

Management 101

Harvard's President Too Slow to Delegate, Got Swamped in Detail

It's a Uniquely Tough Job, And (President) Rudenstine's Style Made It Even Tougher.... Will He Return After a Rest?

大學校長的「壽命」

柏克萊加州大學校長田長霖博士曾面告筆者，現代美國大學校長的職業「壽命」約為三年。沒想到田校長一擔任後即已長達四年。相反地，現年五十九歲的哈佛大學校長 Neil L. Rudenstine 卻在就職三年後，因過度疲勞而無法繼續辦公。Rudenstine 校長是一位極傑出的大學者，有我記憶中的 James B. Conant 及 Derek Bok 兩位哈佛校長之特長。祝 Rudenstine 校長早日康復，重新擔任哈佛工作。

By STEVE STECKLOW

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — If the famed

Harvard Business School wants another case study to present to its students, a perplexing one is right at hand: the management problems at Harvard University.

Running a major university these days—mediating among faculty members, students, alumni, administrators and trustees—has become a notoriously stressful job. Running Harvard, with the unusual independence of some of its major schools, is even worse.

And it all seems to have worn Neil L. Rudenstine to a frazzle.

Acclaimed as a very able administrator when named Harvard's president three years ago, Dr. Rudenstine, now too exhausted to work, has stayed home for the past two weeks and, a spokesman says, is unavailable for comment. University officials say they hope to report soon the results of medical tests and determine when — or even if — he can resume his job.



Neil L. Rudenstine

While Dr. Rudenstine's condition remains a mystery, those close to him say one thing is clear: To survive as president, he must make major changes in his management style. He will have to learn how to prioritize his time, to say no more often and to delegate responsibility.

"Neil can delegate, and I have seen evidence where he can delegate effectively," says Ron Daniel, a McKinsey & Co. director and one of the seven members of the Harvard Corporation, the board that governs the university. "And I've also seen instances where I feel he held onto issues too long." Mr. Daniel says he hopes Dr. Rudenstine can strike a balance "a little more effectively in the future."

For Harvard, which has had only 25 other presidents in its 358-year history, the admission that its top executive is overwhelmed is believed to be unprecedented. So may be the public acknowledgment of the problem by a member of the normally secretive corporation, which picked Dr. Rudenstine for the job.

Many Complex Issues

Despite its renown and \$6 billion endowment, Harvard faces a morass of complex issues common to higher education.

Harvard must deal with a new federal policy that forbids universities from requiring professors to retire when they reach a certain age — a change that threatens to restrict the influx of new, young faculty members. Like all research universities, Harvard also expects a reduction in federal support and will need to find new research funding from the private sector and elsewhere. It is struggling with rising employee-benefit costs, which account for two-thirds of a \$15 million shortfall in its \$1.4 billion annual budget.

And it must confront such issues within the constraints of its peculiarly decentralized structure, in which each of its 13 schools and colleges — including Harvard College for undergraduates and the powerful law, medical and business schools — essentially operates independently.

This system, known as "every tub on its own bottom," has created some of the country's finest graduate schools. But it also has created a university where professors in different schools who teach similar subjects rarely speak to each other and

where every school has its own academic calendar — making it difficult for students to take courses at different schools. Every school has its own fund-raising apparatus, and most have their own public-relations offices.

Undercutting the Head Office

The schools also sometimes undercut the central administration. After Harvard recently announced a university-wide reduction in faculty pensions, the law-school dean told his faculty he would make up the difference with salary increases. "I wanted to help the university solve its problem, but I didn't want my faculty to feel a cut in total compensation at a time when we're trying to grow and take people from other law schools," Dean Robert C. Clark says.

Dr. Rudenstine is credited with dealing with some major issues, including fostering a more cooperative, congenial atmosphere on campus. "He has changed this institution and drawn its parts closer together," says Jeremy R. Knowles, whom Dr. Rudenstine appointed as dean of the faculty of arts and sciences. "We are living in a different world from the one in which we found ourselves before."

But many people here also say Dr. Rudenstine has been sidetracked by day-to-day crises and other matters that soak up too much of his time. "He took on too much, and he tries to do too many of the detail things," says William Paul, a physics professor at Harvard for 40 years.

Dr. Rudenstine spent weeks agonizing about a campus controversy over the selection of retired Gen. Colin Powell as the 1993 commencement speaker; the general supported the military's ban on homosexuals. Dr. Rudenstine also worried over whether Harvard should continue funding an ROTC program when gay students weren't allowed to join. He spent months writing draft after draft of a state-of-the-university report. He took more than a year to fill some important administrative positions.

Unlike other university presidents, he insisted on continuing a Harvard tradition of participating in nearly every decision to grant tenure—lifetime job security—to individual professors. Chairing the tenure process has taken up to a full day of his time each week. But when his former

provost offered to split the job, Dr. Rudenstine decided to have them both do it.

"Probably the most important thing for a president is to allocate his own time, her own time, to make a decision on what the priorities are," says Robert Keohane, a professor of government at Harvard and husband of Nannerl Keohane, the president of Duke University. "That has not successfully been done."

Dr. Rudenstine also has had trouble managing his calendar and getting enough sleep. "I have to say, 'Don't come to too many events,' because he tends to say yes all the time," Dr. Clark says.

Signs of Trouble

One Tuesday last February, Harvard officials say, Dr. Rudenstine failed to show up at an early-morning meeting because he overslept; he then took the rest of the week off, complaining he was tired. On the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, he canceled several fund-raising events in New York at the last minute. The next day he decided to take an indefinite medical leave because of what Harvard officials described as "severe fatigue and exhaustion." He insisted that Albert Carnesale, the new provost and dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government, be named acting president.

The son of a prison guard and a waitress, the 59-year-old Dr. Rudenstine, a soft-spoken scholar of Renaissance literature, was named Harvard's president in March 1991 after a 10-month search. The choice seemed unusual: Although Dr. Rudenstine had earned his doctorate in English at Harvard in 1964 and had taught literature here, he hadn't worked on the campus in more than two decades. He arrived at Harvard after serving as executive vice president of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in New York, where he went in 1988 after spending 20 years at Princeton, including 10 years as provost.

On being picked by Harvard, Dr. Rudenstine immediately said one of his first acts would be to name a provost to help him oversee academic affairs. The job was new at Harvard and was considered a major restructuring of the central administration. Dr. Rudenstine said he hoped the person he appointed would stay seven or eight years, until a \$2.1 billion university-wide fund-raising drive was completed.

Economist Picked for Job

In March 1992, he selected Jerry Green, a popular, well-regarded economist who had taught at Harvard since 1970. Dr. Rudenstine assigned Dr. Green to work with the schools to try to create a more unified university. To that end, Dr. Green helped to plan the fund-raising drive and to establish a series of interdisciplinary, university-wide collaborations — including a new environmental-studies program — that Dr. Rudenstine views as the hallmark of his presidency.

But Dr. Green also tried to tackle some long-range issues, such as the lack of a

university-wide policy regarding the acceptance of privately funded research and the effects of ending the mandatory retirement age for professors. Within six months, the two weren't getting along. Dr. Green felt frustrated by the president's apparent lack of support for these additional efforts, people here say. After two years, he resigned from the job.

An announcement of Dr. Green's resignation came in April, a month before the official kickoff of the fund-raising drive. It embarrassed the university, which denied that any rift had occurred. At a press conference announcing the drive, Dr. Rudenstine said his provost had quit because he wanted to return to teaching.

Before leaving, Dr. Green had made several recommendations to Dr. Rudenstine on how to reduce the university's soaring employee-benefit costs, which now account for 10.5% of the annual budget. The provost suggested providing a financial incentive for Harvard employees whose spouses work to sign on to their partner's health plan — a common practice among private-sector employers. He also urged that older professors be encouraged to work half-time when they reach age 70. Both ideas, he says, "were rejected." He won't comment further on the discord.

Report Promised

Instead, in May, Dr. Rudenstine told a meeting of the faculty of arts and sciences — the professors of Harvard College and its graduate programs — that a report on how to reduce benefit costs would probably be delivered in June. According to the minutes, he said that the changes "were not yet graven in stone" and that "there would be ample time to scrutinize the recommendations, think about them and talk about them."

In June, however, the university announced a series of cutbacks, including a reduction in its pension contributions and an increase in most faculty members' cost of health insurance — to save about \$10 million a year. Faculty members were outraged that the changes were announced unilaterally, without their input, and they complained to Dr. Rudenstine at a meeting last month. "The president, who chaired the meeting, appeared tired and was uncharacteristically brusque in his answer to professors' questions," the Harvard Crimson reported. "He was visibly upset, and at one point shook his head in dejection."

To appease the faculty, Dr. Rudenstine promised to create a new committee, including faculty members, to re-examine the changes, which are to take effect next year. Several professors say they hope he will reconsider the pension cutbacks, which they term shortsighted because older faculty members would be encouraged to delay retirement. "This is exactly the opposite direction that other universities are doing because they're giving financial incentives to retire," says Dr. Paul, who is 68 years old.

Dr. Rudenstine has received more praise for his efforts to unify Harvard's various schools. University officials say he rejected an original fund-raising goal of more than \$3 billion and insisted that the various deans critique each other's academic needs. The deans say that that process gave them a better idea of what goes on at other schools and that it produced a more realistic goal.

Many also praise the president's efforts to create five new curricular and research programs across different schools, including ones on health policy, schooling and children, and ethics. A new undergraduate environmental program has attracted 100 students, far more than anticipated, according to Michael B. McElroy, chairman of the department of earth and planetary sciences. He says professors from several graduate schools, including the law and business schools, do some of the teaching. "All of them for the first time in their Harvard careers talked and interacted with undergraduates," he says.

As part of the program, faculty members from various schools also are collaborating on a study of economic development and the environment in China. While such an undertaking is not uncommon at other universities, it is considered historic at

Harvard. "In my 25 years at the university, I didn't know of any collaborative study that involved faculty from different schools," Dr. McElroy says.

But others who have worked closely with Dr. Rudenstine express frustration at the slow pace of his unification efforts. "He's trying to move the family heirlooms across the street without even chipping a cup," says one person who has worked closely with him. And one former Harvard official says several powerful deans doubt such collaborations are worth the trouble. "Imagine if you're being told that you have to spend huge amounts of time and effort as the dean, thinking about ways to contribute to this entity called Harvard," this former official said. "It's not clear there are tangible results."

Perhaps Dr. Rudenstine can do only so much in getting schools to work together because so many people view Harvard's decentralized structure as a major strength. "We are not trying to dismantle Harvard's decentralized tradition," says Mr. Daniel, the Harvard Corporation member. "What Neil is trying to do is overlay on it sort of a new dimension that would encourage, particularly in areas of scholarship and research, more integration, coordination and cooperation."

Mr. Daniel also says he doesn't want Dr. Rudenstine to try to change his style too much. "We don't want Neil to try to become someone he isn't or can't be. What we've got to do is help him."

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