

Reformers, Mavericks, Renegades, and Rogues: Do-Bad and Do-Good Agents in the Community College

Academic Journal of Educational Research
October 14, 2021

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A distinguishing characteristic of human beings is their drive to create organizations. There are millions of organizations in the world today—local, state, regional, national, and international. There are over 68,000 international organizations in the world; more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations in the U. S.; more than 25,000 universities in the world; and there are 1,462 community colleges in the world including 415 private community colleges.

In every organization that exists there are distinguishable sub-groups that do-good and do-bad. Here we distinguish only among reformers, mavericks, renegades, and rogues in U. S. community colleges. They all have in common high visibility in their organizations. They are all high maintenance for the leaders of the college and often for their colleagues. They all can have considerable impact on the college and the way it operates. But beyond these key elements they have very little in common.

Reformers. The reformer usually operates from altruistic motives with one overarching purpose—to make changes in the college for the better. The reformer has an agenda to make college operations more efficient, to improve communications among various constituencies, to shore up the financial operations, to help the college better serve the community, or to make sure the college is exploring and adding new programs and services to better serve students. To achieve his or her goals, the reformer works within the norms and behaviors expected of leaders and makes every attempt to work with the administration and the

faculty, with trustees, and with community leaders. The reformer is well respected by college stakeholders and usually becomes a visible and powerful leader championing the college. Sometimes impatient with the slow progress of change in the educational enterprise, the reformer may create friction and challenges as her or his reform agenda is herded through institutional pastures.

Mavericks. The maverick marches to the beat of his or her own drum—a beat that does not always sound a clear purpose and whose tune may not be recognizable by other colleagues. The maverick usually operates on a motive to be different, to be contrary against the main flow of the stream. The maverick's purpose can be altruistic or egotistic—goals are flexible; the means remain the same and identify the maverick as a person who acts on an agenda that is often counter to the agenda of others. Mavericks are very unpredictable. They might today support the agenda of the reformer and tomorrow vote against the same agenda. They might chafe under the policies and guidelines of sound group behavior, but they do not make it a practice to violate the standards and norms for effective communication and governance. Except for the core commitment to being the odd person out, the maverick can be a loose cannon counted on sometimes to fight the good fight and sometimes to aim the artillery directly at his or her colleagues in the college.

Renegades. Renegades fall between the mavericks and the rogues. They do little to improve communications and to work as a member of the team. They are more comfortable operating at the edge of the group of which they are a member, sometimes acting as the resident critic or curmudgeon, sometimes making surprise attempts to ameliorate an impasse. As renegades they are as likely to desert a cause as join one. Their purpose is unclear; sometimes like the maverick they appear to march to their own drum and behave just to be different; sometimes like the rogue they appear to advocate an agenda destructive to the college. They cannot be counted on for support or for leadership.

Rogues. Rogues run roughshod over the norms and standards of behavior expected of leaders. They tend to trample over the ideas and cautions of others. They place self-interests over the interests of the college. They violate written and unwritten codes of conduct. They often make inappropriate alliances with faculty, staff, trustees. They recommend and support policies that are not in the best interests of the institution. They consume an inordinate amount of staff and meeting time. They know how to get attention, to appeal to the base elements in others, and to manipulate individuals and situations to their advantage. Most rogues are quite bright and articulate; some are mentally unbalanced. They are sometimes loners, exiled from the herd, but they also create alliances with others to carry out their agenda. They can cause enormous damage. In short, they tend to poison the culture of the college; instead of helping create a sense of community, collaboration, innovation, and common values, they become the catalyst for increased defensiveness, paranoia, subterfuge, and fear. The rogue is the elephant in the room, creating an ever-widening circle of frustration and destruction for anything in his or her path. (O'Banion, 2009, p. 8)

Summary: In general, Reformers are the do-good leaders in a community college. Mavericks can do-good with their off-the-wall or out-of-the-box perspectives, but they cannot be relied on and are just as capable of do-bad behavior. Renegades and Rogues are almost always do-bad players in the college stirring up trouble that can be deeply damaging to the college, the students, the faculty and staff, and the community. When Renegades and Rogues are allowed to impact the culture of the college to the point that fear, paranoia, stress, and mistrust are the defining characteristics of interaction among the various constituencies the college is in great danger of collapse. Many colleges that reach this point of deterioration have a very substantial challenge in ever recovering.

While Reformers are generally welcome, and Mavericks are generally tolerated, Renegades and Rogues should never be welcome or tolerated. Unfortunately, the tolerant, open-door, altruistic culture of the

community college is an ideal incubator for Renegades and Rogues to spawn and nurture their offspring. Most community colleges attempt to create a collaborative culture with a prescribed set of common values around ideals of civility, trust, equity, respect, and openness; but these are often not the values that motivate Renegades and Rogues. Their values are self-interest, chaos, paranoia, destruction, fear, bullying, and shaming. Statements of values and codes of ethics are impotent against these values and the behavior they generate.

So, what can college leaders and college faculty and staff do to prevent Renegades and Rogues from employment or continuing employment?

1. Improve the interview and selection process on the front end to ensure that such candidates are eliminated from the pool.
2. Selection committees must do a thorough job of contacting colleagues of the candidates who are well acquainted with the candidates and who are not listed as a reference by the candidates to probe personality behaviors and psychological characteristics.
3. All new hires must sign a personal contract that they agree with, support, and will exhibit the values in the college's statement of values.
4. All new hires must participate in a mandatory staff development program for at least the first six months of employment that includes a focus on the values of the college such as collaboration, trust, equity, shared governance, mutual respect, etc.
5. College unions must support these efforts to ensure that the culture of the college is protected and sustained.
6. An appropriate unit in the college (ethics committee, union oversight committee, etc.) should be created to monitor and identify Renegade and Rogue behavior when it is clearly evident.
7. Such a committee may recommend a vote of no confidence, a note in the evaluation, probation, or even suspension of Renegades and Rogues who have violated the norms of the college.

These guidelines, of course, must meet legal standards of the college and the state and must be designed to protect the college from lawsuits. If some version of these kinds of policies and guidelines cannot be implemented then current leaders have no recourse but to play hard ball and resort to strategies and actions that are likely to be very disruptive and even very destructive to the college, the faculty and staff, students, and the community. In such a scenario there are no winners.

References

O'Banion, T. (2009). *The rogue trustee: The elephant in the room*. Phoenix, AZ: The League for Innovation in the Community College.

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