

CHAPTER 5

APPOINTMENT OF THE PRESIDENT

THE selection and appointment of a president is certainly one of the most important and usually the most difficult task that confronts the trustees. Fortunately, on the average, it has to be faced only once in six to ten years.

The old adage that a stream cannot rise higher than its source certainly applies to a college and its president. No college can rise above the level of its president in maintaining standards, in enthusiasm for generous service, or in vision of opportunity. When the trustees choose a man to represent them in the administration of their institution they are determining the level of excellence at which the institution will operate during his term of service. A president is either a leader and a stimulus to every person on the staff, or he is a check to ambition, a damper on enthusiasm, and spreads indifference or hopelessness through the ranks. This sounds exaggerated, but anyone who has served under able and under unqualified executives will recognize its truth. If it were possible to insure first-class leadership in the president's office of each of our 1,700 institutions, it would do more than any other one thing to improve American education.

When a board is satisfied with the services of an executive, it is always reluctant to change, and there is a strong tendency to retain the incumbent too long. It is rare that a president over 65 maintains the personnel and efficiency of his college at a high level. It would be best if 65 were fixed definitely as the retiring age for the president, as well as for all other administrative officers. In this case the board would know in advance exactly when this problem was to be faced.

While it is highly probable that there is good material among the 135,000 teachers and minor administrative officers, and the 1,700 college and university presidents to fill any vacant presidency, it is certainly a serious problem for any single board of trustees to find a man to their taste. Although no exact plan to locate the right man for any position can be outlined, certain suggestions can be made.

1. Probably the happiest results are obtained by having a joint committee of the trustees and the faculty nominate candidates to the board. This seems wise for two reasons. The faculty will deeply appreciate the privilege of collaborating with the trustees in the search for the right man. Usually the faculty has to be consulted anyway in one way or another, and it can be done best by doing the consulting through a faculty committee. The faculty will be most appreciative of such a joint committee if they are privileged to elect the members who represent them. Further, the faculty members of the committee can often get valuable information about men who are being considered more easily and more frankly than can trustees.

2. The board should draw up specifications for the kind of man they desire. Such specifications, if carefully prepared, general, and not too precise, will materially facilitate their search. Such specifications may include such items as the following:

Age	Education
Family	Scholarly achievements
Personality	Educational experience
Church relations	Financial experience
Availability at salary paid	Ability as a speaker, etc., etc.

If the trustees can agree on what they must have under a few such heads, it will simplify their search by narrowing the number of men to be considered. For example, if the faculty has gotten into a bad state, and numerous changes must be

made and the faculty reorganized, a man must be secured who has the judgment and personality to do this reorganization most smoothly and effectively. If it is essential to secure large additions to the endowment, a man must be selected who has ability to secure gifts or devise an organization to secure them.

While men have been spoken of thus far, many women's colleges prefer a woman for president and many others might be able to secure an abler woman for the office than any available man. Women are coming to the front in increasing numbers as able executives, and certainly they have numerous advantages over men as the executives of many colleges for women. All that is said here concerning the selection of a man would apply equally to a woman.

3. There are several areas in which the board can well search for a president.

- a. Within the staff of its institution.
- b. Among successful presidents of other institutions who might be available at the salary available.
- c. Among the alumni of their institution holding administrative positions or professorships in other institutions.
- d. Among deans of notable ability in other institutions.
- e. Among professors of administrative ability in other institutions.
- f. Among men in professions other than teaching.

The ablest executives will be sure to have men on their staffs fully capable to succeed themselves. Certainly the first place to look is among the deans and professors of the institution. These men know the institution, are well acquainted with all members of the staff, and with the student body. They understand the history, spirit, and personality of the institution, and under them the board could be reasonably sure that the generally recognized policies would be carried on.

It is interesting to note that trustees are prone to consider

men on the staff of their own institution from an angle different from that at which they view men from outside. Of the men under consideration on their own staff they ask what faults or weaknesses each has and search carefully for disqualifying characteristics. Of men outside they ask for their qualifications for the position and are inclined to overlook disqualifying characteristics. Often in the end they pass over an able and tried man on their own staff and appoint an inferior man from outside. Many dangers are avoided by appointing a man well known to staff and trustees who is well acquainted with the institution and the members of the staff.

At times when no one on the staff can be agreed upon, someone outside must be found. The men who have the widest acquaintance among available men throughout the country are these: the president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, New York City; the president of the American Council on Education, Washington; the secretary of the American College Association, New York City; the Specialist in Higher Education, Office of Education, Washington. If a letter giving the specifications for the man desired and the salary the board can pay, were sent to each of these men, their suggestions would be most valuable.

The members of the faculty should have among their number a wide acquaintance among other faculties and may have valuable suggestions.

As time passes and as college administration grows steadily more complicated and technical, the chances of securing a desirable president from outside the teaching profession decreases. Formerly, most college presidents were clergymen. Today it is quite exceptional to secure an effective and acceptable executive from outside the profession of teaching.

4. The president's salary. It is a good general rule that the president should be paid twice the salary of the highest paid professorial rank. To pay more rather overemphasizes the

importance of his office and tends to create discontent in the faculty. To pay less will usually make it very difficult to fill the position satisfactorily. The salaries of American college and university presidents range all the way from \$3,000 to \$30,000. Most of our forty largest institutions pay from \$12,000 to \$20,000. The great majority of our better colleges pays from \$4,000 to \$10,000. It is highly important to remember that the salary available is a distinct limitation on securing a successful president from another institution, for such a man is usually receiving as much or more than you can pay. On the other hand, almost anyone on the staff can be secured, as invariably the salary available for the president is greater than the institution pays any professor or dean.

Usually it is more satisfactory to pay the president an adequate salary and give him an allowance for travel expense and stop there, than to give him an entertainment fund or incidental fund. Any such fund must either be accounted for in minute detail, which is difficult, or merged with his salary in meeting his various expenses, which is very poor accounting practice.

In the great majority of cases a president's house is provided by the institution, and usually heat, light, and water are included. Where this is a simple, inexpensive residence commensurate with his salary (not costing more than twice his salary), it is reasonable to expect the president to pay out of his salary for service. Where the president's house is a grander mansion and perhaps beyond the reach of his salary, it is reasonable for the institution to provide also all or part of the cost of service.

It generally avoids criticism to allow the president to own his own car rather than to provide him with one. The college can properly pay him a reasonable mileage of from 3 to 6 cents a mile for its use in travel for the institution.

The business affairs, as they touch the president, should be

so meticulously handled as to avoid any possible criticism of his integrity.

The tenure of the president. While the president is often considered to hold a very permanent place, he is, in fact, much less permanent than a professor. Three factors contribute to this situation. Many men are not appointed before they are 50 years old and at best should not serve beyond 65. Their term will vary if all goes well from ten to fifteen years. If a man is appointed at about 40 years of age and makes a real success, he is very likely to be called to a better position in another institution before he is 55. Thus his term will be from ten to fifteen years at most. Then we have the many men appointed to presidencies which they fail to fill in a satisfactory manner and who are properly relieved of office after from three to six years. In general, the term of service of a college or university president is under ten years. A recent survey of colleges showed the average term served by a president was six years.

It is exceptionally rare that a board is warranted in retaining a president in service beyond 65 years in age. While usually he is as intelligent and his judgment is as good at 65 as at 50, his vigor and eagerness to hunt for trouble and straighten it out is always far less. Much would be gained by fixing the age of retirement of presidents definitely at 65. Case after case can be cited where an able and distinguished president has been retained in office to 70 or 75 years of age or older, and where the institution materially deteriorated during the latter years of his service.