

September 12, 2015

Dear Board of Trustees of Morehouse College,

It was my distinct privilege to serve Morehouse College as counsel to the President and Chairman for over twenty months. As you may know, the Chairman asked me to help facilitate better alignment between the President, himself, and a subset of the Executive Committee called the Leadership Committee. During my time, I spent over 200 hours with the Administration and Board—dozens of hours each with the Chairman and the President individually, dozens more with the Leadership Committee, and dozens more observing the Board. All this to say, I gained a unique and intimate view of the dynamics that have led to tensions between some of the Board leaders and the President.

While I am not satisfied with the progress we achieved toward greater alignment in these key relationships, I nevertheless gained clarity about factors preventing alignment. These factors, if not addressed, will continue to impede progress at the college and be detrimental to her success and sustainability in these times of unprecedented change in higher education.

I would like to take this opportunity to summarize what I believe are some key observations and conclusions, but before doing so I want to let you know why I have decided to address the entire Board, and what my frame of reference is for sending out a communication such as this.

Why I am Writing the Whole Board

1. My love for Morehouse as a national treasure, and my belief that she must play her unique and important role in equipping new generations of leaders compels me to share what I believe is a privileged perspective gained over the twenty months I worked with the college.
2. I believe that the Board of Trustees itself is the only entity that can take responsibility and ownership of its own contribution to misalignment between the administration and the Board. Certainly the President plays an important role in this equation, but he cannot singlehandedly do what is required to create functional alignment. He can, and should, address his contribution to the misalignment, but he can only attempt to influence a body that he does not hold accountable, rather is held accountable by. Even the accrediting entities can only demand change, but not lead it. It is incumbent upon each individual Trustee, as part of the whole, to decide on and then lead the change necessary for Morehouse to reach her full potential.

3. In any functional and effective relationship, the identification and ownership of change that leads to growth and effectiveness must mutually and reciprocally start with self—not other. While there are many who understand the importance of such self-examination, I have observed either an unwillingness or inability of a key subset of trustees to look within themselves in order to understand and take ownership of the part they play in the dysfunctional aspects of the relationship with the President. Instead, they have focused exclusively on the President's contribution to the dysfunction. It is based in my assessment that there is no co-ownership of responsibility by some key Board leadership that I appeal to the entire Board to hold itself accountable to the process of self-evaluation and commitment to growth that can only be realized from within.

My Frame of Reference

- I believe in the corporate Wisdom and Will of you, the Board of Trustees. I believe that you will take my thoughts and embrace what should be embraced and dismiss what should be dismissed. In this light, I believe I am most obligated to present my thoughts as thoughtfully, honestly, and responsibly as I am able. Not doing so would squander the investment of time and resources the college invested to improve alignment.
- I believe my silence at this time creates greater risk to Morehouse than does sharing observations and conclusions that will undoubtedly be met with resistance by some, and raise tension with all. However, I believe tension is the fuel for growth for both individuals and organizations.
- I am acting of my own accord. I have spoken with President Wilson, other administrative leaders, several Trustees, and SACs leadership to inform my own opinion of whether the risk in sending this memo is worth it. However, no one besides me knows any of what I am sharing, or even of my decision to send this communication out. I have nothing to gain personally and may be putting much at risk. Nevertheless, because of my commitment to Morehouse first and foremost I feel a professional obligation to share my perspective as I am aware critical decisions are being made about leadership that will impact the best future for Morehouse.

Observations and Conclusions

- I believe President Wilson is a highly effective, mature, capable and principled leader. It is my assessment that his rare and unique strengths are a great fit for Morehouse at this time. He has assembled a strong, talented, and independent team

and shows humility and transparency in his collaboration with them. His knowledge of higher education; his connectedness politically, academically, and in business circles; his ability to communicate both publicly and in writing; his fortitude in the face of internal criticism; and his commitment to Morehouse in specific are a special combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities, not easily found in the Academy. I believe the Board would be hard-pressed to find anyone more capable of leading the change required for Morehouse to become one of the leading higher education institutions in the world, thereby honoring the legacy of her past.

- I have worked with leaders from over 30 other academic institutions, so my conclusions are not naively drawn.
- I was initially given a narrative that if true, led me toward the conclusion that President Wilson might not be the right person for the role, so I was asked to assess his leadership capacity and potential. Not only was my assessment disconfirming of the narrative, I shared with the Chairman that I believed Morehouse had the right leader in President Wilson. I have reiterated my assessment with the Chair and other Trustees often.
- I have witnessed the President interact with his leadership team, and have been present on calls with many other constituents. He has a unique ability to be open and grounded at the same time. He consistently asks what he could do differently and seeks to understand the perspectives of others.
- Every leader is flawed and therefore given an opportunity to keep growing. President Wilson necessarily has areas in which he can become more effective and he has certainly contributed to the dysfunction between some Trustees and himself. However, he has also made, and continues to make, significant effort and strides to account for the role he has played in the unhealthy tension that exists.
 - I have personally observed him take responsibility for his contribution and courageously seek feedback from me, the Chairman, the Leadership Committee, and others to determine blindspots.
 - I believe his greatest opportunity for growth is learning to “lead-up” with the Board of Trustees. In other words, he has been least effective in “leading up” with the Board.
 - There are many factors that contribute to this weakness, and as is often the case, they are the flip-side of the strengths that make him very effective in

leading out, across, and down at Morehouse College. Nonetheless, he must continue to take responsibility for understanding and addressing this area.

- I have concluded the relationship between the President and the Chairman is at an impasse, and I don't believe a status-quo cordiality will suffice the needs of the institution. While I fully appreciate the strengths of the Chairman, I believe that he has contributed more to the misalignment than has the President.
 - When it comes to self-evaluation and willingness to change, there are members of the Executive Committee (including the Chair) who communicate a stubborn intransigence when pushed to evaluate their own contributions to the dysfunction. When I have asked directly in both individual and group forums, "What could you do differently to take responsibility for the tension that exists with the President?" I have been met with either overt resistance or silence by many of the key leaders on the Executive Committee.
 - The more I pushed the Chair and other key leaders of the Executive Committee for self-evaluation and reflection, the more I was distanced from the process that could lead to improved alignment.
 - I believe the Board needs to be led by someone not so principally at odds with the President. With status quo Board leadership in place, the only way to realize alignment is for the President to take 100% of the responsibility to change. This scenario is unrealistic. There is no functional relationship of any kind that works this way. Even if the President could singlehandedly take 100% of the responsibility, the required acquiescence would actually work against what is ultimately required to appropriately lead the change necessary at Morehouse.
 - I want to reiterate that the President cannot be absolved of all responsibility to change his behavior, but neither can the Chair or other key members of the Executive Committee. These efforts must be co-owned.
- I have observed that there is an in-group and an out-group on the Board. This clique culture, more than any other factor, contributes to the dysfunction in key relationships that puts Morehouse realizing her potential at risk.
 - From my perspective, the in-group could be loosely characterized as "the old guard" and are significantly represented on the Executive Committee.
 - They appear to be most resistant to President Wilson's leadership, most resistant to change, and least clear about best practice roles and responsibilities for Governance and Administration.

- They tend to micromanage tactics and the President's leadership style in an almost parental way, rather than hold him accountable to performance measures and vision/mission objectives.
- Their biggest complaint to me (both corporately and individually) has been that the President does not show them appropriate deference and respect. I have not witnessed the President be disrespectful in any of the conversations to which I was privy, but when disagreements emerged about what he believed best for Morehouse, neither did he defer. Rather, he respectfully, although sometimes passionately, remained firm in his opinion and direction, and he changed his views when convinced otherwise. I would hope the Board sees this posture as a positive characteristic of any leader charged with moving Morehouse toward her potential.
- As an extension of the previous points, I believe the Executive Committee should be disbanded, that committee chairs should rotate frequently, and that there should be tenure limits on every board member to battle the threats an in-group/out-group culture makes to Morehouse's success. All of these suggestions are in alignment with best practices for academic Boards. Employing these disciplines is one of the best ways to combat the threats that engrained and powerful in-groups make to their institutions.
 - I have personal knowledge of too many decisions made in the "smoke filled rooms" of the Executive Committee. This dynamic diminishes the ability to leverage the Wisdom and Will of the incredibly talented Board as a whole.
 - The Executive Committee structure and tenure has created an unhealthy reinforcement of some members who have too much of their identity wrapped up in their roles as "key players" on the Morehouse Board. While some have the maturity and self-confidence to resist this pull, I have personally interacted with many who don't. They are the one's most upset about the President not showing them "the respect they deserve."

It may be tempting to believe that if you (the Board of Trustees) call for more patience and acceptance of one another that things will get better. After twenty months of conversations and observations, I have concluded that would only amount to a more subtle form of enabling the dysfunctionality that will ensure mediocrity. Mediocrity is not the legacy of Morehouse College and it should not be her destiny—short or long term.

I am fully aware that my conclusions are going to be met with resistance and skepticism. There will be some who believe that I personally have something to gain with the President by sharing my observations. I can only avow that I have the best interest of Morehouse at heart in deciding to share observations and conclusions that will potentially create division. I can only respond that if I believed President Wilson was not an effective leader, I would have told the Chairman so on the many occasions that he asked for my assessment in our one-on-one conversations. Additionally, if the President had not made the effort he has made to examine his own responsibility, or if he had not been willing to change his approach (both of which he has), I would have shared those conclusions with you instead of the ones I have shared.

If you believe my conclusions to be off the mark, I would encourage you to investigate them yourself by sharing them with those who have an intimate understanding of Morehouse. Share them with Rick Legon at AGB, or Belle Wheelan at SACS and use their feedback to draw your own conclusions. I would encourage you to reach out to the President's leadership team and interview them off the record. I have no relationship or affiliation with any of these individuals or groups. Finally, I would ask you to ask yourself if my conclusions make sense in light of your personal experiences.

If you think my observations and conclusions have validity, know it will take great courage to honestly self-assess and face the issues that will allow Morehouse to more fully realize her potential. I have observed many Trustees who excel in this ability to seek tough feedback and grow. If you believe yourself to be one of those people, it is my opinion that now is the time for you to step up and help lead this process of self-evaluation for the Board.

May your commitment to Morehouse supersede your commitment to the relationships you have on the Board. May you know where I am incorrect in my assessment of the situation. May you have the Wisdom to know what is right, and the courage to act on that understanding.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Keith M. Eigel, Ph.D.