

FEB 2012

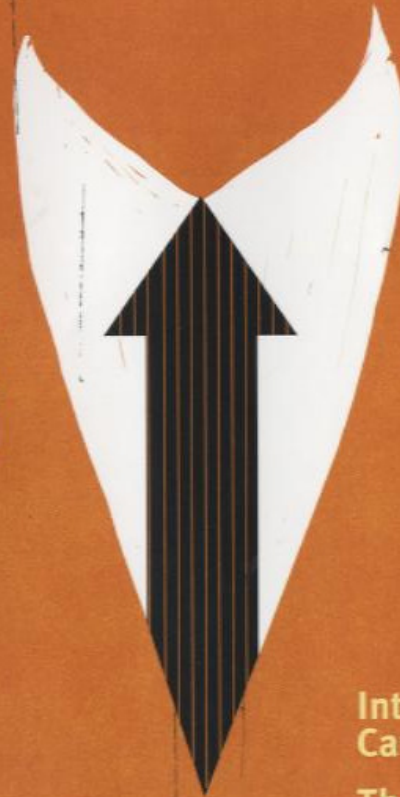
CURRENTS

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THE OTHER SIDE

Are trustees looking for a different kind of leader today?

Lucy Apthorp Leske is vice president, partner, and co-director of the education and not-for-profit practice at the executive search firm Witt/Kieffer, where she has led a broad range of searches over the past 20 years. CURRENTS consulted with Leske about whether institutional boards are looking for different qualities in their leaders.

You have been doing leadership searches for many years. Are trustees looking for different things these days?

What they are looking for has evolved. There's a tremendous amount of emphasis on the term *entrepreneur*, but what they mean when they use this word is new ways to make money and to provide resources that people need to succeed. In the past, we looked to tuition, endowment income, and fundraising. Now I think trustees are wondering if we should be looking inside or outside the academy for additional income. The bottom line is that trustees are looking for presidents who can be more creative about finding new resources, efficiencies, and reducing costs. And they want someone who can lead that conversation effectively.

Are you really seeing boards that are looking for leaders outside of the academy?

We're seeing trustees asking to see those candidates, but they are not appointing them. People with for-profit leadership experience are not always used to the broad consultation that people expect in higher education—the number of people that you must engage up front before you can roll out a new initiative.

How has the economy affected what boards are looking for in a leader?

Many boards see the economy as an opportunity to have a conversation about costs. How can you have that conversation when we're in a field that is about enhancing learning, research, and faculty and student quality, and, historically, the way to do that is to add more and do more, not become more efficient?

You focus on HBCUs and minority-serving institutions in your work.

Are there differences in what these institutions are looking for in a leader?

Not really. All institutions are looking for clairvoyance and creative solutions to what may seem to be intractable or unsolvable problems. People are fundamentally looking for leaders who can help them suspend disbelief that things can't change, and then lead them to the solutions without change, which, of course, isn't possible.

Given current economic realities, are boards more interested in a leader's fundraising skills than in decades past?

They've always been interested in fundraising. It's always been huge, and now it's huge. I don't know if institutions today can afford to have a president who can't raise money. —Interview by GAYLE BENNETT

