

## *Chapter VII*

### The President

---

**IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESIDENT.** Responsibilities greater than those of the chairman of a committee rest upon the chairman or president of an organization. A strong and active president can be of vital help in developing a strong social agency. The executive, the staff, the boards, and the committees of the organization can render their best service only when they work under a capable presiding officer. He supplies prestige, leadership, inspiration, morale, and unfailing support for the board, the executive, and the staff.

**PERSONAL QUALITIES REQUIRED.** The president's personal qualities are important. We would not venture that any president will have all the qualities described below, yet any of them that he does have will come in handy. We have had some presidents, though, who came pretty close to filling this bill of particulars.

The president should be as much of a leader in community life as possible. He should be a person whose personality and achievements the community respects. He should be influential among other leaders in the community, winning them readily to his proposals by the force of his example, by the cogency of his ideals, and by the power of his reputation. In general, he should have had distinguished executive experience in either business, professional, or civic affairs, because this will help him to understand the problems of management and organization that are involved in the work of a social agency. He will thus presumably have learned how to delegate responsibility and how to avoid interference with the person to whom a job is assigned. He should have sufficient control of his own time to carry on the duties of the presidency. He should be a person of even temper, broad understanding, and large energy. His personal charm should make people glad to work with him. He should be sympathetic with the aims of social work and with those of his own agency. Each of the qualities mentioned is desirable. All in combination would be marvelous!

These qualities, indeed, are so difficult to find in one person that

the nominating committee of the social agency will do well to search for a long time for a man who presents as many of them as possible. The committee should then do its utmost on behalf of the agency to secure the service of the man who happily possesses them in large measure.

Here, of course, "he" is used generically and means "she" as well as "he." The woman president is likely already to have won recognition through community service. It may be well to ask her to reorganize her time and to drop other important activities before she enters upon the presidency of an important agency. Generally one presidency at a time is enough!

AS CHAIRMAN. The president should be the embodiment of those virtues of effective and courteous leadership in participative group discussion which have already been prescribed for committee chairmen. Utilizing these skills, the president should preside ordinarily over all legal meetings of the social agency, including its annual meeting and those of its board of trustees and its executive committee.

In addition, for his own information he should, as far as practicable, attend committee meetings. He need not go to all meetings. Rather, with the help of the executive, if necessary, he should decide to which meetings his presence will be of value and in which the matters under consideration are of sufficient importance to justify the expenditure of his time. He should have especially in mind his duty to attend these meetings at which his appearance will add to the morale of the group—for example, meetings of a general campaign organization.

AS INTERPRETER. One of the important tasks of the president is interpretation. He will stand as the personification of the work of the agency in the eyes of the community. Therefore he should speak on the agency's work whenever possible—informally and in conversation among groups of his friends and associates at social dinners and luncheons of civic clubs and similar organizations to which he belongs. He should also be willing to speak publicly in behalf of the organization when called upon. Special arrangements can often be made with important groups for him to talk on the agency's work. As a volunteer, he can usually give a much more disinterested and potent statement than can any paid member of the staff. Through all his contacts, informal and formal, the president can seek for opportunities to clear up misapprehensions, answer criticisms, disarm objection, and win friends.

**SECURING RESPONSIBLE COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND VOLUNTEERS.** Another of his tasks is to secure able committee chairmen who will be responsible to him for their performance. He must consult with them regarding the make-up of their committees. With the secretary's help, he must follow up committee assignments and see that the work is properly done. If a committee chairman fails to do his duty, the president must get after him vigorously but tactfully. If the chairman is a complete failure, the president may have to ask for his resignation and secure someone else in his place. The president must be patient but fearless when the good of the organization requires vigorous action.

The president's personality and ability may also be applied to getting influential people to do special work for the organization. For example, he might confer with public authorities in respect to their share in the work to be done in the field in which the social agency operates. Or, he might deal personally with the president of some public utility for its co-operation in publicity.

**AS SOLICITOR AND AMBASSADOR.** The president should not be responsible for the routine solicitation of gifts in the organization's financial campaign. On the other hand, he should be willing to call with solicitors on important contributors with whom his influence will count. His responsibility in these respects is not fixed; he has in a sense a roving commission to do what may be judged necessary in view of his own capacity and of the needs of specific situations.

Generally, if the agency is a member of a community council of social agencies, the president will serve as one of the delegates to the council. The other delegate (there are usually two) will usually be the executive of the organization.

Again, the president may serve as ambassador in negotiations with other social agencies—in helping to develop mutual agreements, smoothing out misunderstandings, and conciliating disputes as to jurisdiction. In like manner, he may handle complaints or objections in respect to the work of the organization on the part of contributors or citizens whose injured feelings his influence will help to soothe. Misunderstandings may be cleared up more easily by him than by the less prominent personality of an executive of the agency. In this sense the president should be a trouble shooter. He will meet emergencies with ready diplomacy and with sound knowledge of the agency's work—and of the objectors' points of view.

**SERVICE WITHIN THE AGENCY.** In addition to these external relationships, the president should have contacts within the agency. He

should advise with the executive on the problems of the organization. A definite hour and day each week might well be decided upon, at which the president would meet with the executive, either in the organization's office or his own, to discuss progress, to give advice, and to offer help. In addition, the president should be available for conference with the executive whenever the need arises. He should visit the agency's office or institution frequently enough to become familiar with its problems and its methods of organization and service. He should keep informed on its work by reading the minutes of its main committees and any important committee reports. Ex officio a member of all standing committees, he should at least occasionally attend their meetings and receive their notices.

**KEEPING UP TO DATE.** In addition to these specific responsibilities, the president should keep as well informed as possible on the general progress of social work and on specific activity in his agency's field. He may wish to read social work magazines, both general and specific, and important books that will add to his knowledge and usefulness. The tactful executive will judiciously feed to the president as much material of this kind as, by experimenting, he finds that official will consume. The executive will not burden the president with unnecessary details, but he will promote his interest in every practicable way. The executive will give that interest as much material to feed upon as it can digest. He will help the president to understand the problems and potentialities of the agency and to exert dynamic and progressive leadership. The president, in order to develop his knowledge of the work of the agency, may well attend such meetings as the national, regional, or state conferences of social work or those of the national organization of which the agency is a branch or member. At these meetings he should be encouraged to speak on behalf of the agency and to make addresses. He should represent the agency frequently at public meetings in its own community. He should in these ways be part of the internal working force of the organization.

Intimacy with the work of the agency, however, should not impel the president to interfere with its management. While advising and aiding the executive, the president should not go over the administrator's head and try to run the organization. The president and executive should come to early agreement as to their respective areas of responsibility and their effective interrelation. Thus a good president will quickly learn the responsibilities of the executive and will leave to him their execution. The president will interpose only

when he has reason to think that these duties are not being properly performed or when the executive asks for his advice. The president's internal relationship with the agency should be that of helper and not that of interferer.

Every president will be stronger in some areas of activity than in others. The zealous president will study his own capacities and make them count to the utmost. The ingenious executive will study the capacities of the president and utilize them to the fullest extent consistent with the patience and good will of that exceedingly important officer.

QUESTIONS  
\*\*\*\*\*

1. What are the personal qualities of the president of a social agency with which you are familiar?
2. How does he handle the meetings over which he presides?
3. What does he do about attending other meetings?
4. How far does he go in interpreting the work of the agency?
5. What is his part in securing committee chairmen?
6. To what extent does he enforce their responsibilities?
7. Does he solicit funds? If so, to what extent?
8. To what extent does he act as ambassador to other agencies, and to contributors and citizens?
9. What service does he render within the agency?
10. How does he keep up to date on the work of the agency and of work in its field?
11. What relation does he have to the management?
12. What improvement do you think there might be in any of these respects?