

*September*



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## September 1

### ❖ *Take advantage of new beginnings.*

We're privileged in higher education to experience several beginnings each year. The beginning of the academic year brings new possibilities. So does the start of the calendar year. And so does the approach of a new term, though in a less dramatic way. All of these beginnings offer an incredible opportunity: we can let go of what wasn't successful in the past and rededicate ourselves to the potential of the future. We can be continually enriched by new students, new colleagues, and new ideas. So as the academic year gets under way today, spend a few moments looking for opportunities to take a fresh start at your approach to administration. If you've made decisions in the past that didn't work out as well as you'd hoped, release yourself from their burden. Don't lose track of the lessons you learned from them, but give yourself permission to let go of the guilt or disappointment that may still be attached to them. Make the year that's just begun the one in which you start making the sort of difference you've always hoped for. Continue today's reflection until you can identify some specific objective in your professional life that would be exciting to achieve and resolve that this is going to be the year in which you achieve that goal.



## September 2

❖ *Know your limits.*

It's no secret that there are both things you can control and things that are beyond your control, and it's a wise person who knows how to tell the difference. Sometimes, however, academic administrators blur the line between the two because they're so eager to advance an idea that they waste valuable energy trying to transform things that are impervious to change. Like it or not, some people can't be brought onboard an endeavor no matter how persuasively you speak. Some budgetary situations are so dire that regardless of how painful they may be, major cuts will have to be made. Some potential donors are so committed to the causes they already support that it's impossible to interest them in a project with a different focus. And despite the best advice you give, there are certain things that you just can't make people do and certain people you can't encourage to do anything at all. With these limitations in mind, take a candid look at whatever in your environment or working life is beyond your control. Make a resolution that you'll let certain things go and stop frustrating yourself by continuing to devote useless energy to something you can't change. What will result is that you'll now have much more time, energy, and enthusiasm to spend on projects where you can make a positive difference.



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## September 3

❖ *Read the biography of an exemplary leader.*

As a way of contributing to your own professional development, select a biography of a leader you've always admired, and start reading it today. The leader you choose doesn't have to be a figure from higher education. It can be someone who demonstrated great leadership skills in the arts, government, business, the military, nonprofit organizations, religion, humanitarian causes, or any other branch of activity that interests you. As you read the book, try to identify specific values that enabled this leader to be successful and consider ways in which you could demonstrate those values in your own work. Whether we realize it or not, we're often attracted to heroes and role models who demonstrate the same qualities that others also see in us (although almost certainly at a different level). Be sure to notice, too, ways in which the leader you're reading about differs from you in some significant way—in the manner in which you would have approached a particular situation or a core principle that you hold dear, for example. The goal, after all, is to be inspired by a great leader's example, not to try to duplicate everything that he or she achieved or represented.



## September 4

❖ *Attend a meeting just to listen.*

Effective academic leaders learn as much as possible about all the programs, committees, and people they supervise. As a way of growing in knowledge, ask to be invited to a meeting of a department, committee, or task force somewhere within your area of responsibility. Make it clear that your goal isn't to make a presentation or even to answer questions (unless those questions are particularly germane to the topics on the agenda), but simply to listen to the discussion as it unfolds. By sitting quietly and attending to others as they talk, you'll gain a better insight into the issues that different committees are grappling with right now—and you'll learn more about how they address those issues—than you would by reading through volumes of minutes and white papers. Remember, too, that your goal should not be to critique the operation of the committee, but simply to learn how things really work at your institution.

## September 5

❖ *Review your program's publications.*

Take some time today to gather as many of your area's publications as you can. Don't forget that the term *publications* now includes electronic resources, such as Web sites and podcasts. Go through all of these resources and



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pretend that you're seeing them for the first time. Forget that you know anything at all about your institution and its programs so you can take a fresh look at the impression that these materials convey. Is there a consistency of image and message, or do the materials seem to convey conflicting impressions? If you were a potential student, donor, or faculty member, what about the style, content, and theme of these materials would make you eager to become involved in this program? You may come away from this activity with the sense that some of your materials need to be revised or replaced. But today's activity will be equally successful if you are satisfied with the publications you now have and develop greater appreciation for everyone whose work went into them.



### September 6

#### ❖ *Reorder your tasks.*

When students are having difficulty completing exams successfully, it can be beneficial to review with them the ways they approach questions during a test. Some students do better if they work consistently through an exam from beginning to end; if they try to skip around and do sections out of order, they easily become distracted and forget to complete certain questions. Other students do better by answering the easiest questions first; in this way, they build their confidence and are less likely to run





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out of time by devoting all of their energy to one or two particularly challenging questions. Still others perform best when they start with the hardest questions; by the end of the test period, their energy or ability to focus may be lapsing, making it harder for them to succeed at complex or challenging problems. In one way or another, all of us are like these students. Sometimes we're most productive when we work consistently through whatever comes our way. Sometimes we're more effective when we take on our greatest challenges early in the day when we have more stamina. And sometimes doing a series of easy tasks builds our energy and confidence, making thorny issues less daunting to tackle. With this revelation in mind, experiment today with reordering your tasks. Find out whether one of these approaches is more productive for you than the others and, if so, whether it is always more productive or only when you must deal with certain types of issues.



### September 7

#### ❖ *Be a coach.*

Coaches teach in ways that are different from the methods most instructors use. They hector, cajole, praise, flatter, motivate, intimidate, and challenge. Students often accept a far more scathing critique of their shortcomings from a coach than they would from a professor in one of their courses because of this different relationship. We





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expect coaches to set almost impossibly high expectations for us and to use whatever strategies they think are necessary to help us reach those expectations. Of course, not everything that a coach does involves badgering team members. Good coaches also convey a can-do attitude and help individuals achieve a higher degree of excellence than they ever thought possible. Coaches reinforce positive values even while they refuse to accept excuses or self-pity when things aren't going well. Today, consider how you might bring some of these coaching strategies to your responsibilities as an administrator. Who on your faculty and staff could benefit from some excellent coaching, not just to make the program better but to make that person better and more successful at what he or she does?



## **September 8**

### *❖ Waste time.*

The title of today's suggestion is, I must admit, intentionally misleading. Today's goal really isn't to waste time itself, but to become more aware of the ways in which you waste time. All of us have habits or practices that aren't as efficient as we might like them to be. Perhaps we hold on to responsibilities that could more productively be delegated to others. We may proofread our e-mails two or three times for minor typos when the recipient is unlikely to care about an occasional insignificant mistake. Or we



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may agonize over the phrasing of a memo that could have been written in next to no time if we had asked an administrative assistant to prepare an initial draft that we then polished and adapted to our own style. It's possible, too, that we may waste time working with a committee for months to develop a new policy or outline a new procedure that isn't measurably different from what we could have found already in place at dozens of other colleges and universities if we had performed a quick Internet search. Make it your goal today to be conscious of how you spend your time from moment to moment. Try to identify at least three to five practices that aren't your most productive uses of time. What could you accomplish for the benefit of your program if you hadn't wasted time on these inefficient activities but instead had directed your energy toward goals that made a more significant difference to your students and faculty members?

## September 9

❖ *Learn from a bad decision.*

Not all of our administrative decisions end up being successful. There are always opportunities that we missed, mistakes that we made, or choices that we later came to regret. Spend a few minutes today identifying and reflecting on a truly bad professional decision. Engage in this exercise not to wallow in blame or attempt to rewrite



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history, but to learn something important from your error. Had you neglected to use important information that was available to you? Were you overly hasty or confident? Did you rely excessively on the advice of others? Use this reflection as a means of becoming a better administrator. Try to identify at least one thing you'll resolve to do differently in the future in order to avoid adding to the list of decisions you later regret.

### **September 10**

#### *❖ Reflect on respect.*

Spend a few moments today considering how much respect other people seem to give you in your position and how much respect you believe you are giving others. Most administrators discover that the amount of trust they receive is almost directly proportionate to the amount they give the people around them. Sometimes academic leaders balk at this idea and say, in effect, "Presidents, deans, and professors shouldn't be the ones deferring to students. Respect has to be earned, and, like it or not, it can move in only one direction at a college or university." In some ways, that observation may be true. But respect isn't the same as obsequiousness. Respect is the way in which we demonstrate that other people have value, even if that value arises only from their potential. The president who doesn't show consideration for deans, the dean who disrespects faculty





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members, and the professor who is dismissive of students undermines his or her own authority. Evaluate yourself candidly today on the level of respect you're demonstrating to others. Then consider whether there seems to be any correlation between the amount of respect you show your colleagues and the amount you're shown in return.

## September 11

❖ *Provide an outlet for dissent.*

Colleges and universities thrive on dissent. Students are regularly being challenged to examine accepted truths critically and to regard no answer as final. Professors spend years perfecting the art of examining the ideas of others, seeking contradictions or other types of logical flaws, and developing new perspectives. It's only inevitable that these practices will spill over from the study of an academic discipline to an examination of policies, procedures, and decisions that are made throughout higher education itself. For this reason, no matter how congenial your institution may be or how accomplished you have become as an academic leader, you are likely to encounter frequent, vigorous dissent. And that's a *good* thing. Dissent helps administrators keep their perspectives sharp and prevents institutions from falling into groupthink. Learning about opposing views before a final decision is announced can even help us avoid mistakes or ill-considered actions. So devote a few





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minutes today to considering a new venue where people will be safe when they engage in constructive dissent. You could set aside a certain number of office hours every week or two when anyone who wishes can feel free to voice to you, without fear of retribution or condemnation, any view he or she wishes. You could establish an online threaded discussion where comments, suggestions, and opposing opinions can be expressed anonymously. You could survey your faculty, staff, and students to gain a better sense of their priorities. Each campus and each unit is likely to have its own preferred method for voicing dissent. But whatever it is, there are powerful and important voices out there that, one way or another, you need to hear.



### September 12



#### ❖ *Tell your supervisor what you need.*

You've probably already encountered a student, faculty member, or member of the staff who got fairly far along into an activity—perhaps even past the deadline—and proved to be unsuccessful for a reason that you could easily have prevented. “Why didn’t you just ask me for help?” you probably said, to which the response might have been, “But I didn’t know I could!” or “I just wanted to figure it out on my own.” A willingness to be independent can be an admirable quality. But chances are that when you heard the other person’s answer, you felt frustrated and





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perhaps even spoke with the person about precisely what your role is and when it's permissible (even essential) to ask for help. Today, try to understand that your supervisor feels exactly this way. As administrators, we are sometimes reluctant to state our needs clearly and unambiguously to our bosses. We may think that it makes us look weak or give the impression that we're not up to the job. In fact, the reverse is true: effective leaders have enough self-confidence to tell their supervisors precisely what their needs are. You don't want to be like a student or employee who failed because of a misguided reluctance to ask for help. Make that call to your supervisor, and explain what you need right now in order to be most successful in your job.



### September 13



#### ❖ *Learn more about today's college students.*

All of us in higher education are tempted to try to recreate for others the best parts of our own college experience. We want others to have the same advantages that we did. But it's important to realize that college students today also want their own college experience, and that expectation may differ in crucial ways from what you valued most when you went to school. For instance, you may have found that campus life and vigorous discussions in the residence hall were truly life-changing experiences for you, while you now work in an environment where students prefer to live





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at home. You may cherish your memories of those intellectually rich interactions over coffee with a favorite professor but discover that most of the students around you prefer to take their courses online. It's important, in other words, to distinguish between the essence of what made your own college experience so significant—an introduction to new ways of viewing the world, intense and lasting relationships, a greater understanding of yourself and your role in life—and specific ways of providing that experience. Spend some time today learning about what's important to the students in your program. What do they do in their free time? What motivates them? How do they see the world? By learning as much as you can about today's college students, you may find any number of ways to unite the best of your own experiences with the needs and interests of a different generation.



### September 14

❖ *Convey some good news and some bad news.*

Academic leaders frequently commit one of two opposing errors: they either focus too exclusively on their own successes or become overly preoccupied with their challenges, frustrations, and problems. You can see these tendencies all around you. Sometimes administrators feel the need to present the governing board, prospective students, and other external stakeholders a picture of the



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institution as though it easily progressed from one triumph to the next. Sometimes those same administrators confront other stakeholders, such as members of the faculty or staff, with endless tales of woe related to the budget, enrollment trends (where there are always either too many or too few students who want to attend the school), and issues of morale. The fact of the matter is that the news at any college or university is rarely, if ever, purely good or purely bad. The tendency to present that type of picture results from a desire to tell people what we think they want to hear, create a context that makes our own work easier, or both. Today, make a conscious effort to work against this destructive trend. You don't have to be so obvious as to indulge in the old cliché, "Well, I've got some good news and some bad news. . . ." But resolve to present a clear, complete, and accurate picture of both the successes and the challenges your program has experienced. You'll discover that doing so is not as difficult as you may believe and that in the long run it improves your credibility immeasurably.

## September 15

❖ *Describe your supervisor.*

What immediately comes to mind when you think of the person or board to whom you report? What positive qualities can you identify? What negative impressions do you have? Are there descriptive terms that are neither particularly positive nor negative that help define who your



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boss is? Do you find that you resent or fear this person? Do you sometimes feel that you could do your supervisor's job better than he or she does? Consider the description that you develop today, and then identify specific experiences that led you to those impressions. Reflect, too, on whether you believe that you may be demonstrating to your supervisor how you feel through your actions, expressions, or word choice. Particularly if your impressions are more negative than positive, are there ways in which you are causing potential harm to yourself by the attitude that you are conveying, even subconsciously? Once this exercise is complete, delete or shred your list of descriptive terms. After all, you don't want anyone else to see what you've written.



### September 16



#### ❖ *Stop—at least for a moment.*

Administrators sometimes believe that they have to be doing something all the time. If they're not active—not changing things for the better—they often feel that they're not doing their jobs. But today, take at least a moment or two—and just stop. Reflect on all the good that's occurring in your program. Appreciate the people with whom you work. Take pride in what you've already accomplished, and feel gratitude for the accomplishments of others. Pause long enough that you no longer feel you're doing one thing solely to get to the next thing but are really experiencing the full benefit of all the wonderful success around you.





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Then carry some of that positive energy with you throughout the rest of your day.

## September 17

❖ *Remember that it's not all about you.*

Spend today trying not merely to *see* things from the perspective of your colleagues, but actually to understand how it *feels* in their world. Who works with you and is facing some challenges? The young faculty member who's uncertain about the prospects for promotion or tenure? The colleague who's undergoing a difficult divorce? The long-term employee who feels that everything at the school was better twenty or thirty years ago? The person who's trying to make ends meet or facing a medical emergency? The parent whose children have special needs? Every member of your local cast of characters has his or her own particular problems, worries, individual interests, and hopes for the future. It can be easy when people seem irritated or aloof to ask yourself, "What have I done to deserve *that* reaction?" But make it a point today to remember that it's not always about you. In fact, it's frequently not about you. People tend to respond to situations because of where they are in their lives right now. If it's in your power to do so, try helping them with their challenges, but even when you're unable to help, try to view the issue as objectively as possible.





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## September 18

❖ *Share someone else's dream.*

Ask someone who reports to you to tell you about his or her greatest hope for the future. That hope might be a personal ambition, a vision for your program or school, or even a dream that's far more global. But even if the idea that's presented to you today is wholly impractical or doesn't appeal to you at all, don't judge it. Just listen and try to understand what motivates this colleague. If you can, appreciate the vision that he or she has for the future. Thank your colleague for sharing a vision with you that may be extremely private and may never have been shared with anyone else before. And then consider your own dream and how you would answer a question about what you hoped for most in all the world.



## September 19

❖ *Learn from what others teach.*

Gather at least five to ten syllabi from courses being taught in your area and examine them. Your goal isn't to catch a faculty member in violation of this or that policy, and it's certainly not to criticize the courses themselves or suggest better ways of organizing them. Rather, the goal of this exercise is to develop a better sense of how others teach the material in their disciplines, what they regard



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as particularly important, and why they've structured the course as they did. Some disciplines, particularly at the introductory level, have a fairly standard way of approaching topics, and you're unlikely to find much variation even at institutions very different from your own. But in other fields and at upper levels of nearly every discipline, professors often have a lot more liberty to group topics in innovative ways, tackle certain issues first while saving others for near the end of the course, and place an individual stamp on the way in which they teach the material. Do you see the personalities of your colleagues in how they write their syllabi? Do you find any surprises—maybe delightfully creative ways of organizing a course that you would never have thought of on your own? Are there references to assignments that seem particularly inventive? Try to come away from your review with a new appreciation for how well professors teach in the area that you supervise and a renewed enthusiasm for the instructional mission of your college or university.

## September 20

❖ *Evaluate without making value judgments.*

Administrators frequently have to evaluate ideas, requests, and people. There are times too when you'll need to instruct someone to do something in a particular way because of institutional procedures, style guidelines, or your supervisor's preferences. It can be difficult to convey



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the message, “I need you to do this differently,” without appearing as if you are saying, “You are doing this wrong!” or even, “You’re incompetent at what you’re doing!” But effective administrators have to make that distinction very clear. So today, whenever you must evaluate someone or change his or her behavior in some way, seek ways of doing so without making the person feel unappreciated, disrespected, or demeaned. Try to accomplish this task even if today’s the day you must conduct the appraisal of a professor whose students never seem to grasp even the most rudimentary material, who has no prospects in sight for any productive scholarship, and who refuses to take on even the lightest committee load. None of these problems make the faculty member you’re reviewing a bad person, although you may have some suggestions about how he or she might better meet the school’s expectations of its employees. The goal, in other words, is to evaluate people without making value judgments about them, to help them improve their performance without degrading them as individuals. This goal should be one that you pursue every day, but make it a special priority today.



### September 21


❖ *Be the change you want to see.*

One of Mahatma Gandhi’s most commonly quoted sayings is his encouragement to “be the change you want to see in the world.” Accomplishing that lofty goal may






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seem a bit overwhelming as a task to take on during a single day in your life as an administrator, but today at least, try to be the change you want to see in your own world. In other words, if you work in an environment that's torn apart by mistrust and conflict, spend today extending trust and understanding to everyone you meet. If your program suffers from lack of direction or energy, be focused in all of your duties, and bring vigor to everything that comes your way. Whatever it is that you feel needs to occur in your environment, reflect that in your own attitude and interactions with others. If there's anything that, in your opinion, exists too abundantly in the program that you supervise (such as too much criticism, prolonged deliberation, or personal work done on office time), diminish that behavior, quality, or attitude in the way you think, talk, and act. Certainly you won't be able to effect a significant or lasting change in a single day, but you may discover a path to begin taking in the direction that your program or institution needs to go.



### September 22

❖ *Respect other people's time.*

Sometimes the best thing an academic leader can do is to cancel a meeting when it's clear that the agenda isn't important enough to occupy anyone's time. Everyone's



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busy, and a good academic leader doesn't occupy more of someone else's schedule than is necessary. Every day we come across plenty of ways to help leverage the limited time that people have in their schedules. For instance, you could review the work assignments of everyone who reports to you in order to make sure that the right tasks are assigned to the right people; updated job descriptions can help everyone become engaged and properly challenged, and neither overwhelmed nor bored. In addition, you could check to make sure that everyone knows precisely what's expected in his or her responsibilities, what acceptable standards of achievement are, and when upcoming deadlines will occur. A person who doesn't know your expectations is likely to waste time doing things wrong, which then causes even more time to be spent doing the task the right way. You can also help people prioritize their tasks, so that urgent day-to-day business doesn't crowd out more important long-term goals, resulting in a lot of fires that have been put out but almost nothing of lasting significance that's been achieved. You can work with people to incorporate their own dreams into their assignments so that what helps them also helps the institution, and vice versa. Effective administrators are continually looking for ways to respect the time of the faculty and staff members who help make their program a success. Find at least one of these ways today.



## September 23

❖ *Consider the first thing you do at work every day.*

What's the first thing you do when you come to work every day? As soon as you answer this question, consider what your answer reveals about your values and priorities. There's no right or wrong answer to this question (unless, of course, you said that the very first thing you do is to pick up your copy of *Academic Leadership Day by Day* and check that day's activity, in which case all I can say is, "Bravo!"), merely different ways of learning about your administrative style. For instance, if you spend a significant amount of time greeting your coworkers and finding out what's new in their lives, that beginning of your day shows the importance that you place on networking and social relationships. If the first thing you do is check your e-mail, your highest priority appears to be the processing of information. If your initial impulse is to examine your calendar and establish a few clear priorities for the day, you probably place a premium on organization and planning. So your goal today is not only to identify *what* you tend to do first each day, but also *why*. Make sure your first task clearly reflects what you want your priorities to be, and be particularly concerned if you realize that your time tends to get occupied from the very start of your day with unproductive or inessential matters. If that's what occurs, see if you can start reprogramming your day so that your first task



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makes a positive difference to the mission of your college or university.

## **September 24**

### *❖ Find the weakest link.*

Even the strongest chain has its weakest link. You may be fortunate enough to have a faculty in which every member is a spectacular instructor. Even so, one of them is likely to be marginally less spectacular than the others. Everybody on your staff may be dedicated, exceptionally hard working, and personable, but surely one of them doesn't quite reach the lofty heights of all the rest. The goal of identifying your weakest link isn't to be punitive; it's to determine what your best strategy should be in order to help this person become even better. Sometimes weak links need better training, stronger encouragement, or closer supervision. Sometimes their assignments need to be changed so that they can devote more of their time to what they do best. Only occasionally will you discover such a poor fit between what a job requires and what the employee can do that a complete reassignment or dismissal is necessary. Even then, what you're really doing is freeing the person to pursue other possibilities in which he or she is likely to have greater success. So view today's goal of identifying your weakest link not as a way of finding out who's "failing" at his or her job, but



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as your chance to help each person who reports to you do his or her work even better. After all, someday your own supervisor may also be looking for his or her own weakest link.

## September 25

### ❖ *Go back to the future.*

There are many ways of dealing with the future. You can fantasize about what you hope will occur, dread what you fear might occur, and think about what you believe is likely to occur. Today, pursue the last of these approaches. Being neither particularly optimistic nor pessimistic about the future, where do you reasonably expect to see yourself ten years from today? If you think that you'll be in your same position, what will you have accomplished during that time? If you're going to be in a different position or working somewhere else, what steps took you there? If you will have retired, what did you do in order to secure your financial future and establish a legacy of your career? Be as practical as you can in imagining what the world will be like and what your role will be. Extrapolate from where you are right now, and see if you can identify the trends that are likely to shape the next decade. Are there ways in which you can do things today in order to improve your probable future?



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## September 26

❖ *Lead by serving.*

Service consists of all the things we do for the benefit of others. If we lead to help those around us, not in order to secure our own self-interest or advance our personal success, then we lead by serving. The effectiveness we have in our positions can often increase when we change the way in which we view what we're trying to achieve. Today, make a conscious effort to approach every decision, appointment, meeting, and other responsibility by asking, "How are my actions here helping others to the greatest extent possible?" You may find that your whole approach to today's challenges will change. You'll regard unexpected problems not as distractions from your "real work," but as the substance of your real work: an opportunity to make one more difference in the lives of others.



## September 27

❖ *Simplify something.*

Colleges and universities are complex, and they tend to develop policies, procedures, and strategies that are similarly complex. Because colleges and universities tend to be long-lived, those policies, procedures, and strategies often





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become even more byzantine over time. In many cases, however, that degree of complexity is neither necessary nor desirable. Try to find a situation today in which a welcome degree of simplification is possible in the area you supervise. There must be some committee structure, approval procedure, or review mechanism that originally served a perfectly good purpose but now gets in your way or prevents progress. Streamline and pare things down in order to make them more efficient and less burdensome to the people who use them. Come away from this activity with the clear understanding that improving academic policies and procedures doesn't always mean adding something new. It can also mean clearing away obstructions and debris, leaving something behind that is simpler but more elegant.



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#### ❖ *Study interactions.*

An almost unbelievable amount of higher education administration depends on good interpersonal communication skills. Although searches for academic leaders frequently focus on our knowledge of strategic planning, resource development, and leadership in such areas as research, curriculum planning, and assessment, it's in interpersonal relationships that we have to direct most of our efforts. Tensions arise, conflicts break out, and employees become disengaged. We're constantly trying to



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inspire, motivate, cajole, or dissuade others from ill-advised pursuits, and relatively few of us have sufficient training in handling interpersonal relationships. For this reason, make it a point today to learn something new about interpersonal communication and how it affects the people in your area. The course of action you decide to follow could range anywhere from registering for a workshop on effective ways to interact with people to learning five effective strategies to calm others down when they're angry. No matter what you learn today, it's sure to become extremely useful soon, working as we all do in environments with short deadlines, large egos, and increasing pressure.

### September 29

#### ❖ *Seek your own satisfaction.*

While effective academic leaders are primarily motivated by their ability to help others, it's also important for them to find some satisfaction in their jobs. An administrator who's simply going through the motions or resents much of what he or she is doing is unlikely to be serving the best interests of the program. Today, be sure to identify at least one way you can increase your own job satisfaction. Then go out and do it. Although this suggestion may seem a bit self-centered, it's impossible to give others what you don't have yourself. If there's a project that has long been annoying or distressing you, see if someone else



can complete it—or maybe it doesn't need to be completed at all. Explore whether there's a better way to achieve the same goal. If you find yourself exasperated by the constant demands of work, see if you can schedule one three-day weekend a month, giving yourself an oasis of time to look forward to in the midst of unreasonably tight deadlines and ceaseless pressure. Ask yourself, "If I could change one thing that would increase my job satisfaction, what would it be?" Then give yourself the freedom to pursue it.

## September 30

### ❖ *Read a boring book.*

Despite the common injunction not to judge a book by its cover, we actually do exactly that all the time. No one could possibly read all the books that are written or even have time for all those that intrigue us, so we glance at the artwork on the front when we're browsing for something to read, look at the brief descriptions that appear on the dust covers, and make an educated guess as to whether the book will be worth our time to read it. Sometimes we're absolutely correct, but frequently we're disappointed. We hardly ever read a book (unless we're required to do so for some reason) if we think it's going to be boring, annoying, or unrelated to our interests. Yet today's activity is to do exactly that. Find a book about some topic that doesn't appeal to you at all. In fact, the greater your aversion to



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the topic, the better your experience is going to be. As you read the book, it's likely that you won't change your overall opinion of the subject matter, but at least you'll come away from this experience better educated about something you may not otherwise have learned about in any depth. As Pliny the Elder said, no book is so bad that you can't get *something* good out of it. You may also find that the topic you had assumed was so dull and uninviting is actually more interesting than you ever would have known if you hadn't taken this opportunity to read about it. The best academic administrators don't remain satisfied with knowing about only the topics they've already mastered. They're always seeking to expand their insights.



