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# **Curmudgeons and Rogues Special Challenges to Community College Leaders**

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# Curmudgeons in the Community College



# Definition of a Curmudgeon

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- **Contrarians who think otherwise**
- **Cantankerous naysayers**
- **Self-appointed gadflies**
- **Quite vocal and opinionated**
- **Collaboration and civility not held in high esteem**
- **Prefer debate and circular discussion to solving problems and consensus**



# National Study

- **375 community college presidents**
- **77 respondents—20.5% return rate**

**97% indicated they had known a curmudgeon who fits the definition.**

**18% indicated they had known 10 or more.**



# Who Are the Curmudgeons?

How many are male?

**58%**

How many are female?

**2.5%**

**38% of respondents indicated males and females are equally represented.**



# Who Are the Curmudgeons?

**Classified Staff, Mid-Level Management,  
Executive Administrators, Student Services,  
Full-Time Faculty, Part-Time Faculty,  
Students, & Trustees**

<b>Full-Time Faculty</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Mid-Level Management</b>	<b>6.4%</b>
<b>Trustees</b>	<b>3.8%</b>
<b>Students</b>	<b>2.5%</b>



# Who Are the Curmudgeons?

Career & Technical Education, Community Services, Student Services, Library Services, Humanities & the Arts, Social Science, Mathematics, Other

Humanities & the Arts	27%
Social Science	27%
Other	16%
Career & Technical Ed.	6%
Mathematics	5%



# Impact on the College

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**86% of the respondents indicated that the impact on the college of curmudgeons they had known was either negative (49%) or highly negative (36%)**





# Study Phase Two

- The 77 respondents were invited to complete written answers to 4 questions.
- Twenty-two respondents did:
  - a. Behaviors
  - b. Motivation
  - c. Damage
  - d. Strategies to mitigate damage



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Slow or Stop Change

- *They undermine efforts to implement innovative programs and processes.*
- *They slow down decision making.*
- *Everything takes longer, and frustration rates are higher.*
- *They have highly negative impact on institutional morale.*



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Create an Unhealthy Environment

- *They can be a thorn in the side of the college for years.*
- *He changed the dynamics and positive atmosphere of the college.*
- *They created an unhealthy culture that has taken years to repair—after they retired.*



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Undermine Mutual Respect & Trust

- *They tend to intimidate new or less vocal faculty.*
- *They love to create and spread rumors about administrators.*
- *I was amazed at the level of disinformation and chaos they could create.*



# Damage of Curmudgeons

## Create Adversarial Relationships

- *Their behavior encourages people to take sides.*
- *They are so nasty other faculty are afraid to confront them.*
- *Faculty quit attending senate meetings because of their outbursts.*
- *An insidious cancer eating away at our efforts to change and improve.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

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## Connect Personally

- *I usually win them over by respecting their positions and following through on what I promise.*
- *Nothing I or others have tried works because curmudgeons do not want to help; they only want to disrupt and destroy.*
- *His browbeating trumps my attempts.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Isolate the Curmudgeons

- *Physically relocate them and limit access to others.*
- *Focus on their negative impact on students and the college.*
- *As more faculty took ownership of our initiatives they began to take a stand, and they isolated the curmudgeons.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Create an Inclusive Culture

- *Create structures for ideas to come from any level of the organization.*
- *Invest heavily in staff development.*
- *Kill them with data.*
- *Institute governance structures that include all groups—make it harder for curmudgeons to just attack the president.*





# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Ensure Transparency

- *The best antiseptic for a lie is to shine a light on it.*
- *The more transparent the organization, the less credibility curmudgeons will have.*
- *With my trustee curmudgeon I shared every communication and request from any trustee with all trustees.*



# Strategies to Mitigate Damage

## Invest in the Change Agents

- *Support the change agents with promotions, special assignments, and professional development.*
- *Invest heavily in orientation and mentoring of new employees.*
- *Use the 90—10 rule. If less than 10% participate make the incentives so attractive they wish they had.*



# Barriers to Change

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**Curmudgeons are barriers to change and innovation:**

**Curmudgeons slow change.**

**Curmudgeons resist change.**

**Curmudgeons fear change.**



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# **Rogue Trustees in the Community College**



# Appointed vs Elected Boards

- **59 presidents from 16 states**
- **Appointed boards: 7 states/23 presidents**
- **Elected boards: 9 states/36 presidents**



# Definition of a Rogue Trustee

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- **Place own interests first**
- **Violate written and unwritten codes**
- **Make inappropriate alliances**
- **Consume an inordinate amount of time**
- **Know how to get attention**
- **Manipulate others to their advantage**
- **Tend to poison the culture of the college**
- **Catalyze fear, paranoia, & subterfuge**
- **Cause enormous damage**



# Damage from Rogue Trustees

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*The behavior of a rogue trustee can be every bit as damaging to a college as a significant budget cut, the destruction of a building, or a shooting.*



# Damage to the President

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- *The tension he created for me, other trustees, and staff was unbearable.*
- *No president is prepared for a rogue trustee.*
- *My career was seriously damaged, and the buyout seriously damaged the finances of the college.*
- *She monopolized my time and energy so that I had neither for anyone else.*





# Damage to Faculty & Staff

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- *I and all the top administrators left.*
- *He used fear, and staff were afraid of the constant intimidation.*
- *In open board meetings she reprimanded administrators for not having answers to her questions.*
- *If the president cannot protect herself, how can she protect me?*



# Damage to Other Trustees

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- *A rogue trustee may be the genesis of a dysfunctional board.*
- *He was out to destroy everyone, including the other trustees.*
- *She created severe conflict among board members and destroyed trust.*
- *Because of rogue attacks: the chair resigned—two productive members resigned—my excellent chair left.*



# Damage to the College

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- *The college became dysfunctional.*
- *The community began to raise questions about the capacity of the college to provide a quality education.*
- *Decisions were postponed and real issues were ignored or set aside.*
- *The business of the college became the business of dealing with the rogue trustee.*



# Softball Strategies

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- **Policies, codes of ethics, handbooks, etc.**
- **Orientation, work sessions, retreats, etc.**
- **External consultants**
- **Accreditation**
- **Legal controls**



# Hardball Strategies

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- **Political pressure**
- **Role of the press**
- **Public censure**
- **Role of the faculty**



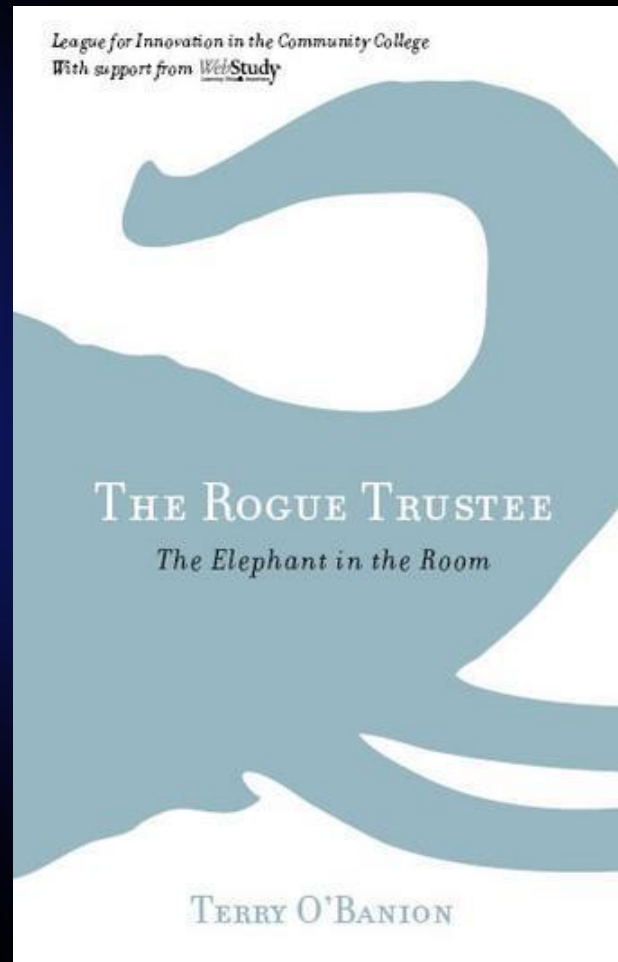
# The Ultimate Damage

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- Presidents and staff can resign.
- Other trustees can resign or choose not to run again.
- Students are often oblivious of internal politics.
- **But the college cannot resign or leave town.**



# The Rogue Trustee



Order from [www.league.org/store](http://www.league.org/store)



# Community College Curmudgeons



Order from [www.league.org/store](http://www.league.org/store)





# Terry O'Banion

*Ancora Imparo*  
“Still I Am Learning.”

Michelangelo

