Book Review / Compte rendu

Zaiontz, Dan. (2015). *#Follow the leader: Lessons in social media success from #HigherEd CEOs*. St. Louis, MO: EDUniverse Media. Pages: 143. Price: 29.99 USD (paper).

Reviewed by Nitin Deckha, Sessional Lecturer, University of Guelph-Humber.

Dan Zaiontz's *#Follow the Leader's* subtitle, "lessons in social media success from #HigherEd CEOS," pithily captures the essence of the book. Written as a social media manual for leaders in higher education, it is based on interviews with twenty-two college and university presidents in Canada and the United States, focusing on how they navigate the social media landscape, using (as the frequent use of hashtags already suggests) Twitter, yet also Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Google+, YouTube and other tools to build and maintain an institutional presence, communicate with various stakeholders, and create and support virtual communities for their respective higher education institutions. *#Follow the Leader* is an accessible, engaging and well-structured book that outlines the risks and rewards of social media presence for higher education leaders, culls best practices from the range of social media profiles it offers on college/university presidents that have been interviewed, and offers planning tools and matrices for higher education leaders and their communication advisors to develop workable and actionable social media strategies. Importantly, *#Follow the Leader* is not an academic treatise nor does it desire to locate itself within larger scholastic debates around social media consumption and behaviour, theories of leadership and management, the corporatization of higher education and the politics of higher education leadership and administration, to name a few potential discussions. While avoiding these debates and those similar to them may contribute to its reading ease, better situating itself in various kinds of debates that traverse higher education and business management, academically and in terms of policy, might have also deepened the significance of its approach and message.

Zaointz's primer begins with the suggestion that, in 2015, when the book was published, social media presence for higher education leaders wasn't mandatory. Yet, his whole book is a detailed examination of the merits and benefits of actively cultivating such a presence. He begins with outlining key questions that leaders should entertain in deciding how to embark on their respective social media journeys, including their reasons for

engaging with prospective and current students, faculty, alumni, government, media and fundraising stakeholders, their own personal capacities for risk and reputational harm and their personal strengths as communicators. Thus, Zaointz's manual is both a "how to" as well as a "learn from." While profiling the relatively successful strategies employed by his interviewees, including presidents of such institutions such as Laurentian University, Southern New Hampshire University, Olds College, and the University of Cincinnati (as well as the now maligned University of Missouri), Zaointz also outlines the steps required to build a social media presence and the strategy to undergird it for a higher educational leader testing the social media waters and looking for guidance.

Zaointz argues that benefits of an active social media presence, such as improved metrics on student satisfaction, ameliorated reputational perceptions, favourable legislative change, and renewed funding, need to outweigh the potential risks to personal, professional and institutional reputations. He suggests that when higher education leaders seek to build and cultivate a social media presence, they should align their messaging with that of their institution's interests and values, be transparent, model someone they find effective, identify interests and provide metrics, design a "success matrix" and work with strategic advisors or communication specialists. Zaointz diagnoses three models of social media content creation: the ghostwriter, the hybrid and the independent. The ghostwriter model, as its name suggests, is where one's presence is run by office staff or the marketing and communication team, a choice that his respondents saw as not particularly effective. The hybrid model offers joint generation of content by both the president and institutional staff, or the staff handling referrals from the president's office, especially on concerns that the president couldn't quickly answer personally. However, for authenticity and transparency, no model trumps that of the independent, which, interestingly, is the model used by the plurality of Zaointz' respondents and, Zaointz argues, "the model most often recommended to senior leaders by social media researchers and consultants" (p. 47).

Expanding on these models is Zaointz's theorization of presidential presence styles of which he provides five: the "customer servant," "the institutional promoter," "the socially inconsistent president," the "oversharing non-strategist," and the "socially active strategist" (pp. 48-51). The customer servant is the president who is the paragon of customer service, taking to using social media to respond to all queries from various students, faculty, and staff. Conversely, the institutional promoter focuses on merely sharing institutional interests, avoiding personal details. The socially inconsistent president is one who is not particularly active in maintaining a social media presence while the oversharing non-strategist, with their over-zealous sharing of personal content and range of seemingly random messages, seems unclear and unfocused. Lastly, the socially active strategist demonstrates the strategic bent which many of the other styles lack, melding a focus on institutional interests, including creating meaningful discussions with key stakeholders with curated personal details. As Zaointz elaborates, such presidents strive to align social media activities with institutional strategies as much as possible and in measured tone and regularity. Although Zaointz submits that he doesn't judge the approaches as either right or wrong, but distills them from his observations of his respondents' institutional social media behaviours, it is hard not to infer that the "socially active strategist" is ideal.

After these distillations, Zaointz turns his intention to various social media "success" planning tools and resources, which would be created by the president in consultation

with institutional communications teams. These "matrices" graph various typical higher education institutional priorities, such as "boost school spirit", "support employee engagement" and "enhance alumni relationships" with tied objectives, tactics, targets, completing dates, and targeted social media platforms, thus offering relatively hands-on and utilitarian guidance for the higher educational leader. Zaointz closes with further distillations on various tropes in the most successful social media strategies of higher education presidents, including institutional championing and storytelling, humanizing stories, visualizing the community for the "followers," and aggregating higher education content for other senior leaders. The book ends with a reprise to persuade still-skittish higher education leaders on questioning their own doubts about developing a social media presence (around time, skill, reputational risk) with further restatements of the benefits of a strategic social media presence.

While ostensibly written for higher education leaders, Zaointz's brief and focused guidebook on building and cultivating a social media presence is highly useful for all of us in navigating and thriving on communications platforms which seem only to be growing in importance in our increasingly interconnected and globalized world.🍁