

Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education

Volume 41 *Faculty Life Issues*

Article 10

9-1-2011

So You Want To Be A President?

Vincent M. Cooke, S.J.

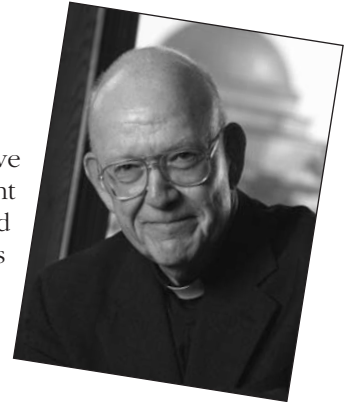
Follow this and additional works at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations>

Recommended Citation

Cooke, S.J., Vincent M. (2012) "So You Want To Be A President?," *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education*: Vol. 41, Article 10.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/conversations/vol41/iss1/10>

SO YOU WANT TO BE A PRESIDENT?

By Vincent M. Cooke, S.J.



The best advice I can give younger faculty or administrators who want to move ahead in the Jesuit system as senior administrators, deans, vice presidents, and even presidents is **KNOW YOURSELF**. Administration is not for everybody. You may already have the best job you will ever want if you are working directly with students and helping them to grow as human beings. If so, sit back and enjoy the run. The higher you progress in administration the more remote you become from direct involvement with students. Is this what you really want? Administrators have a different job. Their time is spent working with faculty, other administrators, trustees, and all sorts of people external to the university. Administration has a lot of satisfactions, but they are not the same as those of a teacher. Administrators have to interact with a wide variety of people. Do you have the social skills to do that, or at least are you willing to make the effort to learn those skills? As a faculty member you have almost complete control of your private time. Administrators constantly have their private time interrupted by the unpredictable demands of their job. Weekends are rarely completely their own.

Are you the kind of person who likes to go to meetings and talk a lot? The first skill required of an administrator is the ability to really listen. People will want to see that you really do listen to them and have respect for their

ideas. If they see you do that, they will have respect for you. Most of the decisions administrators make are judgment calls that could go either way. If people see that you listen to them, if you communicate to them what you are thinking and why you are thinking it, if you are candid about your own doubts or hesitations, and if you then listen to their feedback, they will follow you. They will do this because they trust you, and you have earned their trust.

Do you know how to build trust? Trust is the most valuable asset an administrator has. You must always speak the truth, or at least the truth as God gives us to see the truth, and you must never try to manipulate people. You manipulate people when you try to get them to do something for reasons that you keep secret and which they would never consent to if they knew what your reasons really were. Manipulation destroys trust. It may

Do you know how to build trust?

work in the short run, but it always leads to failure in the long run.

What kind of a decision maker are you? Can you make decisions calmly and quickly? Do you agonize over decisions? Do you have to “think over” even the simplest decisions? Do you always say “I’ll get back to you on that.” People do not want to be kept waiting while you are thinking things over. Some mat-

ters do have to be thought over, and sometimes further consultation is necessary, but the vast majority of decisions are relatively clear cut. If so, make the decision immediately, and let your people get on with it.

Do you want to be an administrator because you want to control things? This is the worst reason to become an administrator. “I don’t know. What do you think?” These are the words that good administrators speak more often than any others. They do this because they know that one of their primary tasks is to empower other people to take responsibility and make decisions themselves. That’s the way things get done in good organizations. People do not want to be robots. Give them a job and let them figure out how to do it. That’s what makes their job fun!

That brings me to my final piece of advice. Whatever role you choose to pursue at a university be sure that you enjoy doing it. There is nothing sadder than seeing someone doing something day after day when he or she really does not enjoy doing it. If you find you are not really happy at your job, get out of it, and do something else immediately. God wants you to have some poetry in your life. ■

Vincent M. Cooke, S.J., is the former president of Canisius College.