BARRIERS TO CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY

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Let me try to set the stage for innovation and change in higher education by addressing barriers to change. We have just finished a series of 8 regional workshops for individuals in state colleges and universities who are involved in planning for change on their campuses. We have tried to say to the participants that there should be a body of individuals representing each of the communities or segments of the campus involved in looking at an institution of higher education and projecting it into the future. This has been one of the most interesting experiences that I have ever had. The basis for this program was developed as a result of a joint appointment for me with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and Morehead State University. I did a study of institutions in the South looking at who is responsible for bringing about changes and if they are, in fact, changing to meet future needs on their campuses. I found an interesting situation as I made the study and I could talk for hours on the results.

I want to congratulate you in California for taking the lead in establishing this workshop to highlight innovations in your system. I don't care what the evaluation shows of the outcome of the workshop, you are doing something that is highly needed in higher education. Simply
calling together individuals from various campuses will be of great value. Is it a correct assumption to say all of you are innovators? This is the largest group of innovators I have ever had the occasion to be in one room with in my life. Evidently, we don't have any academic deans here. The reason I say this is because the presidents of the state colleges and universities I studied said that their academic deans and academic vice presidents are more reluctant to make change than anyone on their campuses. Evidently you are trying to do something similar to a story I heard sometime ago to illustrate -- a blind man going down the street with a seeing eye dog came to a stoplight and wanted to cross the street. His dog took him across at the wrong time. All the cars had to stop suddenly with their tires making noises so he hurriedly retreated to the curb. Again, he started to cross at the wrong time and the same thing happened again. The third time he got across. A man standing on the sidewalk was observing what was happening. The blind man reached into his pocket, pulled out a cookie and gave it to his dog. At that point the observer walked up to the blind man and said, "Sir I have just seen what happened to you. That dog almost got you killed twice by leading you across the street at the wrong time. You finally got across the street and what do you do, reward him." The blind man said, "Sir, you just don't understand, I'm giving him a cookie to find out which end his head is on so I can kick the other end." As an innovator I feel sometimes some people are feeding me cookies to find out which end my head is on so they can kick the other end.

Barriers to Change

Let me spend some time talking to you about communications in higher education as being a barrier to change. I'll tell you before I start; I wish I knew the answer, but one of the greatest problems I have found in higher education is communications. Today we are supposed to be good at
this but we evidently have much to learn. We do not listen, and
evidently the reason communications is such a tremendous problem is
the fact that we as educators receive messages and interpret them from
our own frame of reference. We receive messages and interpret them as
biologists, psychologists, economists, and all the other myriad of academic
disciplines. The message is usually sent from another frame of reference
and the twain never meet. Therefore, we do not communicate internally
about the problems of an institution of higher education.

The faculty members I have talked to want to bring about change on
their campuses. They want to do differently, but they say when they get a
good idea and go to the department chairman to tell him, he's not interested
in the idea. He's got other problems on his mind and is only mildly
interested; therefore, they have to go through a salesmanship song and
dance routine to get his attention in order to get the idea across. After
two or three times of asking him about it, he may say, "Well I'll have to
see the dean." The idea goes to the dean who is out of town, and then it
has to go to the vice president for academic affairs who interprets the
message from a different frame of reference than it originated. The
message goes up through the pipeline, and what comes out at the other end
isn't what went in at the beginning. The faculty member doesn't want to
play this game.

Now for the president -- let me tell you his story. The president
says, "How in the world can one get changes implemented in order to have a
good institution? One calls the vice presidents together to discuss a
problem or policy and what is to be done. Agreements are established within
the administrative council. Later the president meets faculty member Joe
Blow on campus and talks to him. He either hasn't heard of it or he has heard
something through the campus rumor mill that only faintly resembles what
was planned to be done with the vice presidents."
So again, it's the communications problem, and faculty members are saying it is better to stay in the classroom and play the turtle and not stick their necks out than to get them chopped off. I think this is true in your situation as innovators. I truly admire you because this often happens to you.

Another barrier to change is the inflexible policies of the business office. The reason so many programs fail is that a creative faculty member comes up with a good idea, he wants to do it, he sells it, he may get it started, and he sticks his neck out. He leaves the world of the classroom and he runs into the policy files of the registrar, the business office, and he gets his head chopped off. He blinks his eyes a couple of times; he wonders what happened to him. This is a new world to him. He is brave and he believes in his idea, so he sticks his neck out again and gets it chopped again, so he says that's enough; therefore, he pulls back in, retreating to the classroom. The innovative ideas that bring about constructive changes are stymied.

A further barrier to change is that we are afraid of failure. Do you know of any business where you have to guarantee success before one starts, as we tend to do in educational circles? Well, one doesn't know if he is going to succeed in the first place and sometimes we learn from failure as well as success. I have a friend who is an engineer with General Electric. He tells me that, if he has one idea in every hundred that turns out to be worthwhile, that is success. We can't even afford one mistake. So, as educators, we are afraid of failure; we have fear of failure. The public will not tolerate failure. Therefore, creativity and innovation are more difficult in our realm than in many other fields. The misconception that all improvements cost money is a barrier faced by many. Innovations, in many cases, can be brought about in institutions of higher education with little or no addi-
tional money. Some of the good programs I have seen cost very little. These have been developed by doing better with what they already have. A variance of policy interpretation can be a formidable barrier to change. Let me illustrate. On one campus, the vice president of academic affairs encountered a problem with a student who had done a lot of work on his master's degree six years ago. "Well," said the vice president, "you can only count courses that were taken in the last five years for your master's degree." I explained to this vice president, "You mean he has to take all of those courses over again, under the same professors, in the same science room, etc., simply because he is caught with a time limitation regulation!" The undergraduate dean in the same institution was saying, "Give the CLEP examination, so we can give credit for what our students know." See the dichotomy?

Peer approval is a barrier to change. The desire for peer approval is a strong motivating force in all human beings - professors not excluded. When new ideas are presented, his colleague may give an immediate negative reaction. They don't want the boat rocked. It gets to the point where he wants to pull his head back into the shell and stay in the classroom. We must create a more receptive climate for change on our campuses. I have seen new professors come into my office and they want to do something to get them started. They go through the same evolutionary process as all new professors. They start, they fail and draw back in, then one must nurture them in order to get them to come back out of their shell. A successful change agent can do this. This communication problem exists. How do we get people to communicate? How do we get them to listen? This workshop in California is a beginning.
We were in the first session of one of our regional workshops. The topic of the session was, "How can faculty members be involved in bringing about change on the campus?" We had tried to establish an atmosphere to get people to talk, and spent two days at this. They were very professional, very academic, and all the language one can use to describe our professional colleagues. But we couldn't get them to "hang loose." We had presidents and other administrators in the workshop. We encouraged the participants to use the participating administrators as their catharses. And we let them shoot at us. It was time for the next speaker. The group said, "We're not ready to quit." And the group (42 people) said, "Ask the next speaker if he can stay for the afternoon session and let us continue with this session." We changed the entire program. It was interesting to see how they could cast their problems on us and open up with their frustrations. A young man said, "This is the first session I've ever been to in a conference where I have really had a chance to say what I've felt and not feel afraid. I feel I'm a new person. I'm going back home and see if I can get something done to help improve my institution." We are afraid to communicate! And until we remove barriers, we will not bring about the change on our individual campuses we should bring about.

I think someone is here from the Bakersfield campus. Your President, Paul Romberg, was on the Regional Commission of State Colleges and Universities in Washington. We went through the same experiences. When we got to the point where we would say what we thought to each other, we achieved something! But we are our own worst enemy, and until we break that communication barrier, change cannot be brought about.
We tend to blame the outside agencies for our lack of ability to change. In some instances this is true, and we must learn how to deal with outside agencies. We have talked about administrative governance, faculty governance, and student governance. We'd better start looking at public governance, because we are becoming more and more like a public utility and are being used as a public utility. Until we recognize the way our public looks at us, we are playing a role contrary to what exists from their viewpoint. Therefore, we are headed down separate paths. They have the power because they provide the money, and it is high time we recognize this.

In higher education we have different types of governing boards. You have one type in California, while in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia other types are found. But similarities exist in the kinds of problems to be dealt with, and the general direction is to move toward controlling, coordinating bodies. Coordinating bodies can provide efficiency. If controlling follows coordinating power, creativity will be stymied and killed, so there must be autonomy on local campuses in coordination and in control which protects the creativity existing on our campuses.

In no other institution do we have the brain power, the knowledge, and the ability to help ourselves as we do in institutions of higher education. However, in no institution do we find where we use less of our ability to solve our own problems than we do in higher education. We are responding to forces from agencies outside of our institutions to make changes, but we are not initiating change by internal force. How often do you find a sociologist, psychologist, and a market research specialist sitting down together talking about a common problem of concern to the institution,
focusing their knowledge on solving a problem for the betterment of the university? Until our institutions utilize the resources available to help themselves, we will not solve the problems affecting higher education. Unless we recognize that we do have these resources and are willing to use them, we are negligent. A professor said last week that on his campus he knew of professors who were so dedicated to their disciplines and their beliefs that they would rather have the institution go out of existence than change and cooperate across departmental lines to solve problems, because this would be a pollution of their academic discipline and their integrity. We have institutions that will go out of business because of their refusal to change.

Another barrier I see is that those outside of the academic administrative circle see a greater need for change than those within it. I'm sure you are now familiar with the Institutional Goals Inventory which your California institution has served as a pilot system to validate the instrument. In this study, it was found that those as academic administrators were satisfied with the system as is. The students and faculty were less satisfied with the direction in which your institutions are headed. In my own institution I conducted the same experiment. I used all of the people in Research and Development as a population. I used the academic deans and department heads in another population. The deans and academic department heads were satisfied with the conditions as they existed. The research people saw great need for change. Until we bring these points together and realize that things should be done and can be changed, we will never have the academic revitalization we need. The sacredness of courses and curricula serve as a barrier to recruiting college curricula.
We talk about relevancy, and I think the term has been used so flagrantly that we don't really know what it means. And I'm not sure I do. But it seems to me that the student is saying that he wants to be involved in his own learning experience to the point where he can internalize the materials so that he can use it and apply it in a job situation. There is a trend, though, that concerns me which is found in proprietary schools, and we are doing some of the same on our campus. We are developing one- and two-year programs of a technical nature, because there is a need. But we're tending to take out the humanities. This concerns me because we're going into an era of less hours spent on the job, more leisure time, and we may have great difficulties in coping with that leisure time. In the future, we will spend more time learning how to live with each other than we do in making a living. How can we balance this? I see this as something on the horizon, and it should cause great concern. It may be that after the individuals graduate and go out, they will come back for continuing education, take the humanities, in the second- and third-year class level programs. Most of the changes in curricular offerings and revitalization have been in tinkering with trivial type situations. We have failed to really get down to looking at the courses and the duplication we have in the concepts we're trying to teach.

We fail to see the learning opportunities found in service and research programs on our campuses. We tend to think of service and research activities as being done by faculty members. If we can get our students involved in these activities during the instructional-learning process, the classroom, in the laboratory both on and off campus, we will improve our programs adding relevancy as viewed by the students. A lack of knowledge of the role purpose and image of our institution serves as barrier to change. We must know what the purpose of our institution is to be in
in relation to the student population we recruit, and mesh the two together. Unless we do this, we do not achieve the ultimate purposes we seek.

Our scope of thinking has been limited because of the evolutionary process through which most of our universities have gone through in the developmental stages. Most have emerged from normal schools to teachers' colleges, to state colleges, to universities. We have not looked at and re-identified our role and purposes. And yet we have been so busy during the '60s meeting the tremendous growth and onslaught of students that we have not had a chance to redirect ourselves or to find where we are going. The '70s will be a period of time during which we must relook at ourselves. It is essential to the future existence of our institutions. We must do better what we are already doing with what we have at this time. Unless we do better with what we have, we won't do any better with more. Therefore, I would challenge every institution, every innovator to look at this aspect of his institution. Lack of complete information for program development serves as a barrier to constructive change. I recently read about an institution that has developed a two-year program to train airline stewardesses. How do you react to this? How long does it take for an airline company or a commercial company to train airline stewardesses? Five weeks. If a girl graduates from a two-year associate degree program, she has to take the training provided by the airline before she can get the job. This is one of the most detrimental effects of higher education in trying to reach out and develop new programs without doing the basic research on what programs should be developed. We can rush into things that will hurt us and hurt the image of higher education unless we really try to evaluate what we are doing.
Who speaks for higher education? One of the greatest charges was levied at higher education by Albert Quie McCloskey, Edith Green, and others from the House Education and Labor Committee at a recent Danforth Conference in Estes Park Colorado. They said we in higher education don't know what we want. When we start to develop legislation, you do not tell us what you want in a fashion that we can understand what you are saying and result is confusion. When you analyze the legislation that comes out that supposedly is based on the recommendations of our professional associations and how it is to be implemented, you wonder what nut put it together.

Take the new student financial aid program. It can't be administered. They left out one of the basic ingredients in the legislation in providing the cost of books and supplies and other things for students. They didn't think of that. But some of the AASCU presidents were called into the hearing, and Congressman Perkins got these items back in the legislation. We don't even have guidelines for the program at this late date. So who is speaking for higher education? Most of us find that our message is not being delivered in our own states. If we were to go out and ask private citizens about the mission of our institution, what would we find? In order to be innovative, we must know what the innovations should be. They may be innovative to us, but is it true of the students? Is it true of your institution?

Let me ask you a series of questions. No. 1. If I could give you the power to bring about any change that you would like to see happen in your institution, what would it be? No. 2. What are you doing to hinder that change from coming about? No. 3. How would you profit if it were to come about? No. 4. How would that change be detrimental to your position if it were to be brought into being? No. 5. What would you do tomorrow or the next
day to see that the change comes into being? Take the idea that you have
just written down mentally in your mind that you want to change. Is this
what you are working on for your innovative program? If it isn't, why
isn't it? Is it because the one you are working on is the one you
think the administration will let you do? Are you circumventing or
developing an end play around the real issue? Are you the barrier to
change on your campus? When we're planning on innovation, it is my
impression that in higher education, in general, we are leaving out one
essential ingredient—the institutionalization of the plan. This has
been a great barrier for many good changes. How is the plan to be
institutionalized? And by what means are we fitting it into the main-
stream of the academic community in the event it does succeed? How
many good federal programs have you seen wiped out, washed off your
campus and no traces left because no one developed a plan for institu-
tionalizing the program? The federal dollar has been wasted by poor
planning. With institutional money or federal money, the plan should
incorporate an ingredient of how it can be carried on in the event of
success. In the event of failure, evaluate to get the good points to
be able to avoid these mistakes in the future.

Another point that I would like to make is that your institutions
have individual personalities. Each is different from any other insti-
tution. If you see or hear of an innovation, don't rush home and say I
am going to do that as they are . . . because it may not work. You have
a personality situation on your campuses that is unique and you must adapt
and adopt practices accordingly.

Problems in higher education are regional. The people in the
southeast talk about entirely different things than in the northeast, or
the southwest, or the west. If you were to make a study of higher education
across the country, you would find the different problems. But if you look at the heart, you'll find some basic problems of all institutions. These basic problems are things which I have tried to pull out such as communications, lack of planning, lack of clearly identified institution goals, the lack of concentration on the central issues, and we, even though we have great powers in problem-solving, fail to identify the real problems. We identify superficial problems, and proceed to apply first-aid to a problem that needs major surgery. Why can't we in higher education, with all of our abilities, look at the business world and pull the good business and management practices and apply these principles to higher education. There are certain things from other disciplines, other fields, businesses and other organizations that would profit us. We are not doing that, or if we are, we are going all the way and pulling everything and finding it will not work, and it can actually be a detriment to our own situation.

I have tried to give you some of the impressions that I have found about barrier to change in higher education as I have worked with the situation. I wish I had some answers but I have more questions than solutions. I challenge you to use the resources and the knowledges on your campus to solve problems you confront each day.