



Bighouse got it right

It was probably 15 to 20 years ago that I read an article on one of the greatest college basketball coaches in history, Clarence “Bighouse” Gaines. At age 23, Gaines became the head football and basketball coach, athletics director, trainer, and ticket manager at Winston-Salem State, a historically African-American college in West Virginia. Bighouse retired as basketball coach in 1993 after running the show for 47 years. In the article I read, the interviewer asked Coach Gaines what was mainly responsible for the incredible success his teams enjoyed. The writer tells how Bighouse responded by reclining in his chair, tilting his head back, closing his eyes as if he had just become one with the universe, pursing his lips and slowly enunciating the word “talent.” In his mind, legends like Earl “The Pearl” Monroe handed success to Clarence Gaines and made Winston-Salem State a winner.

I hear you, Bighouse. I work directly with 10 people who make Whitworth College a winner every day. It is flat-out unseemly to suggest that any one person is responsible for the robust health of Whitworth today (and our fine folks who bring you *Whitworth Today* know that). Huge credit should be given to Tammy Reid, '60 (vice president for academic affairs), Tom Johnson (vice president

for business affairs), Kathy Storm (vice president for student life), Kristi Burns (vice president for institutional advancement), Fred Pfursich (dean of enrollment services), Terry McGonigal (dean of the chapel), Gordon Watanabe, '75, '85 M.Ed. (special assistant to the president for diversity), Dolores Humiston (our new director of human resources, who comes to us following the retirement of Alice Mewbourn, whom we also appreciated very much), Dale Soden (special assistant to the president for planning), and Saint Sylvia Hedrick, who has the messy job of being my assistant.

One great thing about this remarkable group is that they too have the “Bighouse” perspective. For example, Tom Johnson gets showered with all this sunshine about how great the campus looks, but you don't hear him bragging about how well he pulls weeds. He understands that we just have really talented, hard-working people at this place.

Most college presidents work with a smaller cabinet than I do, or they have a subgroup within their cabinet. For us, the cabinet is the cabinet. When we meet, we all meet, and we love the times together. Every week, for two to four hours, we gather to think, argue, laugh and pray. And once a month a portion of our meeting brings us together with a broadly representative planning group that keeps us looking forward.

Most people would be surprised by the nature of our cabinet discussions. Because the members are so gifted in their areas, we tend not to get caught up in operational crises. Often we spend

our time wrestling with what it means to be faithful to our mission. To help us in this regard, in 1995 I invited Terry McGonigal and Gordon Watanabe to join the cabinet. Both brought faculty perspectives, but, more important, they pledged to lock arms as guardians in our walk along the ridge of Christ-centeredness and intellectual/cultural diversity. This journey is critical to all of us.

When I ask myself why this assemblage of talent gets along so well, the first answer that comes to my mind is leadership. Now, I wish I could say it's my institutional leadership, but it's their personal leadership that makes them so effective. Today's most successful leaders think “institution first.” Personal and departmental ambitions all bow to the good of the whole. To a remarkable extent, “Whitworth first” is the dominant perspective of these talented cabinet members.

Faculty and staff represent the front line of excellence at Whitworth. Bonnie and I entrusted them with two of our children, and they simply could not have been better stewards. But at a moment when *Whitworth Today* is thinking about 10 years, I am thinking about 10 people who have made Whitworth a great place and made me a better leader than I was ever meant to be. To them, and to all of you who support Whitworth, I am grateful. It is a huge honor for me to be associated with mind-and-heart education at Whitworth College.