TITLE   Casting a Vision for Christian Higher Education: A Collective
Case Study of Six Baptist College and Seminary Presidents

RESEARCHER   David B. Horton
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Wake Forest, NC)
Unpublished doctoral dissertation: May 2013

OBJECTIVE   The purpose of this study was to explore the process by which the
presidents of evangelical colleges and seminaries develop and cast
a vision for the institution they serve.

METHODOLODY

Six college and seminary presidents who have demonstrated an elevated capacity to develop and cast vision were selected as participants in the research. In addition to interviews and document examination, each president completed the Leadership Practices Inventory, along with four members of their cabinet completing the observer version.

KEY FINDINGS

The most frequently engaged in leadership behaviors were: Communicates purpose and meaning (#27; ISV), treats others with respect (#14; EOA), and talks about values and principles (#26; MTW), followed by creatively recognizes people (#30; ETH), follows through on promises (#11; MTW), publicly recognizes alignment with values (#20; ETH), builds consensus on values (#21; MTW), fosters cooperative relationships (#4; EOA), and gives others freedom and choice (#24; EOA) – which were all at an average level of "very frequently" (9.0 and above). The respondents were above the Kouzes Posner normative database on all five leadership practices. The least frequently reported leadership behavior was "provides leadership opportunities" (#29: mean = 7.17).

Significant differences between leaders and their constituents were found on two leadership behaviors: "what can we learn from our mistakes" (#18; CTP) and "treats others with respect" (#14: EOA). College presidents reported significantly higher frequency than seminary presidents on the leadership behaviors of "aligns others with principles and standards" (#6; MTW) and "provides support and appreciation" (#15: ETH) and expressed lower frequency ratings on "follows through on promises" (#11; MTW).

The author provides these conclusions: "The presidents in the study all placed immense value on the importance of visionary leadership. The development and communication of a vision was a key component of enlisting followers, recruiting donors, and enrolling students. A compelling vision gave identity to the institution and promoted focus within the institution (p. 195)… All the presidents in the study involved people in the process of developing a vision. Involving people created a mutually shared vision that the constituency of the institution embraced. When the president involved people in developing a vision, the people bought in to the vision early in the process and the leader did not have to be in the unfortunate position of "selling the vision" at a later time (p. 196)… All presidents in the study were intentional in the communication of vision.

Whether it was authoring a book, meeting with the faculty, cultivating a relationship with a potential donor, speaking in chapel, or writing an article for the institution's official publication, these presidents did not take a haphazard approach to communicating vision (p. 197)."

The author also observes that: (a) "The ability to develop and communicate a compelling vision was supported by other leadership attributes. Kouzes and Posner identified five major categories of leadership behavior that were reported on the *LPI 360*. Those leadership behaviors were: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. All presidents in the study scored high in the category of "Inspire a Shared Vision," but they also had similar scores in the other four major leadership behaviors. Strong leaders are well-balanced leaders. The five leadership categories are inter-related. Visionary leadership is strengthened and enhanced by leaders who know their strengths and use them to move the organization forward" (pp. 197-98); and (b) "Visionary leadership was primarily a learned behavior" (p. 198).

The author sums up: "Leaders in other academic institutions could benefit from implementing principles from the visionary leadership behaviors of the college and seminary presidents in the study. In an academic setting, a plethora of events and activities vie for the president's attention, but nothing is as important in moving the institution forward as prioritizing the responsibility to develop and communicate a vision. A president may have a great personality, excel in the classroom, and be a great speaker, but if the president is not a visionary leader, the institution he serves will not develop to its full potential. Academic leaders should work to develop their leadership skills, especially in the area of visionary leadership. While sharpening the ability to cast vision, the leader should work hard to be a well-balanced leader. A wide variety of leadership skills and abilities will help ensure that the vision becomes a reality. The wise leader will develop the leadership skills of others in the organization and will allow them to assist in the development, communication, and implementation of a vision" (p. 199).