Top Ten Things I've Learned as Dean

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1. **"Transparency is the politics of managing mistrust"** (Ivan Krastev)
   Decision making by deans appears obtuse to faculty, at best. Opening up college data and processes such as budgeting, resource allocation, and department performance metrics, will create a sense of trust and shared governance. It will also ensure that you do in fact have a clear rationale for your decisions. Expect to provide extended explanations of data and your thought process early on, and have a transition plan in mind for when 'problems' become visible. You must plan transparency thoughtfully, as once data or processes are opened to the college it is very difficult to reverse the process!

2. **It's the reward program, stupid** or **"On the folly of rewarding A, while hoping for B"** (*Steven Kerr, The Academy of Management Executive, 1995; 9(1): 7-14*)
   Although only briefly discussing higher education, this article was very influential on my view of faculty and student evaluation systems.   In sum, faculty and student behaviors follow the reward structure at the institution. The dean should verify that that the changes that they would like to see are covered in some form through policies and procedures such as annual evaluations, tenure & promotion review, raise programs, or other visible mechanisms. This can be used to effect change for individuals, but also for whole programs or departments.

3. **Assume that someone above your pay grade is listening to all of your conversations**
   Due to the number and range of conversations in which we are involved, deans have plentiful opportunities to make reactive statements and less than professional 'off the cuff' remarks. Yet deans are held to a different standard than faculty or department chairs, and our comments often take on an interpretation all of their own. From meetings with college leadership to informal meetings with faculty to discussions with donors, examples abound about how a dean's statements take unexpected and unwelcomed journeys. Except for my most trusted colleagues, I've learned to assume that my statements will be heard by others; this has the unintended benefit of coming off more professionally than I feel like being in some settings.

4. **Allow departments flexibility in how they meet goals**
   It is likely that the university has specific goals which the college is expected to achieve, and as dean you may have additional goals for the college. Departments within the college are quite different in their history, current context, and future aspirations, so do not expect them to be ready or able to contribute to the college or university goals in the same way. Rather than telling all the departments to do something in a specific way, allow the department faculty to develop their own aligned initiatives (establishing buy-in) yet hold them accountable for progress and outcomes.

5. **Beware of Chicken Little!**
   It is important to have the college's leadership team comprised of individuals with different perspectives and skills thereby avoiding 'group think'. However, there is one character type that does not mesh well with the demands of the dean's office: the office alarmist. When every incident is immediately labelled an urgent crisis, an excessive amount of time becomes allocated to less meaningful transactions. Not only does this make prioritization difficult, as everything cannot be immediately fixed you will find yourself and the college's leadership team emotionally drained and depleted of political capital. I now purposefully screen for such

individuals during the interview process for leadership positions. If such an individual is in a peer position, prepare your team on how to handle these interactions when they arise.

6. **Know when to switch to plan B, and know it is acceptable to do so**
    Deans quickly learn to reply on policies and procedures as a guide for office practices. However, we become over-reliant on them at our own peril. After a few 'incidents' where I blindly followed policy or procedures, I learned to have a back-up plan(s) in case something goes awry, along with setting *a priori* benchmarks for when I should switch to an alternate plan. Slowing down and changing to a different approach is not a failure or a weakness; it is a demonstration of the political savvy necessary to get the job done.

7. **Policy and procedures are not your only tools** (*Susan Roper & Terrence Deal. 2010. Peak Performance for Deans and Chairs: Reframing Higher Educations Middle. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Education. 112pp.*)
    There are four general frames (or lenses) through which administrative actions and change can be viewed: Structural; HR; Political; & Symbolic. Deans do not use all the frames regularly or even at all. Viewing problems or initiatives through each of the frames in turn allows a better understanding of context and provides a more robust plan for moving forward. The cause of the big blunders by academic leaders can generally be understood when viewed through one of these four frames. Viewing a situation through alternate frames is not a skill learned overnight nor can it be applied on the spot; I've learned to build time into an initiative to allow time for such analysis and adjustment to increase the chance of buy-in from faculty and campus leadership.

8. **Learn by observing other administrators, <u>especially</u> the ineffective ones**
    Ongoing professional development is part of a dean's responsibilities. We read books on the deanship and administration, and develop a network of colleagues to contact for their perspective and experiences. However, there is nothing compared to directly witnessing the efforts of others and the associated outcome, as often this is in front of stakeholders at your institution. Poor administrators (which could be fellow deans, the provost, VPs, etc.) often get ignored, but they can provide the fastest lessons in administration; you quickly learn how to avoid political land-mines and ineffective practices. You will also see that they do some things very well; one of my own 'best-practices' came from the worst administrator with whom I've worked.

9. **"The best is the enemy of good"** (Voltaire) or **"Strive for continuous improvement, instead of perfection"** (Kim Collins)
    Your time and energy are limited, and multiple projects with pressing deadlines await- as do numerous surprises of which many require urgent action. Understand your tolerance level for what is an 'acceptable' level of quality on any given activity; when that point is reached, send it on and move onto the next project. For large projects, set smaller milestones with 'good' goals. Any time that you believe you are investing in creating a very high quality product is almost certainly better placed into other initiatives that could use more time (e.g. fundraising, meeting with influential faculty, etc.). Note that this was also a 'Top 10' of Timothy Johnson at UNC-G & CCAS past-president.

10. **Learn techniques for managing stress**
    Due to the sheer diversity of pressures of the office, the stress level for deans becomes elevated from the first day on the job. However, a high-level of stress over time will lead to poor decisions and declining performance of your office, not to mention possible health issues. There are regular opportunities to learn about stress management, and you should participate then develop practices that fit your lifestyle. Regular practice has led me to hone my listening skills; this not only lowers my stress, but it is also appreciated by my colleagues!