

# Inside-Out Leadership

EFFECTIVE UNIVERSITY LEADERSHIP has been both the focus of concern and the target of criticism for most of the past half-century. University leaders, it seems, can't do anything right. If they focus on intellectual leadership, they are criticized for ivory-towerism and for not being sufficiently "engaged" with their communities. If they focus on external constituencies, they are accused of neglecting the core purposes of the academy, or worse, of intellectual cowardice. We believe that it's time for a reframing

of what, exactly, university leaders should

be. We offer such a reframing in this article.

Our argument is based on two related premises. First, academic leadership is not just for designated leaders but is a responsibility of all members of the academic community. This will require a return to a collegial model of governance but with a modern twist. Our second premise holds that leadership is more than someone in formal authority trying to persuade followers. All members of the academic community have both the opportunity and the responsibility to step up and take on leadership roles, whether formally or informally, and the choice to do so is anchored by vocation, a sense of calling to a higher purpose.

Those who lead from the inside out engage in two interdependent activities. They discover their vocations (an *intrapersonal* activity), and they lead with vocation (an *interpersonal* activity). The interplay of these two activities results in a form of leadership that is inner-based and outer-focused, an *institutional* activity (see fig. 1).

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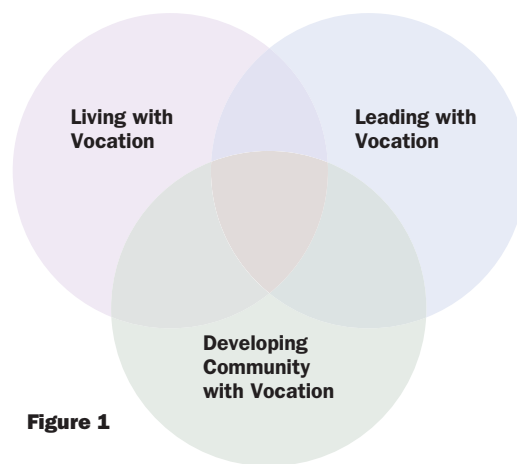


Figure 1

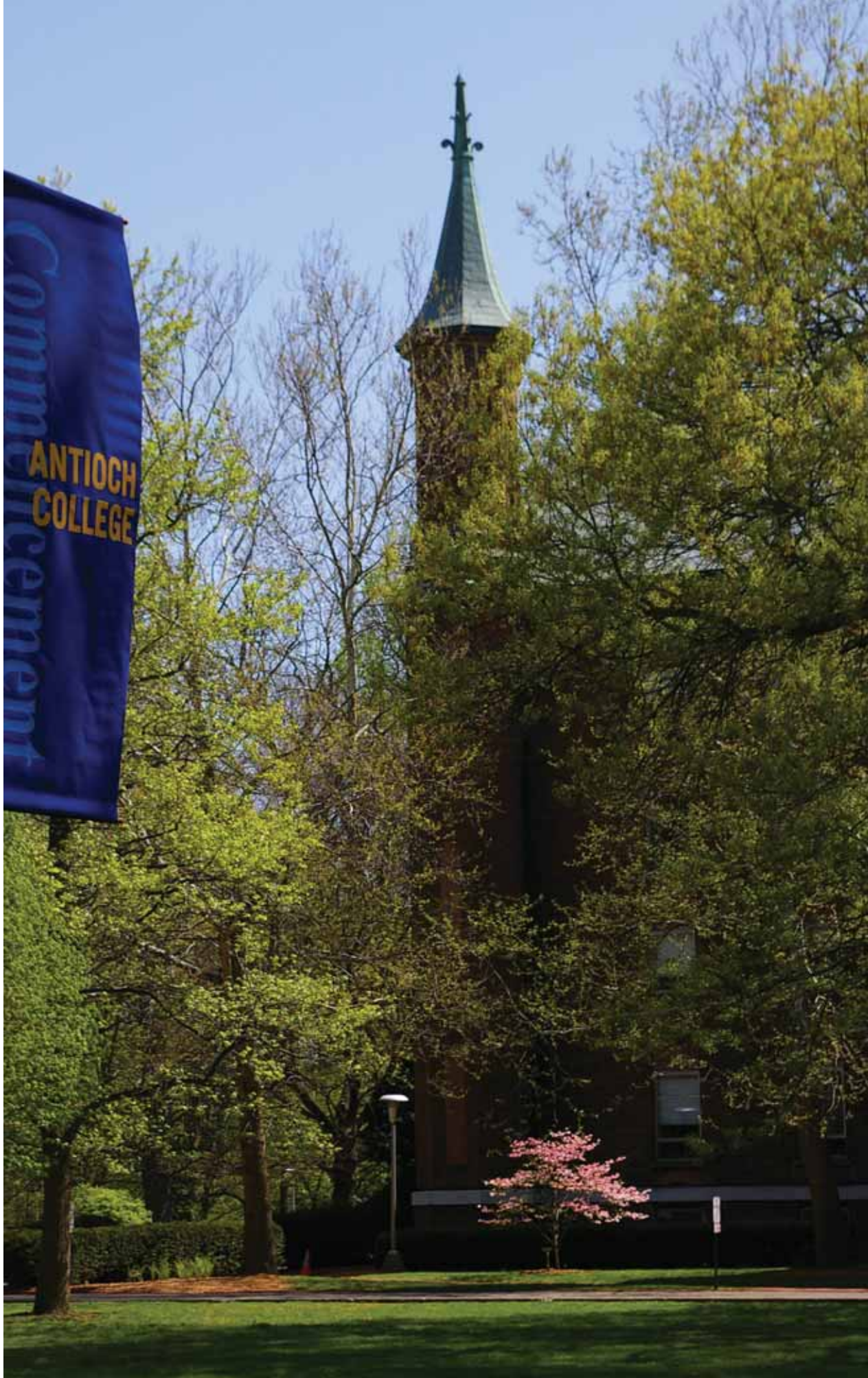
**Leaders with vocation lead from within, but they keep their leadership efforts focused on something outside of themselves—the institution, a program, or a cause**

## Living with vocation

Finding your vocation is a lifelong process of discovering who you are, who you desire to become, and how you want to live your life. It is a dynamic process filled with tensions, conflicts, challenges, and disappointments, but also with joy and fulfillment. Living with vocation involves three interconnected elements: listening, reflecting, and committing.

The word *vocation* is derived from the Latin word *vocare*, which means "to call," and one cannot talk about vocation without first considering the notion of "being called." Living with vocation begins with the experience of listening for, hearing, and following a call. A person finds his or her calling by looking inward. As John Neafsey describes it (2004, 4), "from a psychological perspective, the voice of vocation can be understood as the voice of our 'true self' or 'best self.'" Many refer to this as following one's "passion," but vocation is deeper than that; it inevitably requires sacrifice and hard work. Finding a vocation is a deeply personal process of going into the silence and creating a space that will allow us to listen to ourselves.

Living with vocation also requires engagement in serious reflection. As Neafsey notes (2004, 4), "however we understand it, the



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sense of vocation is an experience of *someone* or *something* which speaks to our hearts in a compelling way that calls for us to *listen* and *follow*. This requires, first of all, a capacity to hear the voice as it speaks within ourselves or through our life experiences. Once we have heard the call, we then face the challenge of making intelligent and discerning and courageous choices to follow where it is leading.” In this process of reflection, two major questions need to be addressed: Who am I? And, how do I best serve others?

The first question concerns self-identity and self-identification—developing a sense of self. This dimension represents the source of the calling, both internal and external. We get to know ourselves—our talents, values, and aspirations—not only through reading, studying,

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and thinking, but also through interacting with others and inviting them to challenge our assumptions of what the world is like and what our role in it should be (Mezirow and Associates 2000). The second question refers to the need to incorporate the social and interpersonal dimension into finding a vocation. How do we live and contribute in ways defined by our relationships with others and with society in general? To what extent is service to others a central focus of our discernment and action? From both religious and secular perspectives, social responsibility is more virtuous than self-centeredness. This does not mean that the ideal or only “true” vocation is one in which a person is involved directly in helping others, however; not everyone needs to become a pastor or a social worker.

The third major element in living with vocation is making a commitment to act upon that vocation. Through listening and reflection, a leader with vocation determines what

he or she truly stands for and commits to acting upon his or her values and beliefs. This process is never strictly linear. One can feel a calling without fully understanding it. One may even act on a calling and only then begin to reflect on its meaning and its implications. Life experiences can reinforce and build on personal commitments, but they may also be opportunities that *lead* to commitment.

### Leading with vocation

There is a big difference between commitment—the intention to act based upon a sense of purpose—and action. Knowing how and when to express this intentionality is the mark of a good leader. Leading is essentially an interpersonal relationship between leaders and followers. Leading with vocation requires giving voice to others, building relationships, and recognizing—and rewarding—the contributions of others. It requires that leaders not only discover their own vocations but also “inspire others to find theirs” (Covey 2004, 5). One does not have to have a formal leadership position in order to be a leader. Rather, a leader has simply to find his or her “voice,” a compelling reason to step forward.

One of the most treasured images of academic community is that of a collegium whose members are collectively responsible for the good of the whole. With the growth of a “managerial culture” in the past several years, the need for individuals throughout the academic community to become “leaders in place” has become acute (Wergin 2007). The concept of leadership in place stands in contrast to other forms of leadership that seek only to influence or to protest. Leadership, whether someone is a formal leader or not, requires a commitment to helping others find *their* voices. One can speak from passion and experience, with the firm belief that motives are honorable and that the message needs to be heard, and still not be a leader. One can sound off at a faculty meeting about the latest administrative incursion into faculty autonomy, and then retire to the sanctity of a private office with the smug satisfaction that comes from being a voice in the wilderness. Or that same person can commit to something much riskier: helping others find their voices in a common cause. By helping others find their own voices, leaders play a special role in the lives of their colleagues.

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Daniel Goleman, of “emotional intelligence” fame, recognizes the power and importance of relationships. He notes that the emotionally intelligent leader requires both “personal” and “social” competence, and that the leader’s “primal task” is building “resonance” with others. “By being attuned to how others feel in the moment,” Goleman writes, “a leader can say and do what’s appropriate, whether that means calming fears, assuaging anger, or joining in good spirits. This attunement also lets a leader sense the shared values and priorities that can guide the group” (2002, 30). Goleman’s sense of social competence is not based upon giving voice to others, but rather consists of reading others’ emotions in ways that are most likely to increase the leader’s influence. Our notion of relationship-building is quite different. By finding his or her own voice and then encouraging others to find theirs, the leader who leads with vocation negotiates a relationship that is built upon identifying mutual values and purposes—even, and especially, if not all those values and purposes are congruent.

Leaders of all kinds are keenly aware that the contributions of followers are a key determinant of their own success. They recognize the work of others. The first step necessary to turn ideals about relationships into reality is, simply, to respect people.

[Respect] begins with an understanding of the diversity of their gifts. Understanding the diversity of these gifts enables us to begin taking the crucial step of trusting each other. It also enables us to begin to think in a new way about the strengths of others. Everyone comes with certain gifts—but not the same gifts. True participation and enlightened leadership allow these gifts to be expressed in different ways and at different times (DePree 2004, 25–6).

Given the press for scholarship—especially entrepreneurial scholarship—in the modern university, DePree’s advice is not often heeded. The differential contributions of faculty members, even if recognized in theory, are often not recognized in practice.

How does the leader with vocation draw out and maximize these different qualities? One

way is by building on the concept of organizational motivation (Staw 1983; Wergin 2003). In order to enhance organizational motivation—that is, the desire to work on behalf of the group instead of individual self-interest—the leader needs to instill both identification with the institution and effi-

cacy, or the sense that one’s efforts will have tangible positive impacts. An effective leader helps others identify with the organization by building a relationship based on shared values and goals, thus making the organization a source of community and emotional support. He or she also helps others find their organizational niche, that place where they feel they are using their gifts in ways that make a unique and visible contribution.

Finally, the leader with vocation recognizes the unique contributions of others by explicitly rewarding their uniqueness. In a vocation-driven organization, people are evaluated according to performance criteria that focus on their ability to bring their gifts and talents to bear upon the good of the whole.

**Developing community with vocation**

We began by focusing on the centrality of self-awareness because the “personhood” of the leader is vitally important. Yet leading from the inside out requires more than just knowing oneself and building relationships. Leaders need also to know what to stand for and why, and their motivation should always be directed toward the goal of making the institution better. Leaders with vocation lead from within, but they keep their leadership efforts focused on something outside of themselves—the institution, a program, or a cause. Simply stated, leading is inner-based and outer-focused, not outer-based and inner-focused. Accordingly, developing community with vocation, the third aspect of inside-out leadership, requires leadership practices that are focused on the organization as a whole. To that end, we recommend that leaders consider three practical steps: first, create a sense of shared purpose and hope for the future; second, develop a collective consciousness; and third, reflect critically on results.

Creating a shared purpose, like creating good working relationships, is a matter of

careful negotiation of diverse voices. The inside-out leader balances individual and organizational needs, and does so “independent of consensus or popularity” (Collins 2005, 11). This may seem like a difficult or even impossible task.

If leaders are ambitious “first and foremost for the cause,” and if they must have “the will to do whatever it takes to make good on the ambition” (Collins 2005, 11), then leadership would seem to be a matter of rallying others around the cause rather than empowering them to make their own voices heard. But if the leader has built and nurtured relationships and given explicit and deliberate attention to organizational motivation, then the paradox

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dissolves. The group will have found its common cause, and the leader’s job will be to make that cause explicit.

Much has been written about the importance of a “shared vision” within an organization, but as Peter Senge (1990) has pointed out, a shared vision is not necessarily the sum total of the individual visions, and it is not necessarily shared by everyone completely. That’s fine. Conflict within an organization is natural, and it is essential to organizational growth. The key is to negotiate conflicts while maintaining a larger focus, to be conscious of organizational motivation at all times, and to develop a sense of both individual and collective responsibility. Both the successes and the failures of the organization belong to everyone; everyone has a stake.

Thirty years ago, James McGregor Burns published *Leadership* (1978), which has become a seminal work on the subject. Burns’s distinction between the “transformative” leader and the “transactional” leader has earned a permanent place in the leadership lexicon.

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What has been lost in most quarters, however, is his definition of “transformative” activity as that which *raises the consciousness of both leaders and followers*. Because “consciousness” had long been dismissed as an unscientific concept un-

worthy of rational study, this was a revolutionary notion at the time. In a broad sense, “consciousness” reflects one’s way of being and one’s ethical and moral orientation. Thus, consciousness “reflects both the interiority of the self as well as the activity that one performs in the world” (Daryanani 2006, 4).

The inside-out leader helps others find this awareness. Jack Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning posits that the only way adults can learn deeply and change ingrained behavior is through “perspective transformation,” a significant shift in the way in which one views the world (Mezirow and Associates 2000). Psychologist Robert Kegan (1994) suggests that the most critical perspectival transformation in adults is the ability to cope with seemingly irreconcilable stresses. This requires a higher-order consciousness that displays an ability to look at life in terms of systems, and an awareness that value judgments have to be made in the face of competing tensions. A similar point is made by Ron Heifetz (1994), who suggests that the truly effective leader is able to manage “adaptive work”—that is, difficult situations in which neither the problem nor its solution is easily defined.

Thus, balancing individual and collective interests is not the only artful task facing the inside-out leader. Leadership also demands recognition of other tensions, all of which relate to a single common phenomenon: the balance between *challenge* and *support*. People have the greatest amount of intrinsic motivation when challenge and support are in balance—or more precisely, when the perceived challenge of a task is just *barely* beyond one’s own resources (Csikszentmihalyi 1997; Parks 2000; Braskamp, Trautvetter, and Ward 2006). The resulting dissonance generates aspiration and energy. This positive dissonance can take several organizational forms: framing problems in ways that challenge conventional thinking, taking reasonable risks, and exhibiting patience and persistence in the face of change that is neither predictable nor linear.

A group's purpose and collective voice may be clear, its aspirations energizing, and its commitment to collective responsibility total, but unless the group cares about and reflects upon the quality of its work product, little organizational learning will result. The inside-out leader will also want the group to reflect critically on its work and to commit as a group to learning from what it is doing. As Steven Brookfield has observed, critical reflection occurs when we "identify and scrutinize the assumptions that undergird how we work" (1995, xii). In higher education, assessment is a major avenue for critical self-reflection. The leader must insist that the institutional contributions focusing on student learning and development are the focal point of all assessment endeavors. That is, the focus is on what and how students learn and develop, and not on how successful the teachers and leaders wish to be. The ultimate payoff is enhanced student learning and development, not increased power or status for the faculty or the administration.

Today, an increasing number of colleges and universities worry about students' development of values and habits of mind. In building a culture of critical reflection, inside-out leaders at such institutions would facilitate discussion of the assumptions that underlie educational practice: What are we doing with our students, and why are we doing it that way? What do we think this will accomplish, and how will we know? Then, instead of developing a list of student competencies for which faculty will be held accountable, the inside-out leader asks: What will we do with the evidence about student learning and development we've collected? How will we talk about the data and make meaning of it? *How can we learn from our experience?*

### The inside-out leader

At the beginning of this article, we called for a neo-collegial model of leadership that gives everyone an opportunity to take on significant leadership roles. The reader may have gained the impression from the preceding pages that "the leader" must occupy some position of formal authority. If so, we should emphasize that inside-out leaders *by definition* recognize a calling to exert leadership in a given situation or context, and then become leaders-in-place. Whether designated leaders or not, they engage in intrapersonal reflection, develop a sense of

personal commitment, move beyond themselves to relationships with others in ways that galvanize their commitment to a common purpose. They then work to create a community of hope that reflects honestly on what it accomplishes. And then they step back so that others can lead in place as well. □

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