Chancellor, you work with the College Presidents to assure that BPs and APs are functional at the college level. If you are a College President, you have input to the District process. Nevertheless, transparency and participatory governance are essential. Some use the CCLC Policy & Procedure Service ([link](#)). You should personally review each update on BPs and APs provided by CCLC. For technical changes like statutory references I make these as administrative changes and update our documents accordingly. For substantive changes I take these first to Cabinet for review. Note that I reserve the prerogative to make this distinction. Cabinet reviews and edits based on our existing BPs and APs as they often differ from the CCLC templates. This occasionally requires an administrative review directly involving the appropriate administrator. Note that all of this is transparent to the college because these documents and discussion summaries are in Cabinet Notes distributed to the whole campus and posted online. If a suggestion for a change in a BP or AP originates from the campus or the Board, a form is used to submit this to me directly. Then the same process occurs through my technical review and editing by Cabinet. When the Cabinet version is complete, regardless of origin, the BP or AP goes through our participatory governance process. That process begins in our governance group which we call President's Advisory Council, PAC ([link](#)) and then follows one of three paths which are described in AP 2410 ([link](#)). All of this is transparent through publishing minutes of PAC meetings. This open, transparent, and collegial process has enabled us to arrive at a reasonable compromise on even the most controversial issues.

*Fiscal Status and Budget Development.* As a new CEO, you will need to jump right into the planning and budget cycle. Most likely, the Tentative Budget for your first year will have been approved in May before you begin work. The Adopted Budget in September will set the level of resources for your first year. Making changes in the planning and budget process takes time, experience, and finesse. My advice is to first learn the process well, depend on your senior staff, and do not rush to make significant changes. You can, however, make the process more

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transparent if it is not already sufficiently open. There are four key elements of budget transparency: 1) open access to understandable budget data, 2) open sharing of discussions of budget development, 3) open sharing of projected state resources as conveyed in the January Proposed Budget and May Revise, 4) dialog with the campus at open town hall type meetings.

- 1) On budget data, work with your chief financial officer first to improve budget report formats. Be sure that these documents include narratives such as budget assumptions and rationales. Then work with your committee charged with advising on the budget process to improve the accessibility and clarity of the budget reports.
- 2) On budget development, have those discussions first in Cabinet and include a summary in the widely distributed Cabinet Notes. Develop three scenarios based on revenue and expenditure assumptions which are conservative, moderate, and optimistic. Follow the District's budget development process. Don't seek to change that process right away, but work to have the relevant Administrative Procedure or other budget documents clearly and completely define the existing process. This alone may accomplish some of the improvements that your early assessments have indicated as needed.
- 3) Share the Governor's January and May budgets along with analyses by the Chancellor's Office, CCLC, and the LAO. Add your own narrative about how these budget proposals will help or hinder your college/district. Transmit this information through Cabinet Notes or special campus written updates.
- 4) In your regular all-campus meetings, include this proposed budget information and local impact. Deliver the message yourself or have your chief financial officer do so, whatever the college/district tradition might be. Of course, deliver the same messages to your Board of Trustees as a part of the routine cycle of reports at regular Board meetings.

*Source Data and Analysis.* As CEO, decisions made by you (and your senior staff) should be clearly seen as driven by data and accompanying analysis. This information combined with relevant laws, regulations, policies, and procedures should be clearly stated as the basis for your decisions. Sharing the source data, your analysis, and the legal citations adds transparency,

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builds confidence among your constituents, and helps inform the college and community about how the college is run. All of this is good discipline for you and your staff as well. As you will see later in the section on *Delegation and Accountability*, you should expect the same “homework” by your senior staff as they bring issues and recommendations to you. As a practical matter, I collect source documents and data in folders on my computer and send these out as part of the agendas for Cabinet and President’s Advisory Council. If the source is a paper document, I have my staff scan it. If the source is an email, I save the email in the relevant computer folder as well. Then in Cabinet Notes and Board Reports, I upload and link these source documents to the issue summaries. A secondary benefit is that I have all these source documents in searchable formats on my computer so I can recall that key piece of information readily.

*Strategic Planning and Accountability.* As a new CEO, you have inherited a strategic planning and accountability system. Typically, the college/district strategic plan has goals linked to your mission/vision/core values and has measurable objectives with key performance indicators. See the Mt. SAC Strategic Plan ([link](#)). The strategic plan is informed by program review outcomes, and an annual report is produced. Accountability is achieved through assignment of objectives to units or groups at the college/district along with benchmarks for progress on the key performance indicators. The cycle of planning and accountability is complete when the next program review report shows progress on the assigned strategic plan objectives in both narrative form and through key performance indicator data. Resources are allocated through the budget development process by prioritizing funding for activities proposed by units and groups in the program reviews which will achieve results as measured by key performance indicators. See Mt. SAC Cabinet Notes 7/11/17, Item 6 ([link](#)). The implementation of this basic planning, accountability, and budgeting process varies considerably from district to district. It is essential that these processes are 1) transparent, 2) widely understood, and 3) rigorously followed. Yes, you will quickly see areas in need of improvement, but initially focus on these three standards. Publish and discuss the planning, accountability, and budgeting process often and in a variety of venues. Make sure your management team members not only understand the process but are evangelists. Accreditation standards require all of this PLUS that evaluations of the process are done regularly and used for improvement. As a new CEO, get to know these processes well and read past evaluations if available. If not, use the participatory governance process to create such an

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evaluation process. It is through evaluation that you will be able to guide improvements as you see the need for them. Through complete transparency, you will gain valuable input from all levels of the college and avoid changes that are not effective or that may be seen as administrative over-reach.

## Leadership

*Are you the Boss?* As a college/district CEO, do you have the same authority as a private sector CEO? No, of course not. Most of us struggle to be clear about those areas where we DO have authority and to develop strategies for leading the college in areas where we have influence but “shared” authority. Let me assert that thinking about authority of the college CEO is almost always NOT the best path forward. My suggestion is to treat almost every situation by using influence first and reserving authority for closure purposes. Start by using group processes where the discussion begins with a defined issue and desired outcome, proceeds to collect and analyze good data to inform the matter, and then moves on to clarify interests of those affected by the outcome. At this point, brainstorm solutions and evaluate them for their potential to meet the group’s various interests. The process may not need to be this structured or linear and may take quite a bit of time over several sessions, but using these elements will, in most cases, make the consensus decision clear to all parties. In other words, use your influence to carry out a constructive development and analysis process and the right decision will usually become self-evident to all parties. Your role is then to bring closure by blessing that outcome, stating clearly the rationale for the decision, and facilitating the movement toward implementation. This is not to minimize your role in this group consensus process. There will be key points where you give direction such as deciding who needs to be at the table, keeping the group on task, determining the nature of the research, setting the criteria for evaluating potential outcomes, and providing concise wording for the decision. And note the upcoming section on *Problem Solving*, especially *Give Praise, Take Blame*.

*Visioning and Direction.* A major role of the CEO is articulating a vision for the college/district. Notice that the term is “articulating” the vision not “creating” the vision. What is a vision? A vision is a description of a future condition at which point optimal results have been realized. The vision is an extension of the mission in that the areas of the college/district mission have been projected into the future to a point that all is being accomplished. So a vision is not

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achievable but is instead is inspirational and sets direction for the work. The vision belongs to the college/district not to the CEO even though, as the person charged with articulating the vision, many will see it as “your vision.” That’s okay—because what you articulate will derive from a combination of those outcomes that the collective college family wants to achieve and what you see as the future. How do you create this blend? In your first year, listen to as many in the college/district as you can, often called a “listening tour.” For example, at each college I have served, early in my tenure, I met with each manager who led me around their domain and explained how it all fit together. The extent of my contribution was to ask the managers open-ended questions about those matters upon which they commented. I met off campus with each Board member and with each vice president—both to get to know them and to listen to their confidential insights. I had the Board members set up meetings for the two of us with significant community members, “introducing” me to the community. I met formally with divisions and departments but also casually with many, many faculty. I walked around campus and introduced myself to students—often to their surprise—and always found that they loved to talk about the college and their experiences. I read everything I could get my hands on—especially accreditation documents. I listened, listened again, then listened some more—to the point that their vision blended with mine. Over time this vision—and accompanying core values—has been used as the touchstone to assure that the direction of the college stays true into the future. I rarely miss an opportunity when speaking in public or in small groups to passionately express the college vision and describe how what we are doing—or about to do—moves us toward that vision.

*Balancing Business Necessity and Human Needs.* As CEO, you are the head of a corporation, a business with a bottom line. The primary “assets” of the corporation are its people—note that we spend 85% of our budget on them. So while we need to make prudent fiscal decisions and comply with applicable laws, regulations, policies, and labor contracts, we also need to support the needs of individual employees. There are several compelling reasons for tempering business necessity with human needs. First, it’s the right thing to do. We are in the business of helping people attain their full potential, and this applies equally to employees as to students. It is a core value. Second, having a compassionate approach to solving difficult personnel issues creates a campus climate that is supportive and affirming. Remember that people work hard when they believe in the WHY of the institution not just the WHAT and HOW of their jobs. So a supportive

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campus climate is a productive campus climate. Finally, addressing the needs of individuals through creative problem solving often avoids using the ugly alternatives such as progressive discipline, layoffs, and law suits. These are not only expensive and time-consuming, they drain our enthusiasm and passion for our already challenging leadership role.

*Managing Delegation and Accountability.* As a CEO, you articulate a vision and set direction—but you also orchestrate development and implementation of strategies to carry out that direction. In almost all matters, that means delegating the work to one or more senior administrators and setting accountability standards for achievement of the outcomes. As CEO, you set the WHAT not the HOW. Several elements of this simple motto are key. First, define the scope of the work clearly and reduce it to writing. Agree on a title as well as the task. I know this seems trite, but it is important that everyone uses the same language. Second, set the criteria that define both the boundaries of the work and the expected outcomes. Articulating the scope of the task is as important as stating the objectives. Third, those objectives must be measurable, so agree on the metrics. It is important to have baseline data and a clear research methodology. Progress cannot be determined if those charged with the task do not know the yardstick by which their work is to be measured. Especially for large tasks, create benchmarks that can reasonably be achieved in the near term and with available resources. Finally, set up a reporting system. The key to CEO oversight and accountability is reporting back regularly on progress toward the established objective. That said, be flexible with your VPs, allowing them to push reports back if they are not ready and even to redesign the task as the reality of the work emerges. You will notice on my Cabinet Notes ([link](#)) that the last item is a list of projects that Cabinet is overseeing and that each has an assigned VP and a date for the next report. In almost all cases the VP has delegated the work to a manager on their team, and often that manager comes to Cabinet to deliver the update. Cabinet as a whole discusses the progress, provides feedback, and comments on implications for their own teams. In most cases, the next steps are clear and agreed upon by consensus. In some cases, it lies with me to set direction and/or priorities. For example, I asked the VPs to initiate expansion of course offerings to high school students on high school campuses. (Setting direction.) We agreed to call this Dual Enrollment Enhancement (Setting the title.) The objectives were to increase FTES, to improve the college-going rate of high school students, and to improve relations with our local school districts. (Setting objectives.) The criteria were 1) active and enthusiastic participation by the school district at the staff level, not just at the top; 2)

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a coherent set of course offerings at each high school, not just random courses for enrollment purposes, 3) support and involvement by departmental faculty, particularly the chairs, in the areas of course offerings, and 4) a smooth and well-staffed administrative process so that the paperwork was not a barrier. (Setting criteria for the objectives.) The VP of Student Services would work with High School Outreach and the VP of Instruction would work with academic deans and department chairs. Each VP and their delegated manager were to report regularly. (Setting reporting responsibility.) A date was set for reporting back and an initial strategy (Setting reporting timeline.)

*Listening and Speaking.* As CEO of an educational institution rather than a commercial business, your ability to get things done depends on getting folks to work together toward a commonly recognized objective rather than giving orders that others are duty-bound to follow.

Fundamentally, that means that your leadership style is Other-Centered rather than You-Centered. Others are motivated by their own values, attitudes, and experiences. To motivate others to work passionately toward an objective, they must see the value in their own frame of reference. Consequently, you must gain an understanding of the values and frames of reference of others. You do that by active listening, being engaged in the message others are sending when they talk about the objective under discussion. Pay attention to the dialog, the give and take between those with differing opinions. Don't be the first to share your position. In many cases, someone else will say what you were going to say—allowing you to reinforce that position and ultimately have the group embrace that position as their own rather than yours. Adjust and modify your initial thinking based on the group input. If you speak first, changing your position is more difficult. Take notes of the wording, even exact phrases, used by others in line with the outcome you would like the group to support. Add points to reinforce that position and sharpen its focus. Finally, be the one to summarize verbally the outcome of the discussion using words and phrases originated by others in the group. Be the one who follows up with a written summary distributed to the group.

*Developing Professional Relationships.* As you move into the role of CEO, climbing the ladder from middle management, your relationship with colleagues changes tremendously. What you express as friendship to an employee may be seen as favoritism by others. A casual remark in a social situation may be seen as college policy. What was seen as acceptable physical displays of

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friendship between colleagues of equal status is no longer appropriate with those who report to you. Caution, discretion, and boundaries are key. Be cautious and aware of the impact of your words and actions. Be sure others at work do not mistake your friendliness as personal. Likewise, have your antenna up for words and actions of others that imply an inappropriate closeness. Be discrete by avoiding awkward situations or conversations. Establish and maintain clear boundaries both physical and otherwise. Develop “deflection techniques” to sidestep such situations without being rude or confrontational. This may sound harsh, but you must project impartiality while maintaining approachability. You must be perceived as being professional while also being friendly. The effectiveness of your leadership depends on the trust, confidence, and respect of others. So where do you go for those let-your-hair-down, what-do-I-do-about-this relationships? My advice is to find a peer mentor that you trust and admire. For me, when I began as interim president at Modesto Junior College, that person was Ben Duran, president of neighboring Merced College.

*Your Evaluation.* As a Chancellor or Superintendent/President, the Board to whom you report is charged with doing your evaluation. While the Board will certainly use their own experiences and perceptions of your leadership, both the Board and you as CEO will benefit from two important additional inputs to that evaluation: your Self-Evaluation and a “360 Evaluation” from those with whom you work. Your Self-Evaluation as a new CEO should be based on expectations the Board has of you and on key “startup” factors you can glean from comments throughout this article. Thus, early on in your tenure, have a conversation with the Board about their expectations—and this does not have to be a formal process. Then write out your own expectations for your first year. At the end of your first year, address these in your Self-Evaluation. Be candid but not sophomoric. When some goals are still in process, say so and carry them over to the next year. When new issues have arisen, include them in next year’s goals. Share your Self-Evaluation with those who will do your 360 Evaluation, that is, those in your immediate work circle. Make a list of administrators, faculty, classified staff, students, and community members with whom you work frequently or in sufficient depth. For me that is usually sixty to eighty people. Be sure that the process is confidential and anonymous. Use a Likert Scale but also ask for narrative comments. Have this compiled by a confidential employee in Human Relations with categorization of responses by the above-mentioned groups. Give both

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the Self-Evaluation and the 360 Evaluation to the Board in advance of the form they will fill out. I use an adaptation of the CCLC form ([link](#)).

*Succession Planning.* An essential role of the CEO is developing talent among your faculty and staff with the goal of creating opportunities for advancement within the college. If your college does not have a “grow your own” leadership training program, consider creating one. There are several models, so be sure that your program fits the culture of the college. Be sure to play a role yourself as a presenter, but be sure the organizers are a good cross sections of those you are reaching. As you get to know those on campus, be a “talent scout.” Look for those who have the potential to lead. With definite intentionality, refer those folks to resources and opportunities to develop their leadership skills. Appoint them to college-wide groups, send them to leadership training—paying their way, recommend them for service on accreditation visiting teams, encourage them to join professional organizations, and provide personal mentoring and advice about moving up the ladder. Yes, some will move up by moving out to other colleges. However, many will stay for the supportive climate at your college.

## **Problem Solving**

*Best Prepared in the Room.* As a new CEO, you will provide direction to the entire college/district, from HR to IT, from Facilities to Foundation, from Budget to Basic Skills, from PR to PE. Like most of us, you probably came from just one of the college areas, or perhaps even from outside the college ranks. On the plus side, this means that you will be bringing fresh eyes to those new areas. As a challenge, you will need to quickly acquire a deeper understanding of those new areas, a series of “crash courses.” Your sources are 1) the college, 2) external documents, and 3) conferences/training. At the college, read college policies, procedures, and guidelines (a grind); plans such as Student Success, Student Equity, Strong Workforce, Guided Pathways, Technology, and the Strategic Plan; research reports, program review summaries, and accreditation docs—especially cited sources (better); and college annual reports, press releases, bond oversight annual reports, and foundation blurbs (good place to start). As for external documents, read or re-read with new perspective overview documents of CCLC, AACC, and LAO—see their recent publication pages; key research reports—have your VPs recommend two or three in their areas; and finally materials posted on the web sites of membership organizations in key areas: CCCCIO ([link](#)), CCCSSAA ([link](#)), ACHRO ([link](#)), ACBO ([link](#)), and CISOA

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([link](#)). You know the usual CCC conferences, but select breakouts that expand your knowledge rather than the ones that are comfortable. Consider one of the “new college president” institutes, particularly AACC ([link](#)) and Harvard ([link](#)). The goal is in the title, be the “Best Prepared in the Room.” Note that this does not call for you to be the most KNOWLEDGEABLE in the room. To be that intent listener and processor described in previous sections, on each subject you need to know the vocabulary, history, players, issues, good and bad strategies, laws and regs, and most importantly both where the alligators are hiding and how many skeletons are in the closet.

*Managing Change: Knowing the Culture.* As a new CEO, you are not just expected to produce the status quo but rather produce change to improve the institution. Much of this monograph is about the strategies to manage change. One of the most important lessons, perhaps the hardest to learn, is that each college has a distinct, unique, and persistent culture. Having worked at several colleges, I have experienced a range of college cultures: Ask the Union First, Don’t Cross the Chancellor, We’re the High Cost Sister College, We’re a Family So Include Everyone; Fix Us & We’ll Follow You to name several. (Sorry for being more than a little snarky.) To be successful in managing change, you must work within these cultures. So learn them first. Remember that Listening Tour? That should be your first dose. Keep at the culture dive in each of your interactions on campus. Don’t be discouraged; it takes at least a year or two. At one place early in my career I made an ego-driven mistake and never recovered. At another place, I prioritized getting along with the faculty union leadership and got a lot done. At one place I learned that everything must be done by committee so be patient but persistent. Remember that it is YOU who must adapt to the college culture—at least in the near term.

*Knowing the Result Ahead of a Meeting.* As CEO, you use the effective practices we have discussed previously to produce desired outcomes. As you go into a meeting, have a clear idea of the desired result on each issue. Classify potential results as optimal, acceptable, and rejected. You aim for the optimal result but can live with the acceptable result. That does not mean you are giving up on the optimal. If in the meeting you gain insight into the actions needed to move in that direction, the meeting is a success. If the result appears to be tending toward a recommendation you would reject, utilize a deflection strategy: delay to get more information, postpone to get wider input, wait until availability of funding is clearer, or suggest that members

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take a period of time to reflect on the implications of the unwanted direction. Patience and persistence will increase the likelihood of the optimal outcome. Of course, if you know about the landmines BEFORE the meeting, you may be able to resolve misunderstandings directly with those having concerns. In either case, know the results you want and can accept ahead of the meeting.

*Timing is Everything.* As a new CEO, resist the temptation to produce immediate change. Yes, your fresh eyes will soon see not only areas where change would be beneficial, but you will have ideas as to how to make such changes. Good ideas will gain traction when the time is right. Interestingly, there will be changes that a diverse majority of college folks will say are needed but have been waiting for authorization to move forward. After validating the reality of such situations, assisting some of these changes to take place can give you good initial credibility as a leader. As to those other ideas of yours, be patient. Start by engaging the college community on the matter. Give direction (see *Delegation and Accountability*) then guide—but do not manage—the process. Assure that the development of the idea is very transparent. Provide additional support and direction as appropriate but keep your antenna up. Projects tend to follow one of three scenarios. 1) Path to Success is characterized by general buy-in, steady progress, and a clear point where the college is ready to act. Your role: provide closure (see *Are You the Boss?* above). 2) Path to Failure is characterized by general apathy or resistance, lack of progress, and no clear point where either action or no action is evident. Your role: quietly stop work on the project; do a postmortem at the senior staff level. Then forget about your idea. 3) Path Roadblock is characterized by a barrier which may be lack of resources or low priority or, most difficult, a diffused resistance to change on this issue. As to resources or priority, be patient, don't force the issue, and look for the right time to make resources available or raise the priority. As to resistance to change, look for the path to acceptance. Some ideas: Find a champion among the resistant group. Send people to a conference or another college where the solution has been implemented. Facilitate a meeting where concerns can be aired then follow up to solve areas of concern articulated by the group. Wait for change of leadership or composition of the resistant group. Finally, don't force the change but be “actively” patient and persistent.

*Deliver Rationale with the Decision.* As a CEO, when you have brought an issue or project to closure, be the one to deliver the written decision and rationale. In most cases you should be able

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to write this yourself with editing and input from your senior staff. In cases where you do not feel confident to do so, read and review the staff report and then distribute the information yourself—with acknowledgement of the author(s). Use words and phrases from the group that worked on the project. Be concise but complete. Provide source documents containing the details. Be sure to express your support. Give praise and attribution. (See *Give Praise, Take Blame* below.)

*Give Praise, Take Blame.* As a CEO you are the Chief Motivator; you are the Campus Climate Weathervane. If your college/district is perceived as a positive, supportive, and affirming institution—from Board members through every classification of employee on campus, you will be much more effective as a leader. Two simple ideas: give praise, take blame. Live this mantra. Celebrate every achievement. Include successes in your monthly Board Report. Have special recognitions at Board meetings. Call out positive contributions of those present at campus and community meetings. Seek out individuals informally at campus gatherings and praise them for their latest milestone achievements. Have a special Presidential Award of some kind and have a campus group run the process. Encourage other groups on campus to publically recognize outstanding peers and then pass along these recognitions in your Board Report. In evaluation of your direct reports, don't neglect discussion of their strong points.

On the flip side, take the public blame. In particular, provide cover for you senior staff. If your VP of Human Resources struggles with a union issue, be the bad guy. If your VP of Student Services gets attacked for a questionable use of process, support her interpretation. If your VP of Business gets labeled as a tightwad, support the conservative and cautious use of funds. Now this is not blanket approval, this is public support. Talk one-on-one confidentially with the HR VP about how to handle the union. Meet individually with the CSSO to straighten out process interpretations. Speak directly to the CFO about total disclosure and transparency on fiscal matters. Deliver praise publically and constructive criticism confidentially. Finally, there are limits. If a person who is your direct report does not measure up, be frank when evaluating that person's performance—and be sure to be specific about needed improvements. Give direction and offer assistance in helping that person to improve. Be firm that you expect cooperation, sustained effort, and significant improvement. When the time comes that you realize that

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improvement is not going to happen, do not hesitate to have that person separate from the college. See *Balancing Business Necessity and Human Needs*.

## College/District Operations

*Labor Negotiations.* If your role as CEO is that of a Chancellor or Superintendent/President, your responsibility includes guiding District negotiations with labor unions representing employee groups. As a new CEO, you will have inherited both existing labor contracts and the history (read: baggage) that has accompanied their creation. First, read all contracts thoroughly, discuss with your senior staff any lingering issues—plus their take on how well the contracts are being implemented. Meet with the District representatives on the bargaining teams and have the same discussion. As you begin to know the trustees (See *Working with the Board of Trustees* below), include discussions about labor relations. Good labor relations are about 1) trust, 2) transparency, 3) trust, 4) relationships, 5) trust, 6) positive attitude, and 7) trust. As CEO, you establish these elements by having open, honest, transparent, and affirming meetings with union leaders on a regular basis and then following through on items discussed at these meetings. Set aside your past history and personal beliefs about unionism and develop a code by which you will live in this indisputable union environment. That code must emphasize the positives: a good union contract sets the rules of employer-employee relations in a fair and equitable manner, and a good working relationship with union leaders makes them part of your leadership team to solve thorny personnel issues. Take every opportunity to affirm the value of those contracts and the important contributions that union leaders make to the District. That’s your code. The most important venue in which to apply that code is the bargaining table. In my opinion, the mechanism of Interest Based Bargaining (IBB) is an outstanding practice that diffuses acrimony, gets to the heart of issues, establishes the basis of agreement on those issues BEFORE discussion of contract language, and creates a collaborative rather than adversarial bargaining atmosphere. Liebert Cassidy Whitmore offers solid customized training in Interest Based Bargaining ([link](#)).

*Enrollment Management.* As CEO, you will give direction to the college/district “revenue engine,” that is, enrollment. The key is data-driven decision making. First, work with your CIO and IT folks to review the current process for enrollment management and the data system used to inform those decisions. When those folks recommend improvements, be sure this becomes a priority. Get your 320 team together and be sure that all parties are agreed on the FTES data—

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especially the annualizers used to produce the P-2 report. Read and use the source data reports yourself. If this is not in your current skills set, get training and ask questions until you are up to speed. Below are a few of the reports we use at Mt. SAC for enrollment management.

- Lag Report. Shows course sections that are more than 5% below the fill rate average for the last four years and so are lagging behind expected enrollment.
- Demand Report. Shows number of days from the opening of registration for all seats in a course to reach 90% fill. Courses which fill quickly show high demand and the need for more seats—evaluated both in the short- and long-term.
- Day-to-Day Registration Report. Shows actual section fill rates each day compared to the projected fill rate based on a four year average, a reflection of demand—both high and low.
- FTES Analysis. Shows FTES per LHE by course. FTES/LHE is a productivity measure.
- Room Efficiency Report. Show the ratio of maximum seat capacity as scheduled for each section to the maximum seat capacity of the classroom. This data is useful in schedule building to match the course max with the room max.
- Seat Exception Report. Shows sections scheduled for fewer seats than approved in the course outline of record. The report also show the room seat maximum—one cause for such an exception.
- 320 Extraction Exception Report. Lists sections that are not picked up by the Banner process of extracting FTES data for the 320 report. If not corrected, the FTES for these sections would not be reported to the state and not funded.

*Program and Curriculum Development.* As CEO, you will not be “in the weeds” on curriculum matters but rather have a strategic view. In particular, review data regularly on the number of awards for each degree and certificate program over the last three years. Be sure your Instruction Team has a process to evaluate programs with low award numbers. Review your college/district

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policy on program discontinuance. Make the strengthening of weak programs the first priority, require a recovery plan, provide resources for recovery, and set a benchmark to evaluate that recovery is proceeding. If these criteria are not met, follow your district/college policy and procedure for elimination of the program. Use a similar approach for courses. Review data both on the role of courses in the curriculum and on enrollment efficiency. Work with your Instruction Team to move standalone courses into programs and follow a recovery plan to restore enrollment of courses which are not filling. Similarly, review annually a report on courses that have not been offered in the last two years. Have your Instruction Team provide an analysis of these courses and a path to elimination or restructuring. In all this work in your oversight role as CEO, be patient but persistent, share information transparently, review the data at Cabinet to get all perspectives, and let decisions develop naturally by review of your staff. Remember to exert influence by guiding these processes and to exert authority by providing closure when consensus emerges to revise or eliminate programs or courses.

## **Working with the Board of Trustees**

*Policy Governance Not Micromanagement.* As a new CEO, you need the support of your Board of Trustees on policy matters AND you need their support of your authority to carry out those policies. This may be bold to assert, but this distinction should be one of the early discussions you have with the Board. Share the CCLC publication *Board Focus*, Fall 2006, “Preventing Micromanagement—Creating High Performance Board” ([link](#)). This should be supported by Board Policy 2430—Delegation of Authority to [CEO] ([link](#) to Mt. SAC BP). Reinforcing this important delineation of roles takes regular and consistent attention. When a Board member hands you a marked up copy of the faculty union contract and says, “Make these changes,” respond that you appreciate and will take this input into consideration. Remind this Board member that it is the Board as a whole which gives direction to the CEO, doing so at the policy level, so that you and the District negotiating team can craft the outcome that meets the interest of the Board. When a Board member recommends that you contract to have an air pollution study done on the impact of the new parking project, affirm that air pollution from traffic impacts is indeed an important issue. Remind this Board member that compliance with the state’s environmental laws are the responsibility of the administration and offer to supply a summary of the latest campus Environmental Impact Report with special attention to the parking

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project. Reaffirm role definition, reaffirm the importance of issues raised by Board members, and provide a constructive and relevant response.

*Working with Individual Board Members.* The previous section *Written Communication: Board of Trustees* discusses the basics of routine communication with the Board of Trustees. As a new CEO, you will also need to develop working relationships with individual Board members. Generally, this requires an understanding of the special interests trustees might have as well as how they prefer to work with you. Either through direct conversation or through receiving individual requests for information, you will be able to discern what it is about the college that is of primary concern to each Board member. As follow up, devote some effort to connecting with the college or community in areas of special interest to Board members. I had a trustee whose interest was in public safety so I made it a priority to get to know the local police chief and sheriff and to regularly attend our Police Academy graduations—accompanied by that trustee. I had a trustee who was from an outlying community in which we had a college center, so I made a special effort to be on the WIB in that county and to get to know the school superintendent. I also made a point of attending events at that college center—accompanied by that trustee. You will also develop an understanding of how each Board member would like to work with you. Of course, you will always respond quickly and thoroughly to Board emails and phone calls. But beyond that, individuals have a comfort level regarding certain ways of working with you. I had a Board member who liked to meet for breakfast at a local hangout in his home town, and he was always prepared with a list of issues to discuss. I had another trustee who regularly emailed and texted me and wanted immediate feedback but rarely wanted to meet in person. Adapt to serving special Board interests to a reasonable degree and adjust your working patterns to fit what is most comfortable to trustees.

*Communication of Board with Others.* As a new CEO, you will quickly realize that your Board members meet with and talk to constituent group leaders on campus. In addition, most Board members have extensive community connections and frequent discussions with significant people who have interests related to your college. These conversations and connections are quite valuable to the college—and to you as CEO. Board members have different levels of interest, ability, or willingness to share information with you. The best way to maximize this flow of information is to develop and maintain a strong trust relationship with as many trustees as

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possible. While there is certainly no formula that guarantees the path to such relationships, a few key points from my own experience may help. Find a connection through a strong shared interest such as health care, technology, or athletics and then include a bit of back-and-forth as a table setter to more issue oriented discussions. Have this information sharing in one-on-one confidential conversations and then protect that confidentiality going forward. As trustees introduce you to community members, follow up and develop your own relationship with them. When trustees hear back from community members about your professionalism and leadership, this strengthens your relationship with that trustee.

*Managing Board Meetings.* As a new Chancellor or Superintendent/President, among your responsibilities are the agenda and conduct of Board meetings. Board meetings at college districts are almost tribal rituals. The blowback from rapid change can be considerable. The best course is to adapt to the existing process. So among your initial points of influence are 1) WHEN items are brought to the Board, 2) CONTENT of the Board item, 3) FORMAT not of the Board item but of resource materials such as the Adopted Budget, 5) TOPICS for Board study sessions along with PRESENTERS, and the Chancellor/President Report. Just a few basics. Do not bring an item to the Board until all parties are in agreement or at least do not oppose the action. Limit the content of Board items to the bare minimum needed for approval. *See Policy Governance Not Micromanagement.* Make sure that the format, length, and level of reports to the Board reflect the needs of the trustees not the desires of the staff. Solicit study session topics from the Board first and get affirmation of your recommended topics from the Board in an open session regular meeting. Rarely present at study sessions yourself, have the reports made by a team of the VP and one of the direct staff responsible for the area being presented. Review a draft of the presentation in advance and do not be shy about requiring adjustments in format, length, and level.

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## Conclusion

Being a college president is the best job I have ever had. I enjoy going to work every day. As a new CEO, you will have challenges. Know that we have all had rough waters. Know also that you make a difference every day in many ways. Hold onto your values, keep your priorities straight, and enjoy every challenge and every success.

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## Scenarios for Discussion

The following scenarios represent actual situations with only moderate editing. They are intended to stimulate discussion and have no “right or wrong” answers.

### Scenario #1—The Trustee Request for a “Favor”

A Board Member requests that a student who is the daughter of a friend of hers have substandard grades removed from her transcript so that her grade point average would be high enough for her to transfer to UC Berkeley. The substandard grades resulted from the student withdrawing from all her courses after the published withdrawal date. The college followed all policies and practices in taking this action, and the student did not respond to communications from the college about her status. The Board Member and the mother of the student have made an appointment to see you.

### Scenario #2—The Struggling Manager

A discrimination claim has been filed by a classified employee against that person’s direct supervising manager. An external investigator has found no basis for the claim of discrimination. However, it is clear that the work environment in that unit is not positive. Previously, one member of the unit took a voluntary transfer and another took early retirement. The investigative report shows widespread dissatisfaction among unit employees with the management style of the supervisor. Evaluation of the unit manager by the vice president shows weak communication skills and occasional overreaction to difficult employee situations. The supervising vice president and the vice president of human relations have made an appointment to get direction from you.

### Scenario #3—The Budget Deficit

It’s July and you are in your first month on the job and your VP of Administrative Services presents you with a budget deficit. You ask for reports and get solid budget data and a timeline to produce the adopted budget by September. You get position reports on staffing levels and open positions for classified, faculty, and managers. Now what?

### Scenario #4—The Facility Bond

You discover very soon after assuming your position that the college passed a bond measure four years ago but has been able to issue only part of the authorized bond amount because the District’s decrease in assessed value during the recession has caused bond repayment levels to exceed the Proposition 39 limit of \$25 per \$100,000 of assessed value. You also realize there are not state school bonds likely for the future. There are many facilities needs going unmet in your District, the public expects the promised projects to be built, and the Board expects you to fix the problem. Now what?

### Scenario #5—The Academic & Professional Matter

As a new CEO, the Board of Trustees has charged you with increasing the number of international students served by the college. You bring the process by a Cabinet discussion which sets an initial charge to a task force constructed collegially of folks in relevant positions on campus. At this point, the Academic Senate asserts that the international student “program” is an educational program and thus an academic and professional matter. What is your response?