



Is Your Facemask On?



Strength for the Long Run: Resilience in the Presidency

Session By:

Dr. Jay Lemons, Academic Search

Dr. Kathleen E. Harring, Muhlenberg College

Dr. Frank Shushok, Jr., Roanoke College



Current Trends in Leadership

- People know what to do, just not where they are going
- Generational shift in leadership is occurring
- Talented professionals feel isolated in the work
- So many feel a path forward for them in leadership is not right or possible
- Even so, there are good people, doing good things, to further democracy and care for our students

2024 Competencies for the College Presidency

A NATIONAL STUDY OF EFFECTIVE
LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In the study, seven competencies for effective presidential leadership were identified:

- + **Trust Building**
- + **Demonstrating Resilience**
- + **Communication Savvy**
- + **Crafting a Cabinet and Building a Team**
- + **Emotional Intelligence**
- + **Leading with Courage**
- + **Data Acumen and Resource Management**

Mind Management and Resiliency

MANAGE ENERGY, NOT HOURS

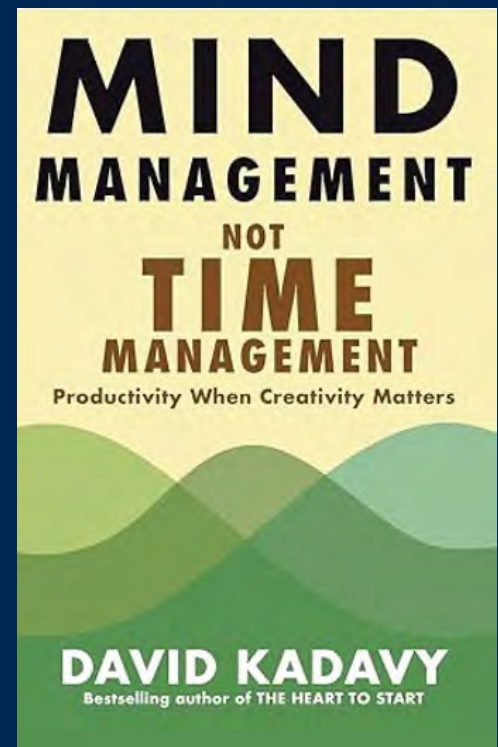
Track your mental peaks to schedule demanding work when you think best. Use low-energy periods for routine tasks to prevent burnout and preserve focus under stress.

BUILD RECOVERY INTO YOUR WORKFLOW

Treat rest, reflection, and creative downtime as part of the job—not a reward after it. Protect mental recovery time just as intentionally as meetings or deadlines.

ADAPT YOUR MINDSET, NOT JUST YOUR CALENDAR

When plans fall apart, shift gears instead of pushing harder. Reframe challenges as signals to adjust strategy, experiment, or change context—core behaviors of resilient thinkers.



Accomplishment and Resiliency

SELECT FEWER STRATEGIC INITIATIVES & PROTECT THEM

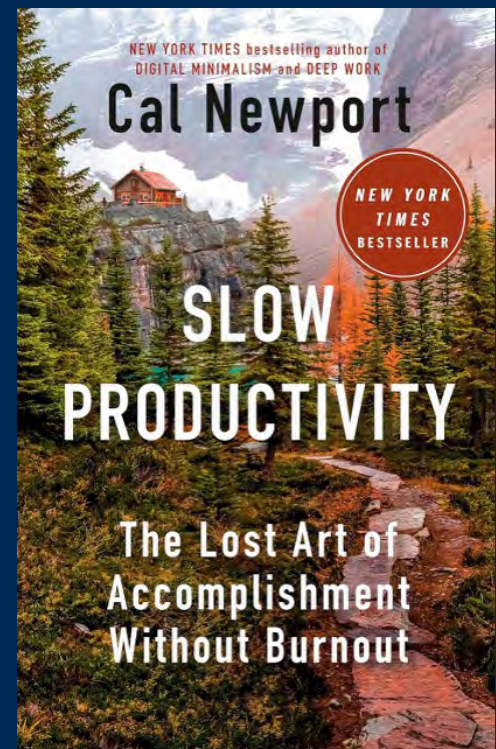
Narrow your focus to a small set of high-impact goals and resist adding low-value tasks. When disruption hits, this “fewer things” mindset ensures your core efforts stay intact rather than being scattered.

WORK AT A SUSTAINABLE, NATURAL PACE TO SUSTAIN STAMINA

Adopt rhythms that avoid the nonstop sprint: schedule rest, allow reflection time, and avoid perpetual urgency. This helps you recover from setbacks and sustain resilience over time rather than burn out.

OBSESS OVER THE QUALITY AND LONGEVITY OF OUTCOMES, NOT VISIBLE BUSYNESS

Focus on producing meaningful, lasting work rather than simply being busy. A resilient organization builds depth over time, not just activity metrics—this builds capacity to adapt rather than collapse when pressure spikes.



Filling Our Bucket for Resiliency

CONNECT WORK TO MEANING

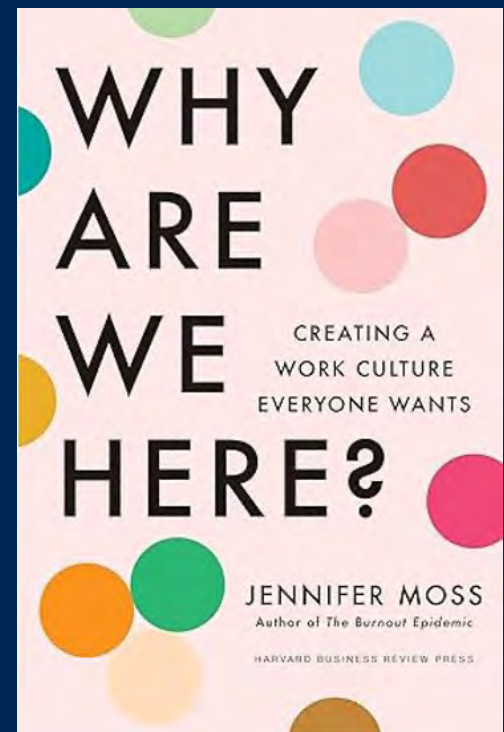
Start meetings by naming the “why” behind current projects. Regularly link tasks to the broader mission so individuals see how their work contributes to something larger.

CREATE SPACE FOR VOICE AND BELONGING

Build team rituals that invite honest input and appreciation. Use short reflection rounds or open forums to strengthen trust and shared purpose.

EMPOWER WITH CLARITY

Give people autonomy in how they achieve goals but set clear expectations and accountability checkpoints. Flexibility plus structure fosters engagement and resilience.





Personal Resilience Toolkit

TOOLKIT ELEMENTS:

- Mindfulness and reflection
- Executive coaching and peer networks
- Care for your support network
- Boundaries and time management
- Physical well-being and routines
- Growth mindset and self-compassion
- Create outlets and joyful distraction
- Digital discipline
- Gratitude practices

Building University for Resiliency

EMBED CARE AS A RESILIENCE STRATEGY

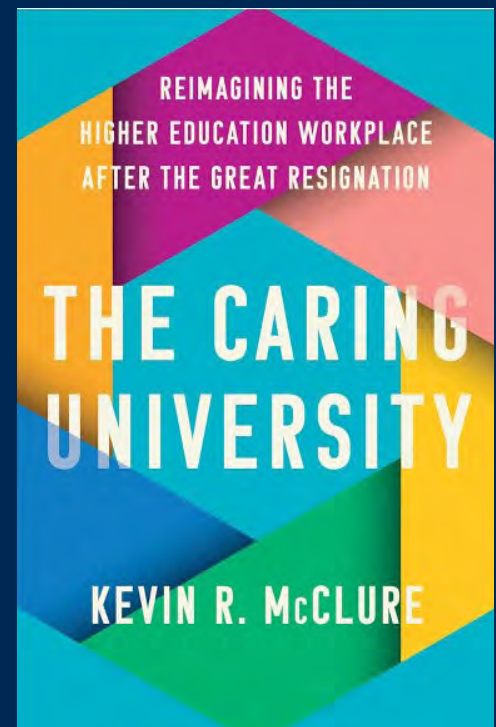
Shift institutional attention from mere workloads and outputs to the whole-person experience of staff and faculty. By prioritizing employee wellbeing, you strengthen the organization's capacity to recover and adapt.

DESIGN HUMANIZING POLICIES THAT BUFFER STRESS AND SUSTAIN RESILIENCE

Implement flexible work norms, equitable workload distribution, and meaningful supports (for caregiving, boundaries, mental health) so that when disruptions occur, individuals and teams don't collapse but instead have structural guardrails to maintain functioning.

CULTIVATE CARING LEADERSHIP TO FOSTER RESILIENT CULTURE

Develop leaders who listen, trust, and act for the wellbeing of their people. This kind of leadership fosters psychological safety, reduces disengagement, and builds collective resilience when the institution faces shocks or change.



Mattering and Resiliency

RECOGNIZE AND REINFORCE SIGNIFICANCE TO BUILD RESILIENCE

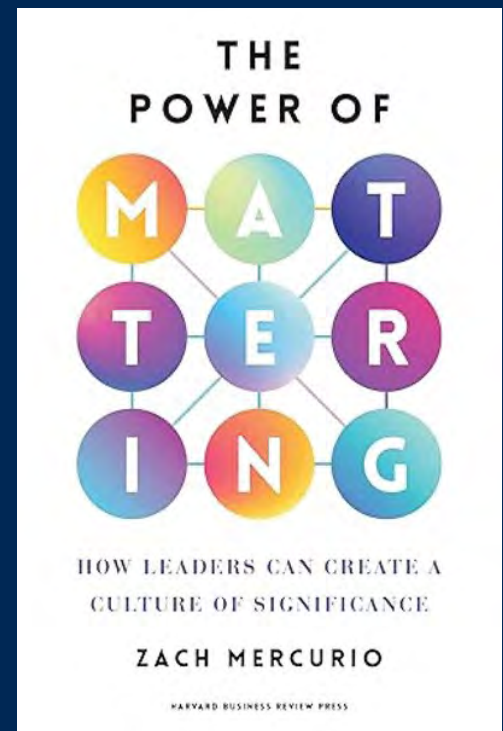
Make “You matter” a regular part of your frequent check-ins rather than a once-a-year statement. People who feel seen, heard, validated, and needed are better equipped to bounce back from setbacks.

USE NOTICING, AFFIRMING AND NEEDING AS RESILIENCE HABITS

Apply Mercurio’s framework—notice someone’s efforts, affirm how their unique gifts make a difference, and show how you rely on them—to deepen connection, foster purpose and create a culture that withstands pressure and disruption.

DESIGN SMALL-MOMENT INTERACTIONS TO SUSTAIN RESILIENT TEAMS

Shift focus from big programs to micro-moments (a quick “How did your meeting go?”, a specific thanks, a “I need your insight here”) that signal mattering. These feed psychological safety and meaningful engagement, making teams more durable in change.





Reframing Leadership Selection for Resiliency

- Hire for values and capacity, not just credentials
- There is no perfect candidate
- Recognize we have always wanted unicorns
- Refocus on transitioning and onboarding
- Focus on complementary skills
- Continuous support and development, individual and team

How Do We Create Meaning?

ANCHOR RESILIENCE IN THE “THREE C’S”: COMMUNITY, CONTRIBUTION, CHALLENGE

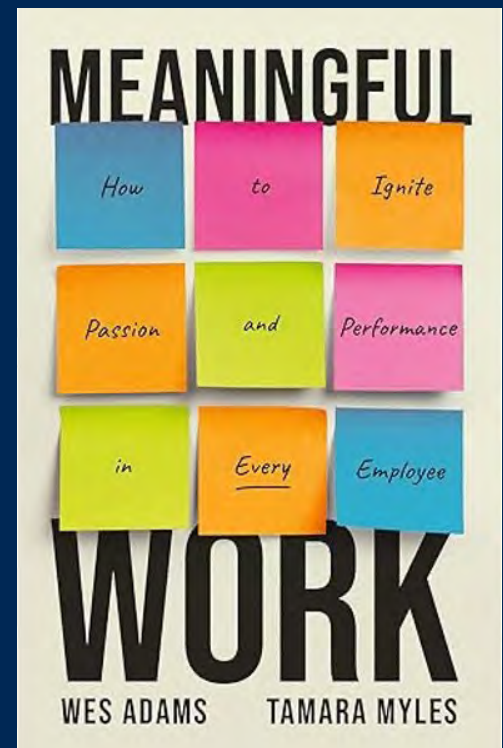
Encourage team members to build strong interpersonal bonds (Community), recognize how their work matters beyond themselves (Contribution), and regularly engage in growth-oriented tasks (Challenge). These elements provide emotional stamina and purpose when change or disruptions hit.

CREATE MEANING-RICH MICRO-MOMENTS TO BUFFER SETBACKS

Embed small, everyday practices—celebrating peer wins, sharing stories of impact, inviting authentic expression—that reinforce meaning. When meaning is continually reforged, individuals and teams are better able to bounce back from adversity.

ALIGN VALUES-LED LEADERSHIP WITH RESILIENT STRUCTURES

Leaders who walk their talk, ensuring that organizational values match everyday behavior, lay the groundwork for trust and psychological safety. In turn, trusted individuals and systems are more resilient because they feel secure and engaged rather than reactive.





What do you need to do to put your facemask on first?

Continue the dialogue on sustaining resilience in leadership. We welcome your reflections and conversation at president@academicsearch.org