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12 Noteworthy Quotes From 12 Deans

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Management is easy, leadership is hard. Most theological school deans can get up to speed on educational program management in relatively short order. It takes about three to four years to learn the finer aspects of the job, but, given the press of the immediate, effective deans get good, real fast, about attending to the nuts and bolts of management and supervision. Fortunately, most organizations can carry on, pushed by momentum, until atrophy requires the new dean to start pushing against inertia, or, to assess and question ineffective and outmoded ways of doing the routine. At some point during the second year, a new dean will likely ask, "Why do we do it that way?" To which the answer will likely be, "I don't know. We've always done it that way."



In the midst of attending to the necessary, two larger issues loom in the foreground for many deans: vocation and leadership. Here are twelve noteworthy quotes from twelve theological school deans on the larger questions of vocation and leadership:

On Vocation

1. "Nothing is irrelevant to our vocation. We may have what feel like 'hidden years,' spent on apparently disconnected activities and 'details' without any great sense of integrating purpose, only to find later that the quality of those details has been crucial for fulfilling a life's work." David F. Ford. Quoted in "The Vocation of the Academic Dean," by Stephen R. Graham, in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education.*, p. 67.

2. "The shift from serving primarily as a teacher to serving primarily as an administrator is not a change of vocation, but a change within a vocation. The academic vocation is rich in the options it holds. Administration is not a sell-out or a loss of that vocation, but simply another way of responding to the call to the academic life and service of the theological school community." Jeanne McLean, "The Study of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Schools : Reflections on Academic Leadership," *Theological Education* 33 Aut 1996, Suppl, p 1-76..

3. "There are at least four kinds of people who should not become chief academic officers: those who are happiest among stacks of books and at classroom lecterns; those who relish the satisfying sense of work completed; those who thrive on calm and predictability in their daily routines; those who agonize fiercely over conflict and criticism. Being an administrator is neither more nor less difficult than being a professor. It is, however, different." Elizabeth C. Nordbeck, "The Once and Future Dean: Reflections of Being a Chief Academic Officer," *Theological Education* vol. 33, Supplement, (1996): 21-23.

4. "The vantage point of the academic dean is different from that of a faculty member. Even though you share in the same core activities that define the work of a faculty member--teaching, research, service, community life--as CAO you see the world of your institution differently than does your colleague down the hall." Gail R. O'Day, "Stop, Look, and Listen: Observation in Academic Leadership," in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education.*

5. "...what it means to serve in the capacity of CAO—to respond to the call of God. To fill this role is a calling, an assignment, a divine appointment that the CAO may not immediately perceive. The vocational call is sensitive to self calling self to a place of ministry. Self must agree with God's call before self can call self to ministry." Linda W. Bryan, "The Vocational Call and Multiple Occupations of a CAO," in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education.*

6. The factors that cause stress and the difficult challenges about which academic officers speak are explicit, clearly defined, and quite concrete. The rewards, on the other hand, are subtle, uncertain, and more elusive in nature. They have to do with making meaning in the life and vocation of the academic officer." Karen M. Ristau, "Challenged of Academic

Administration: Rewards and Stresses in the Role of the Chief Academic Officer." *Academic Leadership: A Study of Academic Officers in Theological Schools. Monographs on Academic Leadership.* March 1996.

On Leadership

7. "Right now, theological schools need leaders, not just managers. The church has changed and is changing, the world has changed and will continue to change, and the persons serving in many theological schools actively resist the changes that might be necessary for them to serve faithfully in this new context, or, in some cases, even to survive." Stephen R. Graham, "The Vocation of the Academic Dean," in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education.*

8. "Working in and through change is perhaps one of the most significant and essential roles the dean plays in governance. The manner in which the dean understands and manages resistance must ultimately lead toward a communal appreciation for the implications of continued resistance for the mission of the institution as well as its faculty, students, and staff." Anne T. Anderson, "Fulcrum Leadership and the Varied Dimensions of Governance," in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education.*

9. "I developed a theory as dean that the faculty, students, and president spent much of the weekend thinking up things to tell the dean on Monday morning about what was wrong with the institution, or the curriculum, or the student body or, heaven forbid, the current dean. Monday ... remained the day when crimes of passion were confessed, revolutionary new utopias were set forth and unexpected insights into the will of God were duly reported." Wilson Yates, "The Art and Politics of Deaning," *Theological Education*, Volume 34, Number 1 (1997): 85-96.

10. "A tension that is quite pronounced within all of higher education is the inherent friction between a school's need for a common understanding of its mission and the tendency of scholarly training to enhance individualism." Dale R. Stoffer, "Faculty Leadership and Development," in *C(H)AOS Theory: Reflections of Chief Academic Officers in Theological Education.*

11. "Alignment with ethos is the most important consideration when building or winnowing the faculty. Academic, scholarly, and ministerial qualifications for appointment to the faculty must be honoured, but never at the expense of alignment with the institution's ethos." Robert W. Ferris, "The Work of a Dean." *Evangelical Review of Theology* (2008) 32:1, 65-73.

12. "Deans have commented, not entirely in jest, that the job requires the intellectual breadth of Leonardo, the communication skill of Dale Carnegie, and the fortitude of Attila the Hun. Rare is the person who takes on an academic leadership position fully prepared. Theological school deans learning principally 'on the job.'" Jeanne P. McLean, "Professional Development for Chief Academic Officers. *Academic Leadership: A Study of Academic Officers in Theological Schools.* *Academic Leadership: A Study of Academic Officers in Theological Schools.*

Monographs on Academic Leadership. November 1996.

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