THE FIRST 90 DAYS
WHAT NEW DEANS LEARN IN THEIR FIRST THREE MONTHS P. 26

FUND-FINDING MISSIONS
BUSINESS SCHOOLS TAKE NEW PATHS TO FINANCIAL AUTONOMY P. 32

REDEFINING QUALITY
AN ARGUMENT FOR RATINGS OVER RANKINGS P. 48

CHANGE MAKERS
HOW B-SCHOOL LEADERS—AND THEIR INSTITUTIONS—CAN THRIVE IN THE FACE OF UNCERTAINTY P. 20
A dean’s average tenure is just more than three years, which means a whole host of new deans are at the helm at the beginning of every academic season. Any change in leadership can usher in a period of uncertainty for an institution and present the new leader with a series of challenges. But the transition can go smoothly if everyone is prepared for the changes ahead.

We talked to six deans who took up their posts in 2014 to ask them how they prepared for their new jobs, what surprised them, and what skills they drew on to manage the transition. Four are first-time deans who had been in the job about three months when we spoke to them; two were veterans who had switched continents to assume new roles. All offered thoughtful insights about how any new dean can weather the first 90 days.
“Meet as many people as you can, as soon as you can. And meet them where they work, not in your office.”

—GEOFFREY GARRETT, DEAN OF THE WHARTON SCHOOL
THE UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA
BEFORE THE JOB STARTS

New deans usually have at least a short window of time between being named to the top spot and taking up their new posts. That time can serve as a critical buffer between the old job and the new.

For instance, Georgette Chapman Phillips had six months to prepare for her role as dean of Lehigh University’s College of Business and Economics in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, after leaving a vice dean position at the Wharton School. She spent much of that time meeting with faculty and alumni to learn what they were looking for from their new dean. “I wanted to manage their expectations of what I could and could not do, but I also wanted to know where they saw the most need,” Phillips says.

Erika Hayes James had only three weeks between leaving the University of Virginia’s Darden Graduate School of Business, where she had served as senior associate dean for executive education, and taking her post as dean of Emory University’s Goizueta Business School in Atlanta. She used that time to completely change her mindset, while also vacationing with family members and assessing how the relocation would affect them. “Because I’ll have less time for family-related engagement, I needed to think through the trade-offs. I know I’ll say yes to some opportunities and no to others,” she says. “It’s important to me to make sure the transition goes smoothly both professionally and personally.”

Other new deans use that window of time to consult past experiences—their own and those of others. For instance, before he became dean of the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia in Athens, Benjamin C. Ayers spent years as director of UGA’s Tull School of Accounting. In that role, he led various programs and engaged directly with alumni, employers, and other stakeholders. “Many of the dean’s responsibilities are similar, but operate on a much larger scale,” says Ayers.

Tiff Macklem moved from a public policy role at the Bank of Canada to the deanship at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management in Ontario. To help him make that shift, he spoke to other deans, “particularly former deans of business schools, who had the luxury of looking back on their tenures and reflecting on what worked well and what didn’t. I also talked to former university presidents to get their perspective about how a business school fits into the broader university and how the broader university can strengthen the business school.”

When Dipak C. Jain became director of the Sasin Graduate Institute of Business Administration at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, he had a lot of experience under his belt:

“This is a complicated role, and it has both an internal and external focus. New deans will be meeting a lot of people, so it’s key that they learn to manage their energy, which is just as vital as managing time.”

—ERIKA HAYES JAMES
DEAN OF GOIZUETA BUSINESS SCHOOL
EMORY UNIVERSITY
He previously had served as dean at INSEAD and at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management. He says his best preparation for becoming dean was working alongside and observing Kellogg’s long-term dean Donald Jacobs. But Jain also made it a point to develop relationships with faculty across disciplines because “my primary insights come from talking to others to exchange knowledge and experiences.”

Similarly, before Geoffrey Garrett became dean of The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, he had held deanships at the University of Sydney, at UCLA’s International Institute, and most recently at the University of New South Wales in Australia. In addition to accumulating his own experience, he notes that he has spent years “watching and learning” from leading academics in the U.S. and abroad. He adds, “I have discussed almost every important decision in my professional life with Peter Lange, who recently stepped down after 15 years as Duke University’s provost.”

Both Garrett and Jain point out that every deanship is a new experience and brings its own challenges, because every school is different in size, mission, location, and student body. “All institutions have their own cultures,” says Garrett, who is embracing both the commonalities and differences between the U.S. and Australia. “The fact that I have looked at the U.S. both from the inside and the outside gives me a useful perspective, as globalization pervades everything, including business schools,” he says.

**IN THE BEGINNING**

During the first 90 days, new deans can be swept up in a flurry of meet-and-greets with faculty, alumni, business leaders, and other stakeholders. This can be both exhilarating and exhausting. Before becoming dean for the first time, Garrett says, “I realized neither how big the job is nor how enjoyable it is. It’s big because of the many stakeholders who matter—faculty, students, alumni, the media, corporations, government. It’s so enjoyable because of the incredible people you get to work with on a daily basis.”

But with so many people waiting for attention, and so many events lined up, time management becomes an essential skill. Garrett says, “A wise person once told me, ‘The pressing will always tend to drive out the important. Just realizing this is the first step to ensuring it doesn’t happen.’”

These deans set short-term and long-term priorities, determine when their presence is required at an event and when it isn’t, and rely on strong support staff to manage their calendars or take over certain responsibilities. “Delegating authority makes sense on multiple dimensions,” Garrett says. “My bandwidth is limited, and the only way to develop future leaders is to give them the chance to lead.”

However, even the best future leaders have to learn the communication style of the new dean, Phillips points out. “They need to know that when I say, ‘Don’t think about this now,’ I don’t mean, ‘Forget about it.’ I mean, ‘Think about it tomorrow.’”

But while the staff needs to learn the dean’s style, the dean needs to learn that...
even the lightest words might carry unexpected weight. “I have to be very careful that I don’t make a casual comment that can be easily misconstrued into something that’s not true,” says Phillips. Even a stroll through a Lehigh facility can get students and staff wondering if big changes are afoot. “Simple actions have big consequences,” she says.

And no matter how well new deans think they’ve prepared for the job, they’ll frequently find themselves dealing with the unexpected. “Any dean needs the ability to anticipate, to adapt, and to manage ambiguity,” says Jain. “If you are agile, you’ll be best positioned to respond successfully to the inevitable surprises.”

He was early in his tenure as Kellogg’s dean when the United States was attacked on September 11. “The tragedy challenged all of us—students, faculty, staff—to come together as a community and help each other get through the terrible day and its aftermath. I’ve learned that with the support of friends and colleagues, you can rise to any event. No challenge ahead of you is greater than the force of those behind you and standing with you.”

**ONGOING CHALLENGES**

Once new deans have settled into the office, they must quickly begin the hard work of deaning, which includes developing a vision for the school, helping staff adjust to changes, and learning to lead through influence. Frequently, the first substantive task is to work with faculty to develop a shared strategy. “Set definitive goals for your first year. Focus on initiatives that provide the greatest impact and build a strong foundation for future efforts,” says Ayers of the Terry School.

Both Phillips and James scheduled faculty retreats so they could meet with school leaders and develop a plan for going forward. James insisted that her colleagues focus on the school’s strengths, not its weaknesses. “I think that led to a different kind of conversation than if we had said, ‘Here are all the challenges we need to address,’” she says. “We’ll get to solving problems soon enough.”

But new deans looking to implement new strategies sometimes encounter resistance from long-time faculty and staff. To overcome resistance, Ayers recommends actively listening—both within and outside school—communicating honestly, leading by example, making timely decisions, and committing to the necessary changes.

“I was underprepared for how all-consuming the job would be. Whether I’m driving home from work or watching TV, my brain is constantly pulled back to the school. One morning at yoga, I thought, ‘This is something we need to get in the newsletter.’”

—GEORGETTE CHAPMAN PHILLIPS KEVIN AND LISA CLAYTON DEAN OF THE COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS LEHIGH UNIVERSITY

James, who has a background in organizational psychology, agrees that any leader trying to manage change must listen closely. “I try to understand not just what people say, but what matters to them. When people feel as if they’ve been listened to, they’re more open to dialogue and a mutual exchange of ideas.”

Phillips advocates bringing the faculty together to work on challenges as a group. “The only way to be successful at effectuating gut-wrenching, foundational change is to grow it organically—to make sure the faculty leaders own it. Creating that sense of ownership has been extraordinarily important to me.”

PHOTOS: CASSIE WRIGHT (AYERS); CHRISTA NEU/LEHIGH UNIVERSITY (PHILLIPS); GORD HAWKINS (MACKLEM)
Phillips also relies on that organic approach to change when it comes to leading faculty, which can be one of the greatest challenges facing a new dean. That’s because business school faculty tend to be fiercely intelligent, highly independent, and frequently tenured. “The idea of calling someone into your office and saying, ‘You no longer fit within our business model’ doesn’t exist in academia,” Phillips points out.

Macklem meets this leadership challenge by drawing on his 25 years in public policy, particularly his time as Canada’s finance deputy at the G7 and G20. “Because Canada is not a terribly powerful global country, it succeeds by bringing good ideas to the table, building partnerships with others, and being very persuasive,” says Macklem. “Leading a group of gifted faculty is somewhat like chairing a G20 deputies’ meeting. You need to offer good ideas, engage with others, and lead constructive debate that takes the best ideas and makes them better. Finally, you need to make a decision, execute it, and communicate it.”

At the root of this approach is the belief that some things can be achieved only by the group, Macklem adds. “Some things faculty can do independently, but creating a great program has to be done together.”

**LOOKING AHEAD**

While deans might see their first few months go by in a blur, their work is really just beginning. To be successful, new deans will have to look ahead to prepare for all the changes coming in higher education.

For instance, Phillips notes that the industry is coping with challenges at all levels. At the undergraduate level, business schools are facing increased competition from liberal arts schools that are adding business courses to their curricula, which means “we can’t be smug and we can’t be complacent.”

At the graduate level, there’s a sharp disparity “between what business schools think we’re providing to students and what employers say they want,” she says. “It’s going to be incumbent on us to recognize that an MBA is, in essence, job preparation. We need theoretical and discipline-based education, but we have to make sure our students are well-served for job placement.”

Macklem agrees that disruptive change is coming to higher education, as global competition increases, technological innovation accelerates, and traditional disciplines converge. But he’s convinced these disruptions will lead to exciting new programs and greatly enhanced student experiences. As business schools are pushed to adopt a wider range of interdisciplinary, international, and online strategies, they’ll be forced to delve more thoughtfully into what makes their programs distinctive and ask how they can produce graduates prepared to make an impact. Says Macklem, “The next ten years will be a watershed in higher education.”

“Get to know your faculty and your staff. They can help you define a strategy that leverages the strengths of the school in a magical way that can create a greater impact on the world.”

—TIFF MACKLEM, DEAN OF THE ROTMAN SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO