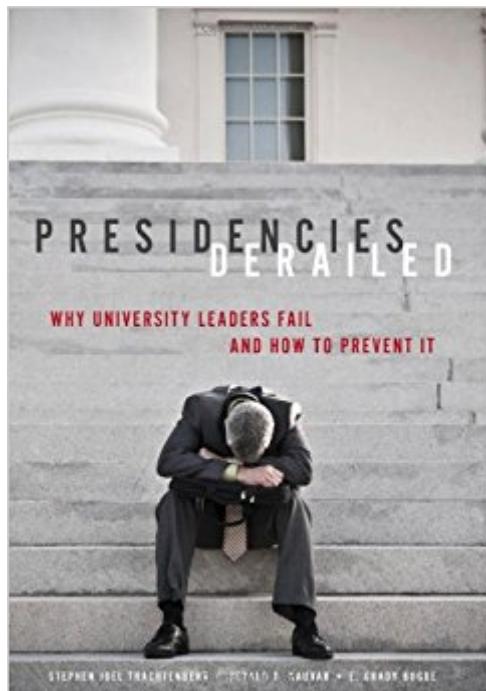


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# Presidencies Derailed: Why University Leaders Fail And How To Prevent It



## **Synopsis**

Presidencies Derailed is the first book to explore in depth why university presidencies fail and how university and college leadership can forestall, if not prevent, future leadership failures. Former university president Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, along with professor Gerald B. Kauvar and former chancellor E. Grady Bogue, organize, classify, and explain patterns of leadership failures, drawing on firsthand testimonies from "derailed" university presidents, sixteen case studies in four sectors of higher education, and reviews of the scholarly literature on leadership failures in the public and private sectors.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

First, this is a superb read. . .articulate, clear, sensible, and timely. Second, this book is a must read for an audience much larger than the title implies. Although its focus is university presidents who left their position prematurely it applies as well to any new leader in a complex operating system such as large business entities. Third, with clarity, and eloquence the dynamic interaction between the president and the entire range of stakeholders is presented both theoretically as well with true life illustrations. Thus, undoubtedly these crucial participants in the college/university setting engaged in the selection and evaluation of an academic president should read this book. These include board members, faculty officers, alumni leaders, benefactors, engaged community and political leaders. The book not only relates importantly to the college/university presidential selection process, but also to the ongoing evaluation of the executive. It illustrates dramatically how unexpected crises can

test the entire system--president and stakeholders alike, emphasizing all the more the essentiality of their reading this. Important guidelines involved in all phases of the process are included. A final thought, if only the candidate had sufficient humility to read this book before applying for the executive position, be it a college presidency or other, there is no doubt the benefit to be gained all around.

While the conclusions of the 6 factors that can derail a presidency are applicable to any leadership position, the insight into the subculture of higher education including the complexity of managing up (boards), down (faculty, staff, students) and out (donors) is fascinating and right on

This book is every bit as relevant to university presidents as it is to corporate CEOs, K-12 heads of school, social sector Executive Directors, and leaders in other organizations, hence it should be required reading for all boards and new executives. Chapters apply the results of interviews with various firsthand observers to examine derailments in private and public institutions, community, master's and research levels, in diverse areas of the US. The personal narratives of two presidents are also included. The introductory and concluding chapters provide insightful analysis of attitudes and behaviors that tend to lead to greater or lesser success and identify six primary causes of presidential derailment: ethical lapses, poor interpersonal skills, inability to lead key constituencies, difficulty adapting, failure to meet business objectives, and board shortcomings. Some of these would be impossible to foresee, computerized personality inventories notwithstanding. Change management appears to be one of the most treacherous dynamics for presidents to navigate, as the alumni and some trustees wish to preserve, while others see the need for innovation. Trustees would do well to engage in a thorough self-assessment of the board prior to engaging in any search in order to ensure that they are actually following best practices in their internal dealings and to identify their expectations and the strategic priorities that the new leader must address. Naturally, effective communication on the part of all constituents, but particularly between the board and the president, is key to successful and productive tenures.

Although its cover is a touch melodramatic, something Steve Trachtenberg and his colleague-writers probably didn't select, the book is timely and terrific. It's exceptionally well conceived, written, and useful -- packed as it is with good advice for all incumbent and would-be chief executives. The authors recognize that that the seemingly high incidence of turnover in the academic presidency is prevalent in all sectors of the economy, in all sectors of not-for-profit and

"investor owned" enterprises. Although the presidencies of twenty and more years are rare indeed today, across all kinds of organizations, turnover rates have not changed very much in the past two or three decades. Being "president" of anything these days seems to be very difficult to sustain much past the ten-year mark. Sustaining effective leadership, especially in the same organization, is beyond the reach of most of us. Especially useful and interesting in this little volume is how the reasons for falling off the track are categorized. For many readers who are new to their presidencies or about to enter them, it could save them from falls from grace, My only surprise (and disappointment) is why Trachtenberg refers to one failed president at the University of Hawaii some years back as a victim rather than as a maker of his own demise. For one huge example of misplaced judgment, this short-lived, public university president actually thought it appropriate to publically support one of the candidates then running for governor. (He lost, too.)

Very good book. The authors actually talk about "dysfunctional" boards, one of the best kept secrets in higher education. Great information. A must read for all presidents and especially board chairs. Well done

The authors did a solid job of assessing why a number of presidents failed. Of greater importance is their ability to design a template for governing boards to use to reduce their contribution to presidential failure. The book is readable; its references are complete.

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