

Being a trustee is often a thankless job. We have a six-member board of trustees made up of people who must live in Neosho County. They are elected to serve up to a four-year term with half of the board seats up for election every two years. It is one of the few non-partisan elected positions left, where it doesn't matter if you are a Whig or a Tory, all that matters is that you want the best for the college and its students.

It is an unpaid position, unless you count free breakfast at our monthly morning meeting, and it is time-consuming. The monthly board packets are very long with proposals, agendas, policy re-writes, check registries, etc. There is a lot of reading and then the long meetings, trainings, and retreats. The worst part – you have to listen to me prattle on at meetings way too long as I give my monthly report.

It also means that you have to work in a group to accomplish anything. It's a six-member board so you have to have four "yes" votes for anything to pass. Working together for everything can be frustrating if you are used to just giving orders and making things happen in your private life or business. You have to get three people to agree with you to move things in the way you want them to go. The board needs to be pulling in the same direction – toward the mission and vision of the college that they helped create. One person pulling in another direction can be frustrating for the one person but also for the rest of the board.

Board of Trustees have to make difficult and risky decisions. At NCCC, the board does the ultimate hiring and termination/non-renewal of employees upon the recommendation of the President. They evaluate the President and create the yearly goals. They set the mill levy, pass the published budget, and move resources around to shape the institution in a way that best fulfills the mission. And if they mess it up, it can be very bad. Audit findings, accreditation issues, lawsuits, you name it. That's a lot of pressure for a free breakfast once a month.

But the payoff is amazing. They get to have a hand in the educational opportunities of thousands of students, who later become productive members of the community. They help set up ways to give back to the community through student volunteering, college services, facilities usage, and on and on. They play a role in providing an informed electorate, a vital part of democracy. Trustees have taken this college from the third floor of the high school to one of the best in the state of Kansas and beyond.

I have said to employees that we are all here as temps, albeit some are here as 25+ year temps. We will all leave someday, but the college will go on. The same is true for trustees. They are elected- or in a few cases appointed, - for a limited term. Sometimes, thanks to reelection, that term can go on for more than 25 years, as it has for David Peter, but eventually they will pass the torch on to the next person who will sit in that seat.

Recently, one of our six members left the board in the most unfortunate way possible, he passed away.

I first met Charlie Boaz when he was selected by the Board of Trustees to complete the term of a former trustee who had moved out of the county. That was in 2007 when I was the Vice President for Student Learning. He had a reputation of knowing everyone in the community through his work at Ash Grove and later Optimized Process Furnaces, his volunteer work with 4H and the Fair Board, and his time serving on the local school board and later the college board, of course. I can't tell you the number of times someone told me, "I know one of your board members, Charlie Boaz." He was such a wonderful

man to know as evidenced by the sheer number of people in this county who knew him and loved him. As a life-long Neosho County resident he cared deeply for this community. And he was a great mentor to me as one of my six bosses.

He often had morning coffee at one of the “Think Tanks” around Chanute. That’s my nickname for a group of folks that meets for breakfast to discuss and solve the problems of the world. There are several around, but I believe this one often met at Cardinal Drug Store. I knew the meeting was in session when I would receive a morning text message from Charlie such as, “How many students do we have in the residence hall this year?” or “When does that new HVAC program start in Garnett?” The group was asking him questions, so he was double checking with me in real time. He was a wonderful spokesperson for the college and sounding board for issues and concerns in the community.

Every year I am evaluated by the board using a long survey instrument, filled with many different aspects of what it means to be president. While I scored very well on many of those aspects, there were a few that were less than perfect. I was saying to the board how hard it is to be a nearly perfect person in the eyes of so many all the time, but that I would keep trying. And I was a little down on myself about it. Charlie told me something that I will never forget. He said, “Brian, there was only one perfect person...and they crucified him.” To me, that meant even if I become that perfect person some people want or need me to be, which will never happen by the way, other people will still attack me. I gave up trying to be the perfect president that day and just worried about being the best I could be, faults and all. Thank you for that Charlie.

Charlie served this institution for 17 years. In that time we opened the new Ottawa campus, went through two 10-year reaffirmations of our accreditation without follow-up, built up the programs in Garnett and LaHarpe, strengthened the online campus to be the second-largest campus, opened the Mitchell Career and Technology Center, greatly improved the infrastructure of the Chanute Campus, made both the residence halls and the college bookstore solvent, saw the college grow by leaps and bounds, transition to a new president, and much more.

As I said before, all of this takes a great board of six people working together to make it happen. But in many ways Charlie was at the heart of that group. A wonderful man who wanted the best for the college and the county. I know I speak for board members both past and present when I say we will all miss him very much.

Soon the board will begin its statutory requirements to fill the now empty seat. This involves placing ads for someone to fulfill the remaining time of Charlie’s current term, then selecting one of the applicants. And while we will find someone to fill the position, no one will ever replace Charlie on the board or in our hearts.

Thank you, Charlie.

If you have any questions about this column or anything else about the college, please contact me at binbody@neosho.edu.