

## Praise for *Well in the Lead*

In this remarkable book, Odders-White and Dove make the case for academic leadership from a person's full self. It's not one more of dozens of how-to books on leadership; instead it's a guide to self-understanding—how to use all of one's qualities in different combinations to be effective, to listen, to be open to others, and to be not just a leader but a human person. The book is a clarion call to academic leaders to take a step back and to breathe, for self-care, and for simple honesty. It's a must-read for anyone with a heart who aspires to academic leadership.

— Michael Bernard-Donals, Chaim Perelman  
Professor of Rhetoric and Culture and  
Professor of Jewish Studies, former Vice  
Provost for Faculty and Staff Affairs,  
University of Wisconsin–Madison

This book will energize academic leaders to pursue their professional calling with grace. It reminds us that to be a standout we must prioritize well-being. Moreover, with inspirational guidance, the book emphasizes that authentic academic leadership begins with doing the inner work.

— Lynn Perry Wooten, President, Simmons  
University

*Well in the Lead* is the perfect companion for the reflective academic leader who looks within while working with others. With its concise analysis, probing questions, thoughtful prayers, and beautiful photographs, *Well in the Lead* becomes a go-to volume for multiple readings over an extended period of time. This is not a transactional “how to” guide to academic administration; it’s a book that helps individuals focus thought, emotion, and energy on the important, and complicated, functions of leadership.

— George Justice, Provost, University of Tulsa

*Well in the Lead* is a welcome and treasured resource for leaders seeking a companion to time-and-task-management tools that focus primarily on how and much less on why. By helping us reflect on our gifts, doubts, and well-being, Elizabeth Odders-White and Suzanne Dove invite each of us to find a foundation for leading authentically. In addition to encouraging individual reflection, this is the kind of book that you may be eager to share and discuss with colleagues.

— Chip Hunter, Dean, Carson College of Business, Washington State University

This book rings so true that I found myself wondering whether the authors had a hidden camera in my office. Their observations and questions for reflection offer critically needed guidance and support for academic leaders. Elizabeth and Suzanne remind

us that everything crumbles when we lose touch with ourselves, providing a powerful motivation to prioritize our own wellness alongside the health of our institutions.

- Diane Del Guercio, Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Research and Gerry and Marilyn Cameron Professor of Finance, Lundquist College of Business, University of Oregon

This book is accessible and fun to read. It offers information, guidance, and support for those who aspire to significant leadership roles in higher education. Drawn from their extensive academic and coaching experience, the authors provide practical tools and strategies for achieving success at work with a balanced life.

- Kathleen Hagerty, Provost and First Chicago Professor of Finance, Northwestern University

*Well in the Lead's* positive messages shed light on what is often a difficult and solitary path. Written with wisdom, curiosity, and prayerful presence, Odders-White and Dove offer college and university leaders a valuable resource for their journey up the academic highway.

- Pat Romney, Clinical and Organizational Psychologist, Leadership Coach to Academic and Human Services Professionals, Romney Associates, Inc.

Drawing on their own leadership experiences, the authors dispel several widely held myths regarding leadership in higher education and provide compelling reasons for integrating professional and personal well-being to achieve long-term success. They also illuminate ways in which leaders at all levels of the academy can reflect on their own experiences and create leadership pathways imbued with authenticity. Just reading the poems lessened my stress, and I found value in all of the questions for reflection despite nearly 30 years in academic leadership roles.

— Soyeon Shim, Elizabeth Holloway Schar  
Dean, School of Human Ecology, University  
of Wisconsin–Madison

The balance the authors call us to find as leaders is critical, especially these days. I appreciate that the book does not provide solutions but rather approaches. The act of guiding successful people to reflect on what it means, how to nurture it, and what is necessary to sustain it is powerful.

— Katherine Lampley, Chief Diversity and  
Inclusion Officer, Bentley University

This book offers a unique approach, insider knowledge of the reality of academic leadership, and is a quick and easy read. The thing that will stay with me is the prayers. At first unexpected, but ultimately appreciated, they are applicable in such a specific way that it's clear they were written by and for

people who understand the unique environment of the academic institution. I will return again and again to these little nuggets of truth to get me through the bad days and support me through those that are good.

— Ellenmarie McPhillip, Associate Dean  
Undergraduate Academic Services,  
University of Miami School of Education  
and Human Development



**Well in the Lead**



# Well in the Lead

*an academic leader's companion*

Elizabeth Odders-White  
Suzanne Dove



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This publication is intended to offer the reader helpful insights into the universal experiences of academic leaders. Examples in the book are an amalgamation of the authors' personal and professional experiences. *Well in the Lead* is not a substitute for legal advice, career counseling, mental health care, or any other form of expert assistance. Please seek the services of a qualified professional if needed.

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To the brave leaders  
who transform higher education  
one step at a time



In celebration of positive  
faculty-staff collaborations



# Contents

Preface	xv
A special note to Standouts	1
1. Shine light on the dark side.	5
2. Leadership is scary.	17
3. Who are you (as a leader)?	29
4. You can't do it all.	39
5. Perfectionism is a soul crusher.	49
6. Relationships are critical.	57
7. Your words matter.	73
8. Leadership is not for the faint of heart.	85
9. You need to come up for air.	99
10. Things get easier with experience.	109
Epilogue	115
Notes	117
Photographs	120
Acknowledgments	123
About the authors	124



# Preface

This is not a typical leadership book. It doesn't include chapters on how to run meetings, set a vision, or delegate effectively, although we believe it will ultimately help you do all of those things and more. This is a book about nurturing yourself in order to nurture your organization\* and its people.

In our collective thirty-five years of working in higher education, we've learned you simply can't lead effectively while ignoring your own needs. Not for long, anyway. Toiling 24/7, answering emails at all hours of the night, and never taking a mental break may work for a short time or make you feel "productive," but things will eventually begin to collapse both within and around you.

At the same time, focusing too heavily on your own well-being and agenda without developing a larger vision and authentic connections with others raises the risk of a revolt. We hope this book will support you as you strike this delicate balance, day by day and moment by moment.

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\* Because we recognize that readers' professional experiences vary widely, we tend to rely on the broad term *organization* throughout the book. Please substitute any more specific word that suits your particular context (institution, school, college, department, unit, etc.).

If you're seeking guidance here, you are probably well acquainted with the headwinds facing academic institutions in the United States and around the world. Everywhere we turn—and every time we brace ourselves to open an issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*—we face conflicting priorities and impossible balancing acts.

We struggle to manage our institution's fragile financial footing against concerns about college affordability. Colleges accustomed to serving eighteen-to-twenty-two-year-olds face declines in the number of high school graduates while a growing number of adults need more education to stay in the workforce. Long-standing governance systems that favor careful deliberation by tenured faculty collide with demands for inclusion of diverse voices, greater transparency, institutional agility, and more equitable sharing of power. The COVID-19 pandemic added yet another thorny crisis to an already pressure-filled environment, leaving many fighting to maintain even minimal levels of mental and emotional wellness.

Higher education leadership can feel like an assault from all sides. Just as we get one fire under control, we realize another was smoldering and is now about to burst into flames. It can feel as though we're running as fast as we can on a treadmill that keeps speeding up . . . with hungry alligators or tigers (or substitute the predator of your nightmares) all around, just waiting to snatch us in their jaws if we slow down or fall off.

In writing this book, we're not providing answers or even solutions; we're offering approaches to grapple with, live with, and hopefully thrive with in the midst of this leadership reality. Instead of running faster and faster on that treadmill, we're advocating for leaders to get off and go outside for a slow jog.

Higher education leadership is a marathon, with a few high-intensity interval training workouts thrown in. Now, more than ever, change is the water we're all swimming in within both our professional and personal lives. Staying afloat requires us to go slow to go fast. It requires that we, as leaders, cultivate in ourselves the same growth mindset we strive to help our students develop.

Just as there are many on-ramps and detours in an academic leadership career, this book gives the reader multiple entry points to thinking about wellness. In addition to observations on what we consider the most essential elements of healthy academic leadership, we have woven questions for reflection, photos, poems, and prayers throughout the book. Surprised? Sure, poems and prayers may not be an obvious choice. But we find them a powerful and effective way of expressing the many emotions that accompany academic leadership.

We share a core belief that higher education plays an important role in society, and therefore we believe in the critical importance of leaders like you. Our colleges and universities need leaders who value the work of their institutions and who

## Well in the Lead

recognize the impact they can have on their organizations, on the communities they serve, and on others around them. Until we lived it, we could never have imagined all that goes on behind the scenes in higher education, and the critical impact that leadership has not only on others but on leaders themselves. Leadership is not something to take lightly; it is not a role for the faint of heart.

In our work as academic leaders, we have learned that personal and organizational wellness are intertwined. You cannot have one without the other. In keeping with the notion that we must put on our own oxygen mask before helping others, this book focuses on your needs as a leader first. As a leader, however, you'll be helping a lot of others with their oxygen masks. So we share experiences and questions we hope will help prompt your thinking about the connections between the personal and the organizational.

This book can be read cover to cover or out of order, whichever feels most helpful. We hope you will keep it close by and refer to it when you need a quick dose of strength, comfort, or inspiration. However you choose to use it, may *Well in the Lead* enhance your life as a leader.

With immense respect and gratitude for the critical work you're engaged in,

*Elizabeth & Suzanne*



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