

An Open Letter to the New Guys and Gals on the Block:

Welcome to the Career College Sector of Higher Education!!!

Dear _____

(Whoever you might be...old, young, male, female, new to the exciting field of private, postsecondary, career education or not.....)

You have elected to enter a field that holds great opportunity and great challenge. Welcome! You are now a part of American history that dates back to before the country was officially born. There have been “schools” preparing people for careers in business and in the trades since before we threw the tea in Boston harbor. As a matter of fact, it was in the Boston area, I understand, where the first schools cropped up, adjuncts to accounting offices where young accountants and scribes were required. They trained their own.

And now look at us, we’re blowing and going in all corners of the country, the marvel of the education world, lauded and trashed by all kinds of folk within and without higher education. Every day some new group with money discovers our sector and decides that it would be a good place to invest. New dollars are arriving by the hour, it seems. That’s good, or can be good, ifand it is a big IF..... folks play by the book, mind their P’s and Q’s, and demonstrate good citizenship.

Our sector of higher education has had its fair share of problems; often created by the “get rich quick” kind of guys we find on trial now for corporate shenanigans. My wife, Jan, reminds me that we have experienced this kind of negative excitement about every ten years, when somebody succeeds in shooting himself in the foot. Those kinds of activities, once discovered, are dealt with sharply and sometimes arbitrarily with draconian laws and rules that everyone else has to now play by.

Politicians delight in “righting wrongs” and slaying the dragons of today with new aggressive approaches to cure the ills without sufficient foresight to the resulting

consequences. Yes, today's problems may be solved with some innovative legislative initiative, but...and this is a big but...what other ramifications will transpire?

So, what, *Mr./Ms. New Comer* do I offer in the way of advice? First, recognize that there are a lot of us who have been toiling in this vineyard for a long time. Some come from second and third generations who have successfully made a living, a good living helping others learn the necessary skills to become successful. Some have been at their desks for more than fifty years such as Morris Gaebe of Johnson & Wales University, Colman Furr of Coleman College, and John T. South, Jr., of South College - Asheville. While you may be new, you are by no means the first to choose to be a part of this enterprise.

Second, recognize that playing by the rules is much more complicated and much more important today, than it ever has been, primarily because there are more rules and more complications to succeeding in the business of education. The bigger you are, the greater your need to have someone with a compliance title and responsibility. He or she may even need a staff well-versed in federal, state, and accreditation agency regulations. There are lots of "eyes" watching and waiting. Some want to fairly evaluate the processes we use to operate and others, regrettably, do not. Not playing by the rules has consequences; consequences reverberate throughout the sector. No man is an island...someone said.

Third, there is a social responsibility in doing what we do, unlike other occupational choices: We don't sell flowers; we don't bottle water; and we don't play football, honorable as those occupations are for those who engage in them, ours is different: We change lives; we create opportunity; and we have responsibility for success of others. That has to be a cornerstone of our day-to-day involvement: We have students; students have needs; we have answers. Employers have to want our graduates; have to be willing to "buy" our "products." In many cases our "products" have already been mistreated by someone or some part of the system, and we get them afterwards. Sometimes we are the last great opportunity for success.

Third, understand that there is a community of interest in succeeding in this endeavor; that community encompasses all who participate in education: those in the public sector, those in the private sector, and those in our sector. We must be

interdependent and interrelated. After all, we enroll the “products” of our secondary programs; we should be concerned and involved in how well our secondary schools do. If all of their graduates could read and write, we could spend more time honing their creative and vocational skills, making them more useful to themselves and our society. Instead, in too many places, we have to do our job and their jobs, too, in too short a time period.

Fourth, understand that we can't afford *lone riders*; folks who care little, share little, and let the rest of us carry too much of the burden of spreading the good news in all the right places. Lone riders are so much involved in what they are doing within their own operation that they don't take time to see how the rest of the herd is being protected. The opposite of the lone rider is a team, an organized activity committed to the mutual benefit of the whole. What this means to you, as you enter this field, is that you have a responsibility to become involved wherever you decide to put down roots – in each and every place you put down roots.

Nearly every state has specialized rules, standards, or regulations you have to follow to open and operate a school. Over time, those rules, standards, and regulations have become the barriers to entry. Sometimes that's good, keeps the bad guys out. Sometimes it's bad, slows or prohibits modifications or changes that could benefit the student, the employer, or the community at large. The politician or bureaucrat who drafted that language has rarely been on the front line of an educational day and lacks the fullest understanding of the consequences of the language he/she has written. While laws/regulations are designed to be arbitrary and capricious, when written to correct some known or perceived wrong-doing, most are simply over-reaching whose consequences are clearly seen until after they have been instituted. Obviously, those need to be changed, once the consequences are clearly understood and can be demonstrated to be contrary to the original purpose. The 90-10 requirement is a case in point.

Our largest states have organizations of career colleges and schools that serve as the collective voice of all of those who function within the field. All or nearly all of these organizations track the state legislative process, advise the policymakers,

encourage and train the career educators and, in general, serve the best interests of all who are in private career education.

Notice the word “all”; not to be taken lightly. All means **all**, members and non- members alike, difference being that those who are members pay the freight; those who aren’t take a free ride. Operators with multiple campuses in multiple states have a responsibility to have multiple involvements. It is part of the price of doing business.

Participation in the state associations means more than merely paying dues, although that is the threshold of involvement. Attending annual conventions, sending representatives to the regular board meetings, showing up for Hill Day in the states’ capital, sending staff and faculty to their in-service training workshop, are some ways you can show your support and gain benefits, besides.

Fifth, you should join the Career College Association (CCA), the one spokes-group for the career college sector of higher education. Headquartered in Washington, literally a stones’ throw from the Senate and House of Representatives offices, this organization has demonstrated its leadership in bringing the career college message to our elected representatives when knowledgeable votes are essential.

As with your participation in state organizations, your involvement in CCA should be more than sending them an annual check for dues. They, too, have workshops – training sessions for those wishing to learn operational insights from the experts who have been there, done that.

In addition, CCA has an effective Political Action Committee that needs your support. In the past election CCAPAC supported the election efforts of 63 different candidates of which 57 were elected to Congress. Thirteen of the successful candidates that CCAPAC helped are new to Congress in 2005 – nine in the House of Representatives and four in the Senate. Every career college should make an annual contribution to the PAC.

CCAPAC sponsors a Hill Day event in Washington. The next one is scheduled for March 16 and 17. This event is an important part of the education process to let legislators know how their decisions impact their constituents. The topics to be included this year are encompassed in the reauthorization of the Higher

Education Act. They include the 90-10 issue, Single Definition of Higher Education Institutions, Transfer of Credit, and the Telecommunications Rule -- each of which has significant ramifications for each and every private career college and school.

As a new member of the career college community, the welcome mat is out. It is the hope of all who are now actively involved above and beyond the successful operation of their institution, that you will become an actively involved, financially supportive addition. Your voice, your vote, and your involvement are the price you must pay to be considered a full-time career college educator.

Thank you for taking your new endeavor seriously,

Stephen B. Friedheim
Founding Chair, CCA

P. S. If you are not a new comer and are reading this, it might serve as a reminder of our responsibilities as good citizens in the world of private, career education. How do you measure up against this list of “need-to-dos?” sbf