



PRESIDENTIAL SEARCHES—SURVIVOR STYLE!

Mark R. Ludorf and Kathleen Rountree

The next time YOUR university needs a new president, how will you search for the perfect candidate? Just take a page from today's popular culture and create the "Presidential Survivor" program. That is what Sinistral University recently did.

Sinistral University's top candidates were assembled for a six-day interview at the Balta International Airport in Pierce County, North Dakota. Each applicant brought two "uniforms" (one black suit, one blue suit), and "ceremonial dress" (academic regalia). In addition, each candidate was allowed three minutes to gather office essentials. Most grabbed a laptop computer, a Palm Pilot, or a cell phone. One astute candidate hurriedly downloaded several Ms. Mentor columns from the *Chronicle*.

The candidates were met by Mr. Robert Weise, Chair of the Board of Trustees, who had short bios for each:

Dr. Vincent Grossvater, a forty-year veteran of higher education who retired in 1996 as CEO of a land-grant institution. He now wants a new challenge, and was quoted as saying "have vision, will travel . . . even to Sinistral University."

Dr. Elizabeth Kinder, a self-nominated young academic who earned her Ph.D. in physics at twenty-one. Now, five years later, she thinks she is ready for the challenge of administration. During her phone interview she remarked "many current ad-

ministrators who were given opportunities at my age in the 1960s, now think that a 26 year old cannot get the job done”.

Edwin Stern, a former senator is on record saying, “SU would be a great place, if only faculty would work more than 6 hours a week.”

General Al Rudi Dunit, a hero of the Grenada invasion and dean at a military academy. He remarked in his pre-interview that he could “rescue Sinistral University—just like we rescued our colleagues in Grenada.”

Antonia Robinson, who has been wildly successful in business, but has never spent a day in academe. She is renowned for team-building and inspirational speeches. “My record speaks for itself. I am a change agent and that is what SU needs.”

Professor Annette Authoritarian was pulled directly from the classroom. She was selected after exclaiming, “Oderint dum metuant (*Let them hate me provided they fear me*)” during her pre-interview.

The candidates were divided into two teams. Team Alpha included General Dunit, Dr. Grossvater, and Professor Authoritarian. Team Omega included Ms. Robinson, Dr. Kinder, and Senator Stern. Each team was headquartered in one of the airport dining facilities. Team Alpha in the Bricks and Mortar Café and Team Omega in the Virtual University Lounge. Once settled in, Trustee Weise stopped by to brief everyone:

“Candidates: Welcome to Pierce County, North Dakota, the exact geographical center of North America. What better place to select the next President of Sinistral University. Although you have all had many “airport interviews”, this interview process will be unlike any other. Each day, for the next 5 days, your teams will compete in a new Presidential Challenge.

After each Challenge, the Board will present a special gift to the winning team. The Board has also decided that it will hire the new President’s Cabinet and will announce the name of one new cabinet member.

The team who loses the Challenge must assemble at the Cinnabon near Gate W4 to choose one member for elimination. And, because this state has a SuperNova Law, every moment of

your interview will be simulcast at the football stadium, so the campus population can observe.

Good luck! Your first Challenge is tomorrow.”

DAY ONE

After breakfast, Trustee Weise, announced the day’s challenge.

“Good morning, candidates. Your first task is the Information Technology Challenge. Last evening the air-traffic control system failed. It is now 6:00 am. By 4:00 p.m., each team must find the necessary parts, which are scattered throughout the airport, and re-assemble a new system. And, by the way, the luncheon for the Outstanding Baggage Handler of the Year is from 12 noon–2 p.m.”

Team Alpha (Dunnit, Grossvater, Authoritarian) immediately began searching for the system parts, and soon was dragging boxes toward the control tower. Team Omega (Robbinson, Kinder, Stern) huddled in a strategic planning meeting. Decisions about how to proceed and whether to attend the luncheon took more than five hours.

By four o’clock, both teams had assembled a working system, but no one had attended the Baggage Handler’s luncheon. When the systems were activated, it caused a power overload, which was fixed when General Dunnit “hot-wired” his Palm VII into the system, resulting in Team Alpha winning the IT Challenge.

Trustee Weise addressed the group:

“Congratulations to Team Alpha. For winning the IT Challenge, you will receive a lifetime supply of 5¼ inch floppy disks, donated by a Distinguished Alumnus. And, I am pleased to announce that Bill Gates has been hired as Chief Information Officer. Team Omega, don your ceremonial attire and assemble at the Cinnabon, to eliminate one team member.”

Slowly, solemnly, in colorful academic regalia, Team Omega processed to the Cinnabon. The strains of “Pompous

Circumstances” wafted through the air. Trustee Weise spoke solemnly:

“Having lost the IT Challenge, you must vote for the elimination of one member”

On a napkin, each team member wrote a name. When Trustee Weise held up the votes for all to view, Senator Stern learned that he was the first to be eliminated. “Senator”, said Weise, “it’s time for you to go.”

Senator Stern left the Balta airport on a private jet headed for Washington, DC. Six months later, he assumed the presidency of the AAPBO (American Association of Presidents Between Opportunities).

DAY TWO

When the applicants were awakened, they discovered that their uniforms were missing. Trustee Weise smiled:

“Good morning, applicants. Today’s Challenge is the Presidential Image Challenge. It is essential that a president be impeccably dressed. But, you say, your uniforms are missing? After you failed to attend the luncheon yesterday, the Baggage Handlers volunteered to transport your uniforms to the site of today’s challenge: The Baggage Carousel. At this moment, your uniforms are riding on the carousel. You must run there, find your Blue uniform, and become presidentially attired. A photographer from the Chronicle of Higher Fashion is ready to photograph the winner for a front-page article.”

As the teams raced toward the Baggage Carousel, they saw individual pieces of clothing moving on all eight carousels. As they sorted through the disheveled items, it became apparent that an alliance had formed between Antonia Robinson and Elizabeth Kinder. Quickly, Dr. Kinder put on any item found by either woman, until she was dressed in blue from head to toe and out she rushed for her photo shoot with the Chronicle of Higher Fashion.

Following the photo shoot, Trustee Weise addressed the group:

“Congratulations, Team Omega! You win a lifetime supply of identical Blue Suits. Also, Oscar de la Renta has been hired as Dean of Fashion and Design, and presidential tailor. Team Alpha, you must immediately assemble at the Cinnabon to eliminate one team member.”

For the first time, Team Alpha experienced the solemn ritual of the vote-off. Annoyed by the fact that General Dunit stopped to spit-shine his boots during this challenge, the group eliminated him. Trustee Weise escorted the General to the taxiway, where a Humvee was waiting. Several months later, General Dunit was promoted and assigned to head security at the US Embassy in Grenada.

DAY THREE

On Day Three, the applicants learned about the VISION CHALLENGE from Trustee Weise:

“A president must be able to think creatively. Your challenge involves the future of Balta Airport, which aspires to be classified as a Jetson Airport II in five years. However, Balta’s storage hangar is filled with bi-planes. Your challenge is to create a strategic plan to retrofit those planes for space travel. To facilitate your work, I have supplied large, empty refrigerator boxes—you must each go into the box, shut the flaps, and remain there until you have a creative solution.”

Many hours later, Trustee Weise declared Team Alpha the winner after Professor Authoritarian produced a 1,247-page strategic plan in Latin. Team Alpha received certificates for free Radial Kerotomy, and the University bought an unlimited membership in the Psychic Hotline, thereby eliminating the need for a Vice President for Planning and Assessment.

Although everyone waited and waited, Antonia Robinson never came out of the box. Finally, the airport custodians sealed the box and carried it away. One year following her de facto elimination, Antonia became a celebrity on the hit show “Who Wants to Marry a University President?”

DAY FOUR

Trustee Weise smiled:

“Your challenge for today is the Super Hero Challenge. As a president, you will spend countless hours in airports, and must successfully maneuver the challenges of travel. You are at gate B12. In 17 minutes, you must arrive at gate p300. On your way, you must learn the names of all the gate agents and do an interview with the Sinistral University student newspaper. The last person to arrive will be automatically eliminated.”

Grossvater, Kinder, and Authoritarian raced down the concourse, taking a few seconds to greet each individual along the way by name. Gasping for breath and dripping with sweat, they were interviewed by the student newspaper. Although the race was close, Grossvater and Kinder entered the gate area narrowly beating out Professor Authoritarian.

Trustee Weise addressed the winners:

“You have performed well. Inspired by your stamina, you will receive a lifetime supply of Ginkgo biloba. And I am excited to announce the appointment of Billy Bob Tae-Bo, as Athletic Director and Presidential Personal trainer. Professor Authoritarian, since you were the last to cross the finish line, the time has come for you to leave.”

As she leaves the airport, Professor Authoritarian turns to the camera and mutters “acta est fabula (the drama has been acted out)”. Professor Authoritarian is forced to walk home. But, once her blisters healed and her mind cleared, she went on to fame and fortune after founding a new Internet startup *www.nihilistic.fit.com*.

DAY FIVE

Trustee Weise presented the FUND RAISING Challenge:

“Candidates, you know that fund raising is of paramount importance. You must raise money for the new TRILLION dollar Space Voyager Terminal. The individual who raises the most money by sundown today will be named the president of Sinistral University.”

Both candidates worked furiously throughout the day, and began to accumulate many donations and pledges. However, Dr. Kinder, who convinced the passengers of a jumbo-jet to donate their spare change to SU, achieved the coup de grace! With her successful campaign completed and planning to start the next one, Dr. Kinder was named the President of Sinistral University.

So the next time YOUR university needs to hire anyone from CEO to Assistant Professor, do not waste your time or money engaging a search firm or assembling a search committee, just look to popular culture in developing your own new and exciting selection process. It worked at Sinistral! It may just work for you!

Author’s Disclaimer: All persons, places, and events in this satire are fictional. Obviously, these candidates show no similarity to actual presidential candidates, who are all wise, good-looking, clever, and polite, with impeccable table manners and well-shined Italian shoes.