

COMMENTS BY W. HOOPER AT THE ORIENTATION SESSION OF THE
ANTIOCH BOARD OF TRUSTEES IN THE FALL OF 2002

With apologies to Monty Python, "And now for something completely different." This is the largest board in Antioch's history. It may be of particular interest that you are the newest (and in terms of service) the youngest board. In addition to that you are the least experienced to ever gather and propose to lead Antioch University into the future. There is not necessarily anything wrong with that.

Taking all this into consideration, you need to understand and accept that also, you are all over qualified. The reason that this is so is because eighty percent of you received your education at Antioch College. Therefore it is a given that you are compelled to challenge everything and to question authority whenever the opportunity presents itself. This approach is enhanced because you are bright, you are passionate about your ideas, and you believe that you are probably smarter than anyone else in the world. Keeping all this in mind, what can we expect to accomplish on this board that will lead Antioch University over the next five years and hold its mission in trust. Your responsibilities truly lie ahead!

A lot has gone on in the last twenty-five years of my own association with the Board. You received and I hope you have read an encapsulated history of Antioch from Scott Sanders, our archivist. I will try to direct my comments to what the trustees have been through during the past quarter century. When Bill Birenbaum assumed the presidency in the seventies his principal charge was to reduce what was called "the network" down from the thirty-four units to something that could have cohesion and of a size that stood some chance of survival. He accomplished a lot in the early years of his tenure, but the overall performance left a lot to be desired.

The Trustees spent most of their meetings in those days discussing money, of which there really wasn't any. The bank had foreclosed on the very small endowment, which had been used as collateral so that the College could open new centers in scattered locations around the country. The situation got so bad that there was not enough money to meet the payroll and that was a devastating experience. One wealthy trustee, a caring sort of fellow, asked me if that really mattered. He had never been exposed to living on a weekly paycheck. You may already know that an eleemosynary institution cannot be forced into bankruptcy by its creditors, but there is an exception. The Federal Government will put you out of existence if you fail to pay your employees twice.

There was an occasion when a majority of the trustees were individually asked to loan five and six figure gifts in order to put off what we thought might be the inevitable. There was one very memorable evening at a board meeting that took place in the basement of the Dupont Circle Hotel in Washington when we thought the end had really come. We took a break while Bob Aller, the Chair talked with Leo Drey in private. We filed back in and Leo wrote a check for one million dollars, but told us not to cash it until Tuesday. My dear friend and colleague Amy Liss said, "Golly, how many trees does Leo really have?"

Most of us were very worried. We believed that when the enrollment at the College dropped below 600 it would not be likely to survive. It fell into the low 400's. This was during the period when the President lived in New York and every faculty member and everyone in management devoted considerable energy guarding their turf in order to try to save the place. It was a terrible time and not much fun to be a member of this board.

Most of the Board was truly united in trying to avert a tragic loss, but we were in despair as to how to accomplish that. We thought it was our responsibility, and not just Leo Drey's, to try to do whatever it took to see that Antioch survived.

The turning point came when Leo accepted Birenbaum's resignation and the start of Alan Guskin's presidency. Al had faith and the Board gave him a genuine honeymoon. At his first meeting he announced that we could have a college and we could have a law school, but there was no way on this earth we could have both. It was not a tough decision. He said that if any part of Antioch exceeded its budget it would be closed, and when San Francisco failed to hear the message that took care of San Francisco then and there. Shortly thereafter Philadelphia, for more complex reasons, was also closed.

During the Guskin years there were three different Board Chairs and he had good working relations with all of them. However, those years were not all peaches and cream. The Board as a whole was quite fractionalized. Not everyone was committed to the University. There were small groups of trustees that were very cliquish and spent a lot of their time and energies following their own agenda.

At the end of Guskin's first year we had a magnificent celebration and an inauguration; something that had seldom been done in Antioch's past. Distinguished alumni in higher education were invited back for a convocation on a Friday, and the next day we inaugurated the new President. Comments were made about the cost of the thing, and that was a reasonable question. The problem went away when an older alumnus was sufficiently impressed to pick up the tab for the whole thing, but he did so anonymously. He also gave Antioch a million dollars so we could start rebuilding the campus.

In 1990 the Board held a retreat in Stowe, Vermont and a significant change took place. At that time the University consisted of the five campuses; the ones that are in place today. Guskin was both the President of the College and the University and the other campuses were managed by Provosts.

At all board meetings up to that time the trustees sat around the table, as you are today, and the provosts sat in the background and appeared to be merely available to perform as a resource. At Stowe they were invited to the table so that they were clearly part of the leadership, and it was about time! The trustees are by no means the managers of Antioch University and that is something that is most important for all of us to keep in mind.

In the fall of 1992 we had another retreat in Seaside, Florida. The principal reason for this retreat was so that Al could present us with some important challenges. Guskin said with absolute clarity that no one person could be both President of the University and the College. Another convincing aspect of the issue was that it was financially inefficient. We devoted a great

deal of time then and for several years after talking about how to make a federalist system of management work for this university. It worked rather well under Guskin's leadership, but it became apparent that it did not survive him. It may be a bit heretical on my part, but in looking back I came to the conclusion that when it didn't quite work for him, he just ignored it.

As it becomes known that you have joined the Board several things will probably take place. One of them will be that individuals or groups of faculty and alumni will seek trustees out in order to help solve some problem in the University. It is difficult not to respond in a positive manner because the presenter is usually a friend and they are very apt to assume that you are both willing and in a position to offer assistance.

The best approach when you are asked to take some action is to talk with the Chancellor, one of the Presidents or the Board Chair and that is a reasonable way to go. Pursuing the issue with members of the faculty on the campuses or other individuals is never a constructive path to take. Neither individually nor collectively should members of this Board try to directly involve themselves in the management. It has been tried many times in the past and it has almost always compounded the problem. The policy for this Board is that trustees should "Keep their eyes on, their ears open and their hands off!"

For many years a large part of our meetings were closed. This mostly happened during the times of our worst problems, but it became too much of a habit. We seemed to go almost constantly from one crisis to another. Some of the issues were of such sensitivity and magnitude that the presidents and the senior staff could not be included. It was not a pleasant feeling to have the leadership of the University cooling their heels out in the hall while the Board met behind closed doors. Except for occasional personnel issues we seldom meet in closed session today and the change is a distinct improvement.

In the past few years the leadership roles of Antioch University has been changing like a series of revolving doors. We start off this fall with a comparatively new Chancellor, a very new President for the College and an interim President for Southern California. In addition to that we have a brand new Board Chair. What is an unusual paradox is that the individuals who manage Antioch University today are more united than at anytime in the past twenty-five years. Craiglow may be a new Chancellor, but he has been an active and constructive leader. Jim is also an integral part of the University and he has been here since before there was a University.

The University Leadership Council, made up of the five presidents, the Vice Chancellor for Finance and led by the Chancellor has achieved a true harmony of working together for the first time in our history. This is an entirely new experience for all of us and I cannot overemphasize its significance. For the new trustees this is an excellent time to join the Board, and for the current members it is a wonderful improvement over what has gone on before.

I described you as a new Board because there are only three trustees who are in their third term, four who are in the second and thirteen, over half the total has served only one term or are brand new. For many years we tried very hard to attract non College Alumni to serve as trustees and our efforts were not always successful. However, it is desirable that we have members who are not Antiochians. We truly benefit from their outside perspective. Today that situation has changed and there are five non-College trustees. That is not a very large number, but their dedication and what they have contributed towards our mission has far exceeded their proportion of membership.

It will be a challenge for you to learn about each other and how to work together. You will have time to do this because you will have very little turnover in the next few years. Our bylaws call for mandatory retirement after four terms and next June thirtieth, the end of this fiscal year you will lose only one trustee, and you are looking at him. That should make your job easier.

This Board will experience more continuity than any previous one. Because you are a new Board you might consider holding a retreat in a year or two. If you do, be sure to include the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellors and the Presidents. Also, never leave out your attorney. David Weaver has a greater background and has been a part of Antioch longer than anyone else in this room. His knowledge of our history combined with his clarity of understanding will stand you in good stead.

Now comes the tricky part. Antioch University has the most united and talented leadership in years and the Board should direct its attention to supporting it and helping it. You can count on the Chancellor, the Vice Chancellors and the Presidents to be candid about the difficulties they face. It will not be easy for you to figure out how best to assist them in achieving their goals. Your first instincts may be to concern yourself with what the trustees can do to change what is already here. You might also wonder what can you do to bring this about.

Antioch University is a truly complex institution and it is not an easy task to understand what makes it work. Please do take the time and try to observe what is really taking place here. Patience and insight are needed before the board considers changing the course that has been followed in the past. At times we have been all too quick to consider altering our direction, but we have been very slow and almost reluctant to show appreciation and respect for what the leadership has done and is doing.

Many years ago the Board established the policy that all committee meetings are open to every trustee, so you are welcome to sit in other meetings to which you are not a member. It is helpful when you speak and participate in a meeting of another committee that you identify yourself as a visitor. The exceptions to this open policy are few. The Compensation Committee usually meets in closed session and the Trusteeship Committee, when addressing the question of the re-election of current members, also needs to be in closed session.

The Board encountered some problems in the past when the Chair and the Chancellor did not work well together. The Association of Governing Boards has a booklet about the role of Chair. It stated, with a great deal of emphasis, that it was essential for the Board Chair and the head of the institution, in Antioch's case, the Chancellor, have a good collaborative relationship. Their goals must be parallel and they must be supportive of each other. I do not know what crisis's you will face in the next few years, but they will inevitably come along and you will recognize them without any difficulty. You are a mighty talented group and I know you will succeed and bring credit to the University. I am looking forward to working with you for the last few months of my tenure. Thanks for listening.