

Meeting of the Board of Regents
April 17, 1979

Thoughts on the Responsibilities

of a

University President

April 8, 1979

The president of a public university has unique opportunity to contribute to shaping the context within which teaching, research, and public service are made available to the people of a state or region. Moreover, the quality and scope of these university services are subject to a president's major influence. And the nature of these services defines in substantial measure the extent to which a state is capable of adaptation and renewal in the face of inevitable change. The public university is, then, much more than another agency of government; it is society's best hope for defining high standards and for nurturing the knowledge and skills required in immediate and long-term problem solving. Leadership of a high order is essential to these ends.

The president is a basic link between the campus and its several publics—trustees, government, alumni, business and industry, the public at large, to name a few. Consequently, the president must be attuned to the needs and interests of many centers beyond the campus and must be able to communicate these needs and interests in understandable form to the academic community.

The president is also a participating member and leader of the academic society. He or she should be able to identify and interpret the aspirations, the anxieties, and the concerns of the campus to groups beyond its borders. The president must be willing to work endlessly at the art of communication which means, among other things, doing more listening than talking.

A president must find stimulation in dealing with such enduring problems as academic program modification and change, sceptical (sic) public attitudes, faculty development, demographic change, and always limited funds. These constitute perhaps the leading problems of universities in the next decade, and require analysis and response, now and in the future. The resolution of such problems requires that a

president work through many other people and that his or her satisfaction be derived in large part from the achievement of others.

The leader of an intellectual community should have deep and lively interests in the principal currents of contemporary thought. The president, accordingly, should read widely and embody the traditions of literacy of the university. He or she should know the difference between pretense and genuine achievement in the academic community, and demonstrate significant academic accomplishment in his own right.

In brief, a president should be leader, listener, planner and interpreter. He or she should be servant and developer of human talent. A president should be willing to subordinate personal interests and desires to those of the institution. And, finally, a president should have defined ideals and the courage of personal conviction, for a time eventually comes when talk properly ends and decisions are made and acted upon.

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