Curmudgeons and Rogues
Special Challenges to Community College Leaders

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Curmudgeons in the Community College
Definition of a Curmudgeon

- Contrarians who think otherwise
- Cantankerous naysayers
- Self-appointed gadflies
- Quite vocal and opinionated
- Collaboration and civility not held in high esteem
- Prefer debate and circular discussion to solving problems and consensus
National Study

• 375 community college presidents
• 77 respondents—20.5% return rate

97% indicated they had known a curmudgeon who fits the definition.

18% indicated they had known 10 or more.
Who Are the Curmudgeons?

How many are male?
58%

How many are female?
2.5%

38% of respondents indicated males and females are equally represented.
Who Are the Curmudgeons?

Classified Staff, Mid-Level Management, Executive Administrators, Student Services, Full-Time Faculty, Part-Time Faculty, Students, & Trustees

- Full-Time Faculty: 82%
- Mid-Level Management: 6.4%
- Trustees: 3.8%
- Students: 2.5%
Who Are the Curmudgeons?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humanities &amp; the Arts</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Career &amp; Technical Ed.</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tbody>
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Career & Technical Education, Community Services, Student Services, Library Services, Humanities & the Arts, Social Science, Mathematics, Other
86% of the respondents indicated that the impact on the college of curmudgeons they had known was either negative (49%) or highly negative (36%)
Study Phase Two

- The 77 respondents were invited to complete written answers to 4 questions.
- Twenty-two respondents did:
  a. Behaviors
  b. Motivation
  c. Damage
  d. Strategies to mitigate damage
Damage of Curmudgeons

Slow or Stop Change

- They undermine efforts to implement innovative programs and processes.
- They slow down decision making.
- Everything takes longer, and frustration rates are higher.
- They have highly negative impact on institutional morale.
Damage of Curmudgeons

Create an Unhealthy Environment

- They can be a thorn in the side of the college for years.
- He changed the dynamics and positive atmosphere of the college.
- They created an unhealthy culture that has taken years to repair—after they retired.
Damage of Curmudgeons
Undermine Mutual Respect & Trust

• They tend to intimidate new or less vocal faculty.
• They love to create and spread rumors about administrators.
• I was amazed at the level of disinformation and chaos they could create.
Damage of Curmudgeons

Create Adversarial Relationships

- Their behavior encourages people to take sides.
- They are so nasty other faculty are afraid to confront them.
- Faculty quit attending senate meetings because of their outbursts.
- An insidious cancer eating away at our efforts to change and improve.
Strategies to Mitigate Damage

Connect Personally

• I usually win them over by respecting their positions and following through on what I promise.
• Nothing I or others have tried works because curmudgeons do not want to help; they only want to disrupt and destroy.
• His browbeating trumps my attempts.
Isolate the Curmudgeons

- Physically relocate them and limit access to others.
- Focus on their negative impact on students and the college.
- As more faculty took ownership of our initiatives they began to take a stand, and they isolated the curmudgeons.
Create an Inclusive Culture

- Create structures for ideas to come from any level of the organization.
- Invest heavily in staff development.
- Kill them with data.
- Institute governance structures that include all groups—make it harder for curmudgeons to just attack the president.
Strategies to Mitigate Damage

Ensure Transparency

• The best antiseptic for a lie is to shine a light on it.

• The more transparent the organization, the less credibility curmudgeons will have.

• With my trustee curmudgeon I shared every communication and request from any trustee with all trustees.
Strategies to Mitigate Damage

Invest in the Change Agents

• Support the change agents with promotions, special assignments, and professional development.

• Invest heavily in orientation and mentoring of new employees.

• Use the 90—10 rule. If less that 10% participate make the incentives so attractive they wish they had.
Barriers to Change

Curmudgeons are barriers to change and innovation:

Curmudgeons slow change.
Curmudgeons resist change.
Curmudgeons fear change.
Rogue Trustees in the Community College
Appointed vs Elected Boards

- 59 presidents from 16 states
- Appointed boards: 7 states/23 presidents
- Elected boards: 9 states/36 presidents
Definition of a Rogue Trustee

- Place own interests first
- Violate written and unwritten codes
- Make inappropriate alliances
- Consume an inordinate amount of time
- Know how to get attention
- Manipulate others to their advantage
- Tend to poison the culture of the college
- Catalyze fear, paranoia, & subterfuge
- Cause enormous damage
The behavior of a rogue trustee can be every bit as damaging to a college as a significant budget cut, the destruction of a building, or a shooting.
Damage to the President

- The tension he created for me, other trustees, and staff was unbearable.
- No president is prepared for a rogue trustee.
- My career was seriously damaged, and the buyout seriously damaged the finances of the college.
- She monopolized my time and energy so that I had neither for anyone else.
• I and all the top administrators left.
• He used fear, and staff were afraid of the constant intimidation.
• In open board meetings she reprimanded administrators for not having answers to her questions.
• If the president cannot protect herself, how can she protect me?
Damage to Other Trustees

• A rogue trustee may be the genesis of a dysfunctional board.
• He was out to destroy everyone, including the other trustees.
• She created severe conflict among board members and destroyed trust.
• Because of rogue attacks: the chair resigned—two productive members resigned—my excellent chair left.
Damage to the College

• The college became dysfunctional.
• The community began to raise questions about the capacity of the college to provide a quality education.
• Decisions were postponed and real issues were ignored or set aside.
• The business of the college became the business of dealing with the rogue trustee.
Softball Strategies

- Policies, codes of ethics, handbooks, etc.
- Orientation, work sessions, retreats, etc.
- External consultants
- Accreditation
- Legal controls
Hardball Strategies

- Political pressure
- Role of the press
- Public censure
- Role of the faculty
• Presidents and staff can resign.
• Other trustees can resign or choose not to run again.
• Students are often oblivious of internal politics.

• But the college cannot resign or leave town.
Ancora Imparo
“Still I Am Learning.”

Michelangelo