

Leader to Leader

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Claire L. Gaudiani

As a college president, every year I give my graduating students an assignment. I ask them to be the people who close the gap between the aspirations on which the country was founded and the experience of those with whom we share this earth.

It is the same assignment facing leaders of every institution today. But how do we determine the best way to close this gap? Where do we look for advice and inspiration? The answers cannot be found in a management text. They will come instead from the wisdom that the human community has acquired over thousands of years. Thus, when Connecticut College decided to forge a partnership with the City of New London, we looked to an ancient text for a guiding philosophy. We looked to Deuteronomy, which tells us to do "justice only justice that you may thrive." These few



words contain all we need to know about how to fulfill the promise offered by our founding fathers.

The Power of Goal Setting

As leaders, we all want our organizations and communities to thrive. According to the prophet, thriving is the point of our work on earth.

How do we thrive? The answer is right there—through justice. Economic prosperity will take hold as social justice occurs for everyone.

Our country has been working at this for a long time. We need to make the same commitment (and apply the same discipline) to our work for justice that we have brought to our work for prosperity. And we need to set the same kind of hard goals. A hard goal is what President Kennedy set in 1961 when he promised to put a man on the moon by the end of

the decade. Hard goals help us achieve our objectives because we can measure where we are in relation to the target.

At Connecticut College we set hard goals when we said, "This college will be in the top 25 in the nation within five years," and, "We will treble our endowment in five years." (We made it into the top 25 and we more than quadrupled our endowment.) Too often, when people who are successful at creating economic prosperity work for social justice, they leave behind their "hard-goal" mentality. They do not approach social justice with the same rigor that they bring to their businesses. But that is exactly what is required.

Effective leaders are personally involved in their organization's key initiatives, including community building. There are certain things that we as leaders cannot delegate, no matter how busy we are. When the president of an institution is too busy to attend a meeting, what message does that send?

Addressing Local Needs

A city of 25,000, New London has experienced economic decline since World War II. Its problems deepened as jobs were lost with reduced defense spending. Today 61 percent of the children in New

London's schools are from households poor enough to qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. The children score at the bottom of the state's mastery test results. The city's family economic levels are among the lowest in the state. And we know that poor children tend to perform poorly in school—and in life.

For many years students at Connecticut College volunteered to help children in the local schools. Eighty percent of students, in fact, have done volunteer work before they graduate. We all felt good

an 800,000-square-foot, \$280 million research facility that would employ 2,000 people. (Pfizer has since announced that the New London facility, now under construction, will be the company's global research headquarters.)

A major pharmaceutical company putting a new building on a brownfield in a neglected downtown—and adjacent to a poorly operating sewage treatment plant—is miraculous. How did it happen? Through Governor John Rowland, the state of Connecticut offered tax abatement for the property and promised

public access along five acres of New London waterfront.

Leading for Results

What did a college president and professor of French have to contribute to such an enterprise? I had what all leaders of successful organizations have: access to expertise, experience in participatory decision making, and experience in leading with constraints on time and resources. An architect who is part of the Connecticut College family garnered proposals from three major architectural firms who competed to do the downtown redevelopment plan. These proposals satisfied another hard goal we had set: that the plan would be completed within ten weeks.

A committee of city council members, citizens, and NLDC board members reviewed each proposal. The group was mixed in terms of ethnicity and educational backgrounds but single-minded in its commitment. We listened to the community, but we did it on a time clock. Many community efforts honor the importance of listening to all stakeholders, and they die listening. You have to listen and act. That is why we established time frames for everything.

Ultimately, we chose Beyer Blinder Belle—the firm that restored Grand

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Leaders have to approach social justice with the same rigor they bring to business.

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about that, but it was not enough. We needed to set hard goals and change the outcomes for children and all our citizens in our community. That led us to revive the New London Development Corporation (NLDC) in 1997, drawing to its board people from the diverse communities in New London who were successful in making their own enterprises work.

Within three months we helped persuade Pfizer to select downtown New London as the site for

an \$11 million improvement to the waste treatment facility. The state is also working with NLDC to bring a four-star hotel, a conference center, 80 condominiums, and a new state park at New London's historic Fort Trumbull.

But there is more. These investment commitments, accomplished within four months, inspired the city council to ask for NLDC's help with another waterfront park that had been debated for eleven years. Within six weeks we had a plan that creates

Central Terminal. They opened a storefront in New London and began doing historical research. As they developed ideas, people were invited to come in and examine the plans. More than 300 people attended a community meeting and heard the plan, made suggestions, and voted to take the proposal to the city council. A week later the council approved it. The result is a plan that will yield 400 new dwellings and more than 100,000 square feet of commercial space. New businesses, including a 14-screen movie theater and a bookstore, intend to locate downtown.

Bringing Justice to Prosperity

Creating prosperity is one side of the coin; doing justice is the other. Here, too, we are creating hard goals. In the next five years it is our goal as a community that the children in New London's federally funded day care center will achieve the same school readiness test scores as the children in the Pfizer day care center. How will this happen? The whole community will work with the parents, teachers, and staff of the center. We want the teachers to become fellows at the Connecticut College Human Development department. Another goal is that within eight years children in the public school system will achieve midpoint in the state's mastery test scores.

We are also setting specific goals for public health and wellness, developed with the local hospital, the city health department, public and nonprofit agencies, and 23 neighborhood groups. We have specified percentage reductions for the next

The lesson for leaders is that we can begin achieving social justice if we apply the same hard-goal-oriented approaches that work in science, technology, and business. Leaders who have succeeded in our own organizations have be-

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five years in the number of children contracting asthma or experiencing lead poisoning and in the number of women delivering babies without adequate prenatal care. Approximately 15 such indicators of public health will be the responsibility of every community leader.

Making the connection between economic growth and social justice, we created a microlending project modeled on efforts in the developing world. It helps people develop business plans and life plans and gain access to cash to make their plans a reality. They belong to peer lending units—for example, six to eight family businesses—that take shared responsibility for repayment. We have also established specific goals for an increase in the number of owner-occupied dwellings in New London over the next five years.

come too complacent. We have for too long relied on others to fix our social problems. We have let others do our homework for us. It is time for us to get our assignments and get to work.

Claire L. Gaudiani has been president since 1988 of Connecticut College, a highly selective liberal arts college ranked among the top 25 in the nation. She is also president of the New London Development Corporation, a college-community partnership that is leading a \$715 million revitalization of New London, Connecticut.