

Random Thoughts . . .

PRIORITIES IN HARD TIMES

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It's been one annoying budget cut after another around here lately, and when I read the memo limiting faculty members to one box of paper clips a year I went straight to Kreplach, my guru on administrative policy. (I almost went to him when the toilet paper memo came out but got distracted.) I found him in his office, staring at his computer.

Me: Good morning, Kreplach—got a few minutes?

Kreplach: Certainly, certainly—I was just reading the Chancellor's invitation to the reception for the new Deputy Associate Vice Chancellor for Parking Permits.

M: I hadn't heard about that position—seems pretty specialized.

K: Maybe, but it's essential. Ever since the motor pool was cut to three cars and a pair of roller blades, the Associate Vice Chancellor for Vehicular Affairs has been spending so much time on backed-up requests that it's been cutting into his midday power walk.

M: I can see why he'd be distressed.

K: Who wouldn't be? Anyway, what can I do for you, my boy?

M: I was just told that we're limited to a box of paper clips a year, and it seemed to me that...

K: Ah yes—you have me to thank for that.

M: You?

K: Absolutely! The Provost's original plan was to have faculty requisition one clip at a time from Central Stores, and I talked him out of it.

M: Well done, Kreplach—what a waste of faculty time that would have been!

K: Faculty time? . . . Oh, I suppose there's that too, but the real issue was the added load it would have put on Central Stores, especially since they just cut the

service staff in half. We would have had to add a new assistant provost just to coordinate paper clip dispensation.

M: Point taken—but really, isn't rationing paper clips a little over the top?

K: Not at all. You know we've been mandated by the legislature to cut our expenses by 15%, which means we all have to make sacrifices.

M: True enough, but I still think the administration is overdoing the penny-pinching, and the faculty is taking the biggest hits.

K: It may look that way to you, but only because as usual you're missing the big picture. We're all assuming our fair share of the burden, with the administration leading the way.

M: That's reassuring to know.

K: Yes, and everything that can be cut is on the table except critical functions the university simply couldn't manage without . . . excuse me, that's the Chancellor calling, let me just . . . Hello, sir . . . right . . . Flight 207 to Honolulu . . . business class . . . meet you in the departure lounge . . . great, see you then . . . Ciao.

M: Sounds like a big trip coming up.

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- K:** Yeah, it's a high-level conference on maintaining administrators' salaries in the face of budget cuts . . . now where were we?
- M:** Everyone is sharing the burden and only indispensable functions aren't being cut.
- K:** Right.
- M:** But see here, Kreplach—a conference trip to discuss salaries doesn't seem like an indispensable function, especially since faculty travel has been completely suspended.
- K:** Except for emergencies—and if the potential impact of these cuts on the Chancellor's salary doesn't count as an emergency, I don't know what does.
- M:** That makes sense . . . but Hawaii in business class?
- K:** Look, if we want to keep our top administrative talent we have to treat them right. If we tell the Chancellor he can't go to this conference or the one in Paris next month on modern developments in dry-erase marker technology, or that he has to fly economy class, his CV will be on its way to Stanford in the next FedEx pickup.
- M:** We certainly can't risk that.
- K:** No indeed . . . and it might interest you to know that he insisted on flying business class to Paris instead of first class—that's just the kind of team player he is.
- M:** Unbelievable—the man is a saint! So, any other budget cuts coming down the pike?
- K:** Well, yes, but I need you to keep this one under your hat until it's official. Last week yours truly came up with an idea that will save the university tens of millions every year and it got the Chancellor's approval yesterday. I even impressed myself with this one.
- M:** I'm all ears.
- K:** Okay, first we make the minimum class size in freshman courses 250, which means we can get rid of three-quarters of the English and Math faculties. That already saves millions. Next we eliminate PE, which lets us convert all those open gym spaces to auditoriums big enough for the new freshman classes, and—here's the beauty part—we no longer have to heat the gym! Someone in mechanical engineering figured out that the body heat from all those students should be enough to keep the building comfy even in the dead of winter.
- M:** Kreplach, that's the most brilliant plan I've ever . . .
- K:** Wait, I'm not done yet! Those vacant rooms where the freshman classes used to meet? We rent them out to small businesses!
- M:** Fast food places, I suppose?
- K:** Nope—plenty of those across the street. I was trying to think of something students spend lots of money on but can't get easy local access to...and then it hit me. Composition facilitation!
- M:** Say what?
- K:** You know—a student has a paper or project report to write and turns to a skilled professional for help with the background research and the paper composition, and then . . .
- M:** Wait a minute, Kreplach—are you talking about those outfits that write students' papers?
- K:** Certainly not—that would be unethical. This service would just produce first drafts and the students would then do their own supplementary research and rewriting, with a reasonable percentage of the fee—say, 60%—going into the Provost's discretionary fund.
- M:** But what would keep the students from just turning in the papers as their own work?
- K:** Aha—I anticipated that some cynical faculty members would raise that unlikely scenario, so I make the students pledge that everything in the paper is either their words or exactly what they would have written.
- M:** Fiendishly clever—that should satisfy even the most jaded among us! Kreplach, I've got to hand it to you—you've thought of everything.
- K:** Coincidentally, that's just what the Chancellor said. He was so excited about all those savings that he switched himself back into first class on the Paris flight, and then he . . . oh my goodness, look at the time! I've enjoyed this little chat but I need to run to a meeting with the Search Committee for the Deputy Vice Provost for Emergency Relief Revenues.
- M:** Boy, that sounds really important! I imagine a serious salary goes with it.
- K:** You got that right, but it's crucial if you want to get someone with the right qualifications for a sensitive job like this one—all hell could break loose if you put an amateur in charge of converting all the rest rooms on campus to pay toilets. Oh, by the way—would you happen to have an extra paper clip on you? □

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