

Leadership Burnout and Board Governance Responsibilities

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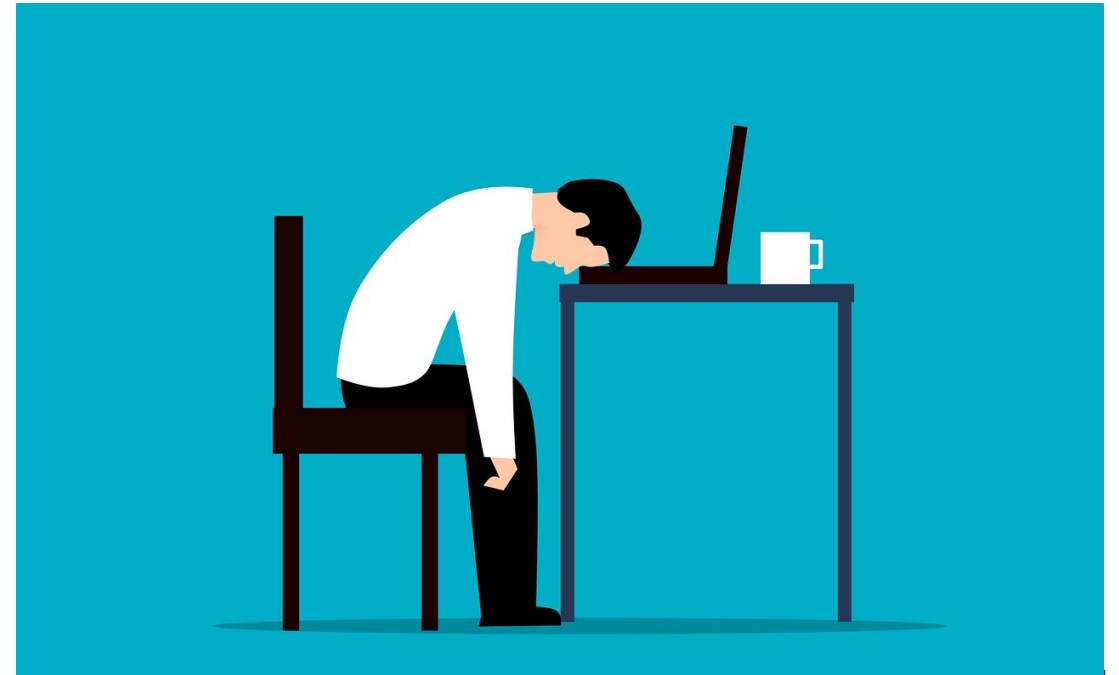
Overview

- The role of the academic president is becoming more complex resulting in shorter tenures and increases in stress related leadership dysfunctions.
- More attention needs to be paid by governing Boards to the “care and feeding” of their senior executive.
- While Boards are more alert to presidential stressors when institutional challenges are present, it is not uncommon for these to be missed when key performance indicators, and other markers of mission success, are present.

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In this workshop we consider:

- What marketplace case studies and research are revealing about leadership burnout.
- Strategies Boards can use to diagnose and manage burnout in their senior leadership.
- How the Board and the President can create a partnership for managing the causes of, and responses to, the increasing challenges of leading our institutions in times like these.



Success May Not Be Healthy

- Why are governing Boards not alert to the facts that their successful CEOs are burning out?
- Trustees become aware of strains on leadership when indicators of institutional viability are under performing.
- However, when success indicators are positive, it is easy to assume that the one leading the success also is healthy.
- Boards are surprised when they discover that their high functioning CEO begins showing signs of burnout.

Successful Leaders Can Burn Out

- Leaders, who take the major responsibilities for success on their own shoulders, are most prone to burn out
- Classic Signs of Burnout can include:
 - creeping negativity,
 - exaggerated irritability when decisions or direction are challenged,
 - insensitivity to support staff,
 - aggressive assertions of authority
 - persistent tiredness,
 - waning motivations,
 - over emphasis on successes and achievements
 - family and other relationship tensions and
 - increased demands for absolute loyalty.
- <https://www.boardpro.com/blog/how-do-i-stop-my-ceo-burning-out>

Workplace Toxicity



- Another reason Boards need to be alert to leadership burnout, and an indication that it may be present, is the escalation of toxic workplace complaints and litigations.
- The challenges of sustaining a viable institution now require significant impact on employee positions, salaries, morale, and related matters requiring consolidations and “right sizing”.

Monitoring Leadership Toxicity

- A lack of well-defined executive parameters, in place to monitor the CEO's performance and workplace impact.
- Minimal feedback available to the Board from core constituencies that are most impacted by the leader's stress reactions.
- Balancing the Board's role to oversee it's "one employee" without abandoning its responsibility to ensure that their one employee is effective in leading all the employees in ways that ensure mission fidelity and operational viability.
- Christian employees are hesitant to express concerns and complaints about the CEO's leadership dysfunctions out of:
 - fear of retaliation but mostly,
 - out of obedience to the biblical mandates to "pray for those in authority" (I Timothy 2:1-4),
 - not "touch God's anointed" (I Chron. 16:22, Psalm 105:15-17) and
 - serve sacrificially even at personal hardship and difficulty (Ephesians 6:5-12).

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Ensuring A Healthy Leader to Ensure a Healthy Workplace

- It is never easy for "Nathan's" to address a leader's dysfunctions (2 Samuel 12).
- And it is challenging for Boards to determine if such concerns are merely anecdotal, from a few disgruntled folks not getting their way, or more broadly represented in the supporting constituencies.
- Tools like "360 reviews" done by competent professionals,
- Validated climate assessment instruments like Best Christian Workplaces,
- Regular employee satisfaction surveys
- Exit interviews of departing employees
- Tracking constituency related litigation and
- Ensuring that "whistle blower" policies and practices are effective.

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Board Strategies for Presidential Well-Being

- A standing committee assignment with agenda item to discuss presidential well-being.
- Performance indicators that speak to personal, spiritual, family as well as professional health.
- A safe place for the President to share well-being concerns – usually established with the Chair.
- A Board initiated “prayer watch” for the President and family.
- Ensuring workload relief through vacations, time for spiritual formation & reflection and other life-giving priorities. Examples?
- Annual performance evaluations address well-being not just work performance
- Funding for an executive coach capable also of providing self-awareness/assessment in areas beyond job performance essentials.
- Note the promises of calling in I Thes. 5:23-24, & also Peter’s restored call in John 21.

Summary, Resources & Discussion

- Boards need proactive strategies to support and assess the President's personal, professional and spiritual well-being.
- In these days of unprecedented pressures on leaders, governing Boards must be more alert to the care and nurture of their CEOs, addressing indicators of burn out quickly, responsibly and compassionately
- The following articles are available in the ABHE downloads for this session”
 - Leadership Burnout and Governance – David J. Gyertson, Ph.D.
 - Whistleblower Policies Overview – David J. Gyertson, Ph.D.