

ROI Strengthens Collective Leadership through On-Boarding Campus Leaders

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It is that time of year when new presidents are arriving on campuses, some of them first-timers and others seasoned by leadership experiences elsewhere as presidents, governors or corporate leaders. What they all share is the need to transition smoothly into a new environment. Many have gone through leadership programs designed to expose them to key campus issues—finances and budgeting, shared governance, student success and fundraising. There is more, of course, but what is often missing from these programs are the nuances of the particular campus and often the system culture. Understanding institutional history and culture at their new institutions is key to leadership success.

ROI has been engaged with campus leadership for over twenty-five years and both Barbara Kaufman and Gretchen Bataille bring to campus leaders experiences that jumpstart the process of integration into the new institution. The first 100 days are critical and navigating the waters of the new environment requires focused attention. This past year we have worked with over twenty campus leaders—some new and some well into their tenure. Among those leaders are nine women and eight minority leaders. What they all have in common is a desire to build a strong team that will make a difference for all constituents. *Students* will be academically successful and secure jobs or admission to graduate and professional programs. *Faculty and staff* will thrive in an environment of support and one that provides opportunities for advancement. *Alumni* will recognize that as the campus profile grows, the value of their degrees increases. *Legislators, voters and donors* will be proud to support a well-run institution. In every case, achieving these goals will demand a consistent vision shared by the leadership team.

There are many ways to achieve these lofty goals. Often boards require a new president to have a coach and the first 100 days becomes a critical period for the new CEO to gain insights about the campus' readiness for change, including the changes

brought by a new president's experiences, personality and leadership style. "Onboarding" used to be reserved for corporate leaders, but increasingly academic leaders in the C-suite are benefiting from an expedited onboarding process.

Aligned with onboarding is the opportunity to assess the current leadership team. ROI uses a customized interview protocol to gain insights about the campus history and culture, identifies the "low-hanging fruit" and seeks out the landmines that can derail a new leader. Early coaching and interviews with the senior team can lead to a senior leadership team retreat where all of them gather to begin the conversations about mutual support, development of the shared vision, new team rules of engagement and implementation strategies that can begin immediately. Often such presidential retreats continue to be held annually to address opportunities and challenges on the horizon.

Through these processes, ROI provides multiple services as coach, guide, mentor and advisor to a new leader. The process may include consultation with and feedback to system officers, board chairs and other stakeholders who care about the future of the institution. Each university or college is different—public or private; large or small; HSI, HBCU or historically white; religiously affiliated or professional school; two-year or four-year—and the needs will vary as will the expectations of boards and other constituents.

Newly appointed presidents have recognized the need to gain insights quickly about their new institution. Cynthia Teniente-Matson came from a well-established campus in a large system to Texas A&M University San Antonio, a recently-accredited university within another large system. She has acknowledged the need to understand the nuances of a new campus and described her onboarding experience in positive ways: "The expertise and leadership assessment provided by ROI provides useful tools for quickly grasping the range of internal and external cultural, political and academic issues that may require focus, analysis, decisions and presidential attention. ROI also provides an experienced voice to discuss 360-degree organizational context as the onboarding and campus immersion process is underway." Félix Matos Rodriguez transitioned from a two-year community college to a four-year comprehensive university and immediately recognized that not only did he have to prove himself as the

campus' new leader, he had to quickly come up-to-speed on the expectations for performance at a four-year institution. As he suggested, "I didn't want to fall into the trap that I knew or understood Queens College just because I have been part of the CUNY system for years. The ROI on-boarding process proved to be of real value, not just to me, but also to my senior management team and ultimately benefited the entire campus." Soraya Coley served as provost at CSU, Bakersfield before her appointment to the presidency at Cal Poly, Pomona in January of 2015. Following a long-tenured president, Dr. Coley had to be sensitive to traditions and culture, while at the same time helping the campus understand her audacious vision for the campus and the values that guide her as a leader. She indicated that "the ROI on-boarding process was extremely valuable in serving as a 'communication bridge'; administrators and staff were unexpectedly comfortable in sharing their individual candid assessment of the state of the university. These reflections were immensely beneficial in helping to inform my 'onboarding process.'" She acknowledged that she didn't think her new leadership staff would have been as forthcoming in a group setting or in private meetings in the early days of her presidency. She concluded that, "The ROI process assisted me in formulating an effective strategy for building a team that is ideally suited for the challenges and opportunities facing our campus."

What all of these new presidents share is a profound sensitivity to the importance of ramping up quickly, while honoring achievements of the past, assessing the current situation, and putting in place a high performing senior leadership team that will move the institution forward, often in ways that require reframing how the campus community envisions the future. They also share a passion for learning about the institution, the people and the mission that will guide them into the future.