

Real Life Lessons in Leadership

Part 1

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Abstract

Participants in this study included high level managers and administrators in both the private and public sectors. Individuals participated by contributing personal experiences related to their specific professions. Their experiences are presented in this paper as case studies. Professors of management and public administration will find that these cases relate to many of the topics covered in their courses. For example, cases refer to (a) leadership, (b) planning, (c) communication, (d) motivation, (e) control, (f) conflict (g) mentoring, (h) staffing, (i) change, (j) environment, (k) culture, (l) decision making, and so on.

Keywords: Leadership, Business, Management, Public Administration, Case Studies

1. Introduction

The case study approach to learning is one of the most popular learning methods. This methodology is used extensively to bring to life the materials being covered in course work. The 15 case studies in this work are based on the real life experiences of high level managers and administrators working in the public and private sectors. The cases are not categorized because all of them can relate to more than one topic. Statements and or questions are presented after each case to stimulate discussions. Professors will find it easy to include statements and or questions that relate to their lectures.

2. Case Studies

2.1 Thoughtful Decisions*

Uday Sukhatme
Executive Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Faculties
Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis

All good higher education administrators are expected to make thoughtful, consistent, data-driven, academically sound decisions. In recent years, with the increased use of e-mail, it is expected that decisions are also timely. This avoids confusion and an over-filled inbox! A few years ago, when I was serving as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at SUNY Buffalo, I received an e-mail message from the mother of a student. She had some issues regarding a course in which her daughter was enrolled. Very similar issues had previously been raised by others, and my Associate Deans and I had already studied and discussed the problem in great detail, considered a number of options, and decided on a course of action. Consequently, I knew exactly what to write to the mother, and quickly sent a short e-mail response describing the chosen course of action. The mother was still logged on, and read the response right away. It was not exactly the resolution she wanted to hear, and she telephoned my office immediately. She was irate, not so much with the response content, but with the speed with which it had been given.

“We expect thoughtful decisions from administrators, not instantaneous responses without considering all aspects of a problem,” she said. I realized that rather than appreciating the quick response, she thought the decision was taken far too fast without appropriate thought. On the phone, I explained that the issue had indeed been previously discussed in detail and I went through the reasoning behind the suggested course of action. This explanation eventually calmed her down, and the conversation ended on a very friendly note when by chance it was discovered that we had something in common - we both spoke Italian! The lesson to be learned is that on potentially sensitive issues, one has to be careful about including sufficient explanations in e-mail messages. Secondly, while efficiency is important, in some instances, it might be wise to wait a day or two before responding – then the decision would be perceived to have been thoughtfully made !

2. 1. 1 Case Discussion

This case provides excellent advice regarding taking time to reflect before responding. Share an incident similar to this one that you experienced.

2. 2 Noxious Weed

Dr. Marilyn “Marsi” Liddell
President
Aims Community College
Greeley, CO

One of the most unique anecdotes for our college deals with the noxious weed—Russian Olive trees. When the institution was first formed about 40 years ago, the Russian Olive trees (not then declared a weed) were planted as a buffer between the college and the local community neighbors. As they grew to mature trees (now weeds), they overtook the street, the utility lines, and the fences. The trees interfered with the utility lines to the point where squirrels regularly climbed trees, jumped on utility lines, were electrocuted, and subsequently destroyed the college’s IT system at a cost of about \$10,000 per incident. The Facilities Department assessed the situation and resolved to cut down the offensive Russian Olive trees. This activity mobilized the neighbors to become adversarial. They took photos, wrote letters to local media, and established a campaign to “save the trees and the environment.” They made it a safety and security argument. In the end, it took hours of time on the part of the CEO, CBO, trustees, attorneys, and the Facilities Department, but finally we reached a compromise over noxious weeds. It is just one of those things they do not teach you in “administrator wanta be” school.

2. 2. 1 Case Discussion

This case relates to being able to compromise. Describe what you would do in this situation if you were in the President's position. What decision criteria would you employ?

2. 3 You Can't Trust Spell Check

Jerry B. Cain
President
Judson University
Elgin, IL

Several years ago a vice presidential colleague at another college in Missouri had to deal with some very sensitive issues dealing with sexual harassment. He sent out an Announcement to the faculty calling for a public discussion about new policies being instigated. In the memo, however, he left the "I" out of public and for the next decade snickers ran through the faculty every time we were called together for a discussion about any topic. The lesson to be learned is you can't trust spell check.

2. 3. 1 Case Discussion

This is a humorous case, but an embarrassing case. Please explain how similar experiences might be avoided.

2. 4 An Unanticipated Scenario*

Thomas F. George
Chancellor / Professor of Chemistry and Physics
University of Missouri □ St. Louis

During my first year as dean of natural sciences and mathematics at SUNY-Buffalo (I was dean from 1985 to 1991), I decided to resurrect the Cowper Distinguished Visiting Lecture Series (for whatever reason, the endowed lectureship had been dormant for several years). To get it going, I opted to choose the lecturer myself, with the understanding that future lecturers would be determined by some sort of organized process with faculty having the opportunity to make nominations. I invited a good friend of mine, Chemistry Professor John C. Polanyi at the University of Toronto just across Lake Ontario, who graciously accepted (we are in the same field of research and have interacted considerably, including the submission of a joint proposal to a Federal granting agency). Someone at SUNY-Buffalo who was not in our field of research asked who Polanyi was, and I responded that he is a super scientist of top caliber – I should add that certain faculty were delighted he was coming because of his involvement in the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs focused on the dangers of nuclear weapons.

We were lined up for him to come to Buffalo to present his lecture in September, and during the summer he called me to say that he would have to postpone his lecture since he was being inducted into the Pontifical Academy of Rome. I then rescheduled his lecture to a date in November. Now here's the punch line: In October he was awarded the 1986 Nobel Prize in Chemistry, and his lecture at SUNY-Buffalo the next month was his first formal presentation after notification of the Prize. I picked him up at the bus terminal in downtown Buffalo, and of course there was plenty of press/media coverage (more than normal) surrounding him during his visit to Buffalo. As an amusing occurrence, Professor Polanyi told me that when the bus crossed the US- Canadian border and he mentioned to the official that he was going to give a lecture at SUNY-Buffalo, the official said, "I know what you are up to – you are trying to get a job at SUNY-Buffalo." I should add that in 1985 when I had accepted the deanship after 13 years as a faculty member at the University of Rochester, Professor Polanyi's comment was, "What a loss!" By this, I assume he was referring to my research program, and I have made every effort since then to keep my research program as robust as ever.

2. 4. 1 Case Discussion

Describe the types of decisions that were made in this case. Choose one decision and explain if you disagree or agree with the Chancellor.

2. 5 Shared Governance Works, even if it does not give the Originally Anticipated Result *

Thomas F. George
Chancellor / Professor of Chemistry and Physics
University of Missouri □ St. Louis

I recall during my first or second year as chancellor at the University of Wisconsin □ Stevens Point (I was chancellor there from 1996 to 2003) that I was feeling kind of lonely on campus during the break between the fall and spring semesters because of the absence of students. I came up with what I thought was a good idea, namely, for the students to return a week earlier to begin the spring semester. I talked a faculty member into getting this onto the agenda of the Faculty Senate, but not revealing the source of the idea. There was spirited discussion and debate on this at a Faculty Senate meeting where a faculty member sitting in front of me said to the person next to them, "Whose lousy idea was this anyway?" In any event, the end result was not quite what I had proposed, but rather the Faculty Senate created what was coined "Winterim" □ two and a half weeks of intense classes where one could complete the equivalent of a full-semester course. Winterim quickly attracted hundreds of students and was an immense success, albeit not every discipline lent itself to this abbreviated concentrated format. I got my wish of having students back on campus shortly after New Year's Day, but in a better fashion than I originally proposed.

2. 5. 1 Case Discussion

This case relates to decision making and change. Explain what you perceived as the obvious or not so obvious conflicts related to this change.

2. 6 Professional Jargon

Michael G. Morris
Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer
American Electric Power Company, Inc.

During 1998 when I was CEO of Northeast Utilities in Connecticut we had just brought the Milestone Nuclear Units back on line which was very important for our customers and shareholders. I called Governor Rowland (Connecticut) to tell him the plants had just gone critical and he panicked and wondered what to do. In power plant lingo "going critical" means you're making electricity a good thing not a bade thing.

2. 6. 1 Case Discussion

Many professions have their own language that is understood by the individuals working in that profession, but not by others who are not. What are examples of other professions that use jargon specific to their professions? What you would do to reduce the confusion this may cause?

2. 7 Play on Words

Jerry B. Cain President
Judson University
Elgin, IL

Dr. Harm A. Weber, a true twentieth century saint, guided Judson College for 22 years. Being an intentionally Christian college, the faculty meetings always ended with a prayer and those prayers typically included the phrase "and protect us from harm." The wording always had two meanings and always dismissed each faculty meeting with an element of casualness and release.

2.7. 1 Case Discussion

This case demonstrates the effective use of humor as a tension reducer. What types of tension reducers have you observed in work settings?

2. 8 Grateful?

Jack Hawkins, Jr., Ph.D.
Chancellor
Troy University
Troy, AL

One of the bonuses of serving as a Chancellor or President is that you are surrounded by extremely intelligent people with quick wits. Of course, that can be a double-edged sword when the wit is directed at you. Several years ago, we decided to raise the minimum threshold salaries for instructors and assistant professors. In some cases this meant as much as an additional \$10,000-\$12,000 a year. One music professor evidently needed the raise in the worst way. He sent me a thank-you note which read in part: "Thank you for your concern and support. The additional income will truly be a godsend to me. *I may now eat.*"

2. 8. 1 Case Discussion

This humorous case relates to feeling comfortable in an environment that has a trusting climate. Explain how you would develop a climate similar to the one portrayed in this case to encourage open communication.

2. 9 An Incorrect Assumption

Jerry B. Cain President
Judson University
Elgin, IL

As president of a Christian university, I am often called on Sunday's to preach the morning sermon for a pastor who is on vacation or on study leave. These public appearances were not only good for the university but keep us in touch with clientele and donor base. One Sunday I arrived 20 minutes early at the local church building and was greeted enthusiastically by a young usher. He never asked my name but after giving me the morning bulletin remarked "I don't think I've met you before. Is this your first time to worship with our church?" I responded truly this was my first visit and I hoped it would not be my last. He responded by saying "I hope you will certainly come back next week because our pastor is away this Sunday and we have someone from the university filling in. You will really like our pastor, he's an excellent preacher. Please come back next Sunday and you'll hear a good sermon." I remember him melting when in 20 minutes I moved to the pulpit to read the Call to Worship and then the Morning Prayer.

2. 9. 1 Case Discussion

This is an example of an incorrect assumption. Describe a similar situation you have observed. How did the person cope with it? How would you cope with a similar experience?

2. 10 Embarrassing Experience*

Dr. George C. Knox, President
Labette Community College
Parsons, Kansas

Every year, before the start of the fall semester, we host a cookout for all the athletic teams and have an opportunity to meet the new athletes and learn a little more about them. This past year I was cooking for the event when this person came walking into the park. They were dressed in shorts that were hanging down, a T-shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a lot of jewelry around their neck. They made a point of coming up to me and saying hello. Before they could introduce themselves I asked what position they would be playing on the men's basketball team. She replied with her position without skipping a beat. We became great friends over the year and as it turned out our women's basketball team won third place nationally. It was a great lesson for me not to judge a book by its cover.

2. 10 .1 Case Discussion

Share an experience or two when you or someone you know made false assumptions. Explain the outcomes.

2. 11 A Midnight Run*

Dr. Margaret Mary Fitzpatrick, S.C., Ed.D.
President
St. Thomas Aquinas College
Sparkill, NY

“Midnight Run is a volunteer organization dedicated to finding common ground between the housed and the homeless. Midnight Run volunteers distribute food, clothing, blankets and personal care items to the homeless poor on the streets of New York City. The late-night relief efforts create a forum for trust, sharing, understanding and affection. That human exchange, rather than the exchange, of goods, is the essence of the Midnight Run mission.”

--Midnight Run.org

St. Thomas Aquinas College, located in Rockland County New York, participates as a volunteer organization in the Midnight Run program. This community service is a co-curricular monthly activity co-sponsored by the Office of Campus Ministry and the Division of Social Sciences. In addition there are special Midnight Runs co-sponsored by the Office of Campus Ministry and the Department of Athletics. There are sixteen volunteers on each Run and the waiting list to participate is extensive. During the academic year, the College community collects specific clothing and personal items to be distributed on the Runs. The Spartan volunteers organize these items for the Run. I was privileged to be one of the Midnight Run volunteers several years ago. The volunteers were asked to meet in one of the College’s dining halls to enjoy dinner together and to get to know one another. After dinner, the Director of Campus Ministry and a Professor of History spoke to us about the root causes of homelessness, how to approach and relate to a person who is homeless, and what to expect during the Run.

The Director of Food Services made the soup and coffee we would be bringing and the volunteers started to make 300 sandwiches that would be placed in individual bags with water and fruit and a message of hope. This task furthered the conversation among us and brought home to us the fact of hunger. By 8:30 p.m. we were in our vans off to Westchester to gather additional clothing, blankets and personal items to be distributed. I was the driver of one of the vans accompanied by a professor and six students. Again, the conversation was both light and serious. There are prearranged stops in Manhattan for the meeting with people who are homeless and the distribution of food and goods. We were told that our last stop, approximately 1:00 a.m., would be a building where many people sleep on floors during the night and our only bathroom stop. It was 10:00 p.m. and we reached our first stop. We were eager to meet each person, to talk, to understand in some small way each other’s lives, to lighten the night through compassion.

By the fifth stop, our fervor was waning a bit, we were a little cold and hungry, and yet we were enlivened by our conversations with the people who are homeless. At our last stop we sat on the floor, had conversations, and shared the goods and food we had left. On the trip back to the College, there were poignant stories shared, reflective silences, and some sighs of exhaustion. One student suggested that we stop for pizza. The idea caught on and I phoned the other van, in which was the Director of Campus Ministry, to share this idea. Her response stopped me short, “Do you think the homeless are going for pizza?” Needless to say, we did not stop for pizza; we returned to the College; and headed to residence halls and homes. While this experience was several years ago, it still stays with me. Try to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. Let their pains and joys motivate us to right in great ways or small the injustices we see around us. Through teaching, scholarship and service college communities can fulfill their missions. At St. Thomas Aquinas College (www.stac.edu) we strive to assist each student to develop as an articulate and responsible leader in our global society.

2. 11. 1 Case Discussion

This simple yet powerful case puts things into perspective. Describe a situation when you put yourself in someone else’s shoes and explain what happened.

2. 12 Group Decision

Michael Fishbein, Ph.D.
President, Antioch University Midwest

I've always believed that the aspiration to join the faculty is an expression of aspirations to a life spent in the pursuit of deeper knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge to those who seek it. I was fortunate to have an experience early in my administrative career that both tempered that admittedly altruistic vision and sustains me even as a president. I was new as a dean (a 'green dean' you might say). After a considerable analytic process, we had determined that there was no reason to sustain a particular major. The courses could continue to be offered and the lone full-time faculty member would retain his post. We simply had concluded that it cost more in publications and maintenance of registrar's records and academic administrative attention to a major that hadn't attracted a solitary student (none of whom remained in the major, as I recall) in at least three years and little before that in the preceding decade. The matter had been brought through the committee process and the faculty committee had affirmed the recommendation to end the program. Then, the matter was brought to the full Faculty meeting. A warm spring day and a well-attended meeting. The usual pleasantries concluded and the Faculty Chair recognized my colleague dean to advance the proposal to end the major. No sooner had she regained her seat when the faculty member in question rose to the defense of his discipline and his craft.

This is, by the way, a man who at administrative meetings often doodled in German and whose contributions to the any matter usually tested the meaning of the word "obscure." Today, however, he was in fine fettle and his arguments, while unable to refute the reasons for termination, at least sounded plausible. They stirred the soul of every faculty colleague in the room for whom the words "there but for the Grace of God go I..." As the temperature crept upward and the rhetorical heat likewise climbed, we did battle over words on the catalog page. In the end, the Faculty voted to sustain a major whose last graduate hadn't graced the campus in (again, as I recall) at least a decade. Later that day, my colleague dean and I were talking together in her office. We picked over the days events, looking for morsels to salvage. We talked (as I have many times since in my career) about the transformation that seems to come over a faculty when assembled together. That's when she said, "you know, no matter what they do, how frustrating it may be, at the end of the day, you have to love the faculty." And I do.

2. 12. 1 Case Discussion

Do you agree or disagree with this decision? Please explain. For example, do you think the decision to keep the major was positive or not?

2. 13 Presidential Interviews of Tenure Candidates*

Lloyd A. Jacobs, M.D.
President
The University of Toledo
Toledo, OH

I have just signed the last of eighteen letters to faculty members, stating in part:

"I am pleased to inform you that the Board of Trustees approved my recommendation that you be granted tenure.. .let me congratulate you on achieving this milestone in your academic career."

This year at The University of Toledo, these formulaic letters have a special significance, particularly the words referring to my recommendation. This year I made my recommendations based not only upon the candidates' dossiers as has been traditional here at The University of Toledo, but also based on a thirty minute personal interview. I have learned much from this experience. I have learned that there is wide variation across the University in the volume of published material that in various departments qualifies a tenure applicant. In some departments a corpus of several peer reviewed writings are expected, in others the much vaunted publication requirement hardly exists. Furthermore, the degree to which other forms of communication, such as artistic performance or a work of visual art may offset a publication requirement is not codified at all. I have learned that in the 21st century, tenure is much less about academic freedom of speech than it is about job security. Particularly fearful to candidates is the six year up and out anachronism to which The University of Toledo still subscribes. This is understandable in light of the great difficulty of selling a house currently in Toledo as well as the situation of the academic job market in many disciplines. I learned much about new and fascinating fields concerning which I had been ignorant. Throughout the eighteen interviews I have, I believe, been the winner. I have learned about magnetorheology. phenomenon I did not know existed. I have learned that the piezoelectric shape change can be driven at many cycles per second. I have learned that structuring questions for children, whether for a medical history or in a courtroom has a critical body of knowledge associated with it; and that we have a world recognized leader in this field at The University of Toledo.

I have learned that the intervals on the standard Likert scale, say between "good" and "very good," are not linearly progressive and that great care must be taken in developing these instruments. I have also learned some things that have saddened me. I've learned that disabled people are sometimes subjected to violent vituperation and abuse, that hate crimes against the disabled are not uncommon. This is apparently related to our fear and abhorrence of disability; I have lain awake at night wondering at the heights of altruism and the depth of depravity displayed by mankind. Overall, I've learned so much that I feel indebted to these wonderful people who will become tenured faculty members at The University of Toledo. However, a University President can hardly justify disrupting the placidity of the University because he or she has enjoyed learning something. Being privately tutored is not one of the listed perquisites of the job. I believe a personal interview is a minimal and appropriate exercise of responsibility, and in previous years, have always felt vaguely guilty about basing my recommendation merely upon written material.

I first announced my intention to interview tenure candidates on October 26, 2009 in a note to our provosts. At that time, I wrote in an email: "In view of the net present value commitment inherent in the granting of tenure, I propose to interview personally all applicants for tenure." I have estimated the value of tenure for a 40 year old faculty member to be in the range of 2.5 million dollars. More importantly, in the ordinary course of events, a tenured faculty member has an impact on the institution for two or three decades. The reaction to my announcement has been interesting. For starters, I have come to understand why tenure has been called the "third rail" of higher education. Many reactions from the faculty have been extremely negative. Indeed, one blog entry made a vague but threatening reference to the tragedy at the University of Arkansas where tenure denial may have been a factor in that tragedy. Others have been less critical and have written that the interview may be construed to provide an opportunity to showcase their work and to build a positive relationship with the University President. I of course, subscribe to that view. A number of interesting issues have surfaced in the ensuing conversation. Some have alleged that I am intimidating, and that tenure candidates would be disadvantaged by that.

I was nonplused to think that people as accomplished as these candidates would be intimidated by an aging person who knows nothing about their field. Other objectors believed that biases, conscious or unconscious, would be injected into the process, even suggesting the possibility of racial stereotypes coming into the interview process. I have argued that I interview Deans and Vice Presidents, why not life-time employment candidates. The questions I have asked thus far have been standard interview questions: "Tell me about yourself;" "Tell me about your research;" "Do you enjoy teaching?" "Do you think that there is in fact a revolution going on in Higher Education?" The candidates have handled them with ease; indeed have hit them out of the ballpark. And, I have been the beneficiary of nine hours of teaching from experts in their field. The Faculty Senate has passed two separate resolutions opposing my idea. In the first of them they asked that I "reconsider." I did so. I re-considered, consulted mentors and advisors, and lost sleep over the re-consideration. In the end, however, I came out in the same place. I cannot, in good faith, make a \$2 million decision which will impact the institution for decades without doing all the due diligence such a decision requires.

On February 16, 2010, the Faculty Senate passed a resolution with 37 votes in favor of it, nine opposed, and one abstention. This resolution included the statement: "The University of Toledo Faculty Senate wishes to express in the strongest possible terms its disapproval of the President's decision to interview tenure candidates prior to approving their application;...." This was preceded on February 15, 2010 by an open letter to the Trustees of The University of Toledo, published in *"The Independent Collegian,"* our off campus newspaper. This letter stated in part that "... however appealing to commonsense notions it [a presidential interview] might be, it is not a "usual" part of the assessment of tenure candidates..." The University of Toledo Board of Trustees rejected these arguments and formally stated their support of the interviews on March 15, 2010. One other piece of encouragement came from John Silber, President Emeritus at Boston University. In a kind, personal letter to me he stated in part, "My congratulations on your decision to interview every faculty member up for tenure. I followed a similar policy at Boston University." His support was timely. So, I'm planning to interview tenure candidates again next year. I find myself looking forward to it. My hope is that I will again be enchanted by learning something new; that I'll have the pleasure of meeting new acquaintances; and that I will contribute, however infinitesimally, to this University's pursuit of excellence.

2 . 13. 1 Case Discussion

This case relates to decision making and change. Describe several of your thoughts regarding the President's decision regarding the tenure process.

2. 14 A Spontaneous Presentation

Steve Odland
Chairman & CEO
Office Depot, Inc.

Early in my career, I was a young Brand Manager and was set to deliver an important presentation to the sales force regarding the introduction of some new products. The presentation was important to gain sales force attention and enthusiasm to insure the successful sale of my products to our customers. In those days before Powerpoint presentations, we made glass slides that would be loaded into multiple slide projectors and choreographed to music and the verbal presentation. Slides were divided among several projectors and programmed to fire in a specific order. On the way into the meeting room prior to the presentation, I dropped the hundred or so slides, scrambling the entire presentation. With help I rapidly tried to get the slides back into order and loaded into the various projectors. Unfortunately the process took awhile and I didn't have time to run through them and check the order. Soon the room filled with people and I began my presentation. I was incredibly nervous but almost passed out when I began advancing the slides and realized they were out of order! I had no idea what slide was to appear when. I contemplated stopping and delaying the meeting while I reloaded and did a rehearsal but this would have ruined the meeting schedule. So, I quickly decided to forge ahead. I tossed aside the script I planned to use since it now would not match the visuals. I then embarked on a game of "slide roulette," waiting to see what came up next, attempting to tell a story in some assemblance of order. When I finished my "debacle" of a presentation, I was sure I was going to be fired, or worse, publicly humiliated. To my surprise, nobody seemed to notice (or were too polite to mention) that the slides were out of order! I received compliments on the spontaneity of the speech, the variety of the subject matter, the keen sense of surprise, and freshness of the presentation style that didn't rely on prepared remarks. They thought it was deliberate! Learning a valuable lesson, I vowed not to work from a script in the future and to try to infuse all presentations with a similar sense of spontaneity.

2 . 14. 1 Case Discussion

This Chairman and CEO of a large national chain of stores was handed lemons and made lemonade. He learned a valuable lesson. Have you had a similar experience. If so, how did you cope with it? What did you learn?

2. 15 Where You Sit*

Jeffrey H. Barker
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dean, School of Humanities and Sciences
Converse College
Spartanburg, SC

In the late 1940s, long-time federal official Rufus Miles coined "Miles's Law": *Where you stand depends on where you sit*. Miles was referring to an official who left the federal Bureau of the Budget (predecessor to the Office of Management and Budget) for another position in a different federal agency. A fierce opponent of spending while with the budget office, Miles's colleague became a fierce advocate of funding the projects of his new agency. Where he stood on the budget depended on where he sat, what he saw and could see, and what he learned from his new perspective. Miles's law applies in nearly every organization but especially in higher education. When Stanley Fish wrote in 2004 in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on the experience of moving from faculty member to dean and back to faculty member, he reflected on how he viewed "the other side" at each point in his career. Having served as a dean and moved back to the faculty, he had an answer to faculty who complained, asking why administrators were paid more than faculty: "The answer is simple: Administrators work harder, they have more work to do, and they actually do it."

Describing faculty life in America, Fish's essay is littered with terms (sometimes from other administrators) such as "narcissistic" and "infantilizing." Where you stand depends on where you sit, and then stand once again. While I doubt that many administrators work significantly harder than a number of faculty or are significantly less narcissistic, I can look back after more than three decades of teaching and serving as an administrator and see that where I have stood has very often depended on where I sat. Each stage of my career has sharpened my awareness of the importance of taking active steps to view things from as many different chairs as possible. It is not enough to see both sides of an issue, since resting in that seat means you are missing all of the other sides.

One must sit in many different places in order to take better stands. At times, this has been a literal matter. Becoming involved in renovation and new construction projects as an administrator, I learned fairly quickly that I could not see many of the difficulties that would be encountered by someone in a wheelchair or with limited use of the arms, or by the visually or hearing impaired. What looks like a small lip at an entrance door to a person walking into the building can be a daunting or even dangerous barrier to someone in a wheelchair. The height of handrails on a ramp looks very different from “down there” than it does from “up here.” A door that cannot be secured open can swing halfway closed and be a real hazard to a visually impaired person. In order to help “see” these and other issues, I learned to ask for help. At my current campus, a faculty member in a wheelchair volunteers to “walk” with me through the plans for any project, repeating the process as construction moves forward. She is free with her advice, repeating her motto: “Don’t let stupid be your companion.” Of course, some people get older and wiser and some people just get older.

I am reminded of this every time I hear of a faculty or administrative decision so narrow that it is hard to imagine that the person making the decision has ever seen things from more than one position. One of my first lessons in this came more than thirty years ago, at the start of my teaching career. I was teaching at a major state university, offering an introductory philosophy course. It was an exciting time, with brand new preparations and ambitious plans for my students. I had taken care at this large university to contact the office that scheduled classes well ahead of time to make sure I knew exactly where the class would be held. I was pleased to see that the class was scheduled in the most historic building on campus. Later, as a more experienced faculty member and administrator, I would understand the hierarchy of room selection and why I was placed in the most historic—that is oldest and least-equipped—building on campus. The first day of class arrived and students gathered in the classroom in the basement level of the building. This old—excuse me, historic—building had no elevators and only steep stairs to access the lower level, not a problem for most of my students. Nearing the hour, I noticed that a few students listed on the class roll were missing. Just then, three came in, with two of them supporting and even half-carrying the third, who was gripping crutches. I glanced up the stairs and saw an abandoned wheelchair. The two students helped the third to his seat and took theirs.

Class proceeded and at the end, the two students repeated their roles, picking up the student and helping him back to his wheelchair. Before the handicapped student left the room, I asked him if he had notified the administration of his situation. He assured me he had; he could not understand why he had been placed in a classroom at the bottom of the stairs. Knowing that the university had a place on the registration form—this was in the old days of paper registration—for students to indicate such needs, I went right to my desk and called the office responsible for this cruel and insensitive treatment of a student. After giving the staff member the student’s name and asking her why her office would put a handicapped student in the basement, I waited while she found the registration card in question. After a bit, she came back to the telephone and told me she knew the answer. She said that my class had been placed on the lower level, at the bottom of the stairs, because the student had written on his form, “I cannot go up stairs.” She continued, “That’s why we put your class downstairs.” Where you stand—if you *can* stand—really does depend on where you sit. For the administrator scheduling classrooms, not seeing life from another position led to an absurd, even laughable result. The classroom was changed and a lesson was learned, one hopes. I remember this story, though, every time I begin to think I have seen it all, from every position. There is always more to learn.

2. 15. 1 Case Discussion

Choose one or two experiences presented in this case that you can relate to and explain your reaction to each one

3. * Participants wrote the title. Other titles were developed from the contribution.

4. Note: I am collecting personal experiences for Part 2. If you would like to participate, please send your contribution(s) to me at the address below. Thank you.

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