

SECTION V

The Duties and Services of
Trustees

CHAPTER 22

THE DUTIES AND SERVICES OF TRUSTEES

THE duties and services of trustees are of three kinds: (1) things not to do; (2) duties as one of the board in meetings and committees; and (3) duties as an individual representing the institution to the public.

One of the first things that should be impressed on a new trustee is that he is a trustee and not an executive. The operation of the institution, and the selection of the staff is the function of the president and faculty. Trustees are continually besought to secure jobs, contracts, and the retention of dismissed students. All such requests should be referred to the president without recommendation. If the president fails to direct the institution in an effective and satisfactory manner, by all means replace him as soon as possible by a more capable man. But do not assume any personal part in the immediate direction of the college.

As a member of the board and of committees of the board, several responsibilities devolve on a trustee:

1. To become familiar as soon as possible with the buildings, grounds, and equipment; their condition of repair and general suitability to the uses they serve.

2. To become acquainted with the president, deans, and as many of the faculty as possible, that he may form an intelligent estimate of the quality of the personnel and their spirit.

3. To become acquainted, at least superficially with the printed matter issued by the institution. The catalogue, reports, publicity material, and any regular publications of a scholarly type.

4. To assure himself that all endowment funds are safely

and wisely handled and are fully protected in every possible way.

5. To assure himself that all current income and expenditure is handled with absolute integrity and with skill and that all interests of the institution are conserved.

6. To assure himself that the budget is honestly and competently prepared. That income estimates are conservative and expenditures carefully and fully estimated. That all educational needs—salaries, salary increases, new appointments, library, supplies, and equipment—have been carefully considered.

7. To familiarize himself with the fixed policies of the institution; to be active in codifying and adding to these policies, where changes are needed.

8. To assure himself that the president is following the general policies of the trustees in the direction of the institution.

As an individual representing the institution to the public in his area, the trustee has further opportunities to serve most usefully. While there never was a time when as much was spent on higher education by the public, or when so large a number of students attended the undergraduate, professional, and graduate colleges, there seems to be less intimate understanding and sympathy between the public and the colleges than formerly—certainly less than there should be.

The trustee might well be an active intermediary in many ways between his community and his college:

a. In directing qualified high school graduates to his college and in discouraging unqualified graduates from entering.

b. In keeping in touch with the student attitudes in the college through continued acquaintance with the boys and girls who attend his college from his town.

c. In bringing properly selected faculty members before question-asking groups in his community for discussions or lectures.

d. In giving publicity through local newspaper editors relative to worthwhile matters at the college. The community should feel that their trustee is their representative at the college. He should strengthen the relations of the college in serving the public in his community.

e. He should have an interest in the product of his college, and especially in the graduates who went to the college from his town. How has the college changed the boy or girl? Have they grown as men and women? Are they competent in the field of their special training? Can he as a trustee be proud of the finished product of his college?

The alumni secretary can be a great help in supplying desired information relative to students and graduates from a trustee's home town. Nothing could be more stimulating to an alumni secretary than inquiries from trustees. The alumni monthly, or quarterly, often gives illuminating sketches of the college and its work. The alumni secretary has, or can readily secure, the latest information on the employment of graduates.

f. So far as may be he should try personally and through the board as a whole, to narrow the gap between trustees and faculty. This gap has always been wide. Half a century ago it was still usual for each professor to report in person to the trustees on his department and submit to questions from trustees. Such meetings were of small value. The faculty is usually doubtful of the competency of the trustees, and the trustees are often critical of the faculty. Anything that brings faculty members and trustees in personal contact improves this situation and is to be desired. Trustees brought in to address faculty groups, and faculty members invited by trustees to address groups in the trustee's community are most useful methods of promoting better acquaintance. A joint committee of trustees and faculty, the latter members elected by the faculty to represent them, can discuss certain common problems with great mutual profit.

This business of being a college trustee can be a great

business, a great pleasure, and a great service. It can also be a very small, useless, and perfunctory performance. A shocking percentage of the 17,000 men and women serving as trustees, directors, and members of the boards controlling our American colleges and universities, know little of their responsibilities and care little about their institutions; perfunctorily attend board meetings, and approve presidential recommendations without understanding or serious consideration. On the other hand, there is no finer or more valuable group of people in the country than our able, responsible college trustees. And there are no more rewarding services in which to work. The effective trustee renders an unpaid service of which he may well be proud. To be an active, useful, stimulating factor in the life of a great institution; actively to help unite the administration, the trustees, the faculty, the alumni, and the students in a drive toward noble goals in education; to feel that you are a useful factor in developing the best that is in American youth—all this can mean much in the life of a man. No public trust today is more important than the trusteeship of American colleges and universities. No public service can be more rewarding.