I was recently asked a question about being the President of Halifax Community College by one of my mentees. He wanted to know how I operate as President and what advice I could give to someone who might want the same or a similar leadership position. Well, you can imagine that in the troubled times we live in, leadership is a sought-after commodity. Nonetheless, I pointed out to him that troubled times also provide the opportunity to exhibit courage and excellence in leadership. In other words, if you talk the talk, make sure you can walk the walk.

I pointed out that in my 35 years in higher education there were a number of leadership lessons that I had to learn. Some of the leadership lessons [I must admit], I had to learn several times, to my regret. I offered several suggestions for him and those who aspire to be Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) in their chosen endeavors to consider. They included the following:

- **Flexibility** – Leaders need to learn the art of being flexible with all constituents before becoming the CEO. You cannot learn to love them after you become president.

- **Plan of Action** - Leaders should have a plan of action and the ability to execute that plan of action. We should study the institution and its culture; understand the community setting and the players in the community; be willing to meet with the players (both real and perceived); stick to your stand and act with integrity and honesty in all of your dealings with all constituents.

- **Working with Boards** – Most leaders, at some point in their careers, will have to work with a board that sets policy for the organization. **Before** you become the chief, learn as much as you can by attending meetings and observing board members doing their job. You will find that some board members need different levels of “care and feeding.” Personalities sometimes override common-sense
solutions, but patience is a virtue that college presidents and CEOs, in general, must have.

- **Developing Your Perspective** – Use every opportunity to learn and deal with a broad spectrum of the organization. I have found my best information usually comes from those in the maintenance and security areas. They usually know everything that happens and why. Of course, I talk to everyone else to broaden my worldview of HCC, and I never overlook anyone in the process.

- **Institutional Fit** – Sometimes leaders and organizations don’t have a very good fit or marriage. I always make sure my qualifications and the needs of the institution are a good match in order for the marriage to be long lasting. Expect some challenges and be willing to compromise if necessary, but never let anyone take away your integrity and status as the chief executive.

- **This too shall pass** – There will be days when you will wonder why you even thought about being the president. At these times, I always remember that “this too shall pass.” You must enjoy yourself and the position that you are in regardless of the current situation. Many people will notice what you do, but many more will notice what you don’t do. Therefore, you should know that being the president or CEO is like being in a fish bowl. If you don’t want to be in the fish bowl, you might want to consider some other occupation other than a community college president.

After all of my advice, I asked him if he still wanted to a president or CEO of an organization. Of course, he answered in the affirmative with the zeal of a young man ready to conquer the world. From the President’s Perspective, I welcomed the opportunity to share some leadership and mentoring lessons with the next generation of leaders in our region. Leadership development is an important aspect of the holistic training we provide at HCC, especially in troubled times.

As always, if you have comments or questions about our programs or services, stop by the campus or call us at (252)536-2551 or visit us online at [www.halifaxcc.edu](http://www.halifaxcc.edu). You may also contact me at [president@halifaxcc.edu](mailto:president@halifaxcc.edu).