

“A Half-Day in the Life of a University President”
By G. Wayne Clough, President, Georgia Institute of Technology
Celebrity Playwright Fundraiser, Horizon Theatre, March 2002

Setting

Office of the university president, including outer office area. President’s office includes his desk and chairs for guests. Outer office has a desk for an administrative assistant.

Props

Phones on both desks

Computers on both desks would be realistic, but are not essential to the play

Brief case for the president.

Papers and folders as indicated.

Characters in order of appearance

Administrative assistant (AA)

President

Provost

Athletic director

Parent (can be same actor as provost)

As the lights come up, the administrative assistant is sitting at his/her desk at work. The president enters immediately, carrying a brief case.

President: Good morning! How’s everything this morning?

AA: Doing just fine. How was your breakfast meeting with the alumni?

President: Well, the food was good.

AA: Okay, what did they want?

President: This group wants us to fire the head basketball coach and expects an answer by **noon today**.

AA: That’s interesting. The group you met with yesterday demanded that we keep the coach. Maybe we can put them both in a room and let them fight it out. We go with whoever’s left standing... By the way, the athletic director called yesterday saying the coach was expecting a raise. He wants your response by **noon today**.

While AA is speaking, provost enters outer office carrying file of papers.

AA: Here's the provost, right on schedule for your 9:00 meeting.

President (*walks into his office, puts briefcase down and sits at his desk*): Come in and have a seat. Have you gotten the results from that survey on faculty morale?

Provost (*follows president into his office, takes a seat on the other side of the desk*): Right here. (*Indicates file.*) There's good news and bad news. Which do you want to hear first?

President: Let's get the bad news out of the way.

Provost: Okay. (*Looks at papers.*) The survey shows that faculty morale is at an all time low.

President: Geez. What's the good news?

Provost: The good news is that this is as high as faculty morale has ever been. The faculty is looking for a statement from you on what you plan to do to improve morale in response to the survey. I've promised them that you would post something on the administration website by **noon today**.

As the provost is speaking, the phone rings and the AA answers quietly in the background, then sticks his/her head in the door, waiting for the provost to finish.

AA: Excuse me, but the chairman of the board of trustees is on the phone, so I thought I'd better interrupt and let you talk to him.

President (*picks up phone*): Good morning, sir. I hope you're doing well.... I see.... Let me get this straight. You've been informed that a professor of sociology took a group of students on a field trip in a university van to the red-light district of New Orleans to study the lifestyle of prostitutes. They were seen parking the van in the French Quarter and were singing the school fight song as they entered a bordello... No, this is the first I've heard of it.... Yes, I'll call you back by **noon today** with a full report on what I intend to do about it.

While he is speaking, the phone rings again and the AA answers quietly in the background. The AA again sticks his/her head in the door, waiting for the president to hang up.

AA: As long as this meeting is interrupted, I thought I'd better tell you that the staff at the Student Center just called. Both the Young Democrats and the Young Republicans claim to have reserved the conference room in the Student Center for this afternoon. The Student Center staff says they don't have either one down for the room – they have the International Students Club on their calendar. All three groups are demanding to

know why this university can't get its act together, and say they intend to stage protest demonstrations if this matter is not resolved to their satisfaction by **noon today**.

Provost: Well, I can see you're going to have a busy morning. But before I leave, let me give you some real good news. Professor Chen of electrical engineering was awarded a top prize for inventing a new device that can measure the heartbeat of soldiers on the battlefield from a remote site. It will help medics know who to treat first as they move into care for the wounded. A great recognition for him and us.

President: Wonderful news. Hey, wait a minute. We could use this thing here on campus. I've always wondered if some of those tenured professors were actually still alive.

Provost laughs, leaves office. As provost leaves, AA steps into president's office and hands him a sheaf of papers.

AA: Here's the morning mail. Note that letter on the top from the parents of one of our incoming freshmen. They are irate because their son Charlie did not get a President's Scholarship.

President (*looking down at letter*): That's ridiculous. I remember this kid – he only had a 1200 SAT, a 3.2 GPA and was only vice-president of the chess club. President's Scholars start at a 1400 SAT and a 3.8 GPA, and they all have a long list of leadership activities. What can these people be thinking?

AA: Well the mom and dad say they know Charlie better than we do and that we just didn't see his real potential. They say they are friends with the Governor and are writing him a letter, and they're threatening to sue. I need to know how you want to respond by **noon today** so we can get the legal department working on it this afternoon.

While AA is speaking, Athletic director enters, sticks his head in the door of the president's office. He is carrying two folders. AA leaves. Athletic director speaks as he enters.

Athletic director: I know you're busy, but the press is on my case – they're expecting an announcement about the new assistant football coach by **noon today**. I've narrowed it down to two candidates, but I need your advice on the final choice. Here are their resumes. (*Holds out folders.*)

President (*looking into folders*): Hmmmm... (*Phone rings in the background, AA answers quietly*) I wonder if this guy really has a master's degree in biomedical engineering.

AA (*still holding phone, sticks head around the door*): Excuse me, but Richard Belcher from Channel 2 is on the phone. He's investigating a story about a faculty member who

billed the university \$3,000 for a trip to China to do research on the difference between Chinese and American integrated circuit boards. However, Richard says that these days American electronics products use Chinese circuit boards, so he thinks the trip was really a vacation boondoggle. He's looking for a live interview with you for the news at **noon today**. Look out the window! You can see the news truck out there running up the antenna.

While AA is speaking, a middle-aged parent tentatively enters and looks around nervously.

AA (*spotting intruder*): Can we help you, sir?

Parent: Is this the president's office?

As he speaks, the president walks up.

AA: Yes. This is the president right here

Parent: Mr. President, my name is Rodrigo Cortez and I want to tell you about my daughter who just graduated. (*Phone rings in background, AA answers quietly.*) She's the first from my family to ever attend college, and at the beginning I didn't want her to come here to a big city to attend a big university. But I want you to know that she loved college and now has a great job. We are grateful to you and your faculty for giving her such a wonderful experience, and I just wanted to shake your hand and say thanks.

President's grimace gradually relaxes into a grin as he listens. As father concludes. President extends a hand to shake hands.

President: Mr. Cortez, thank you for sending your daughter here, and for reminding me why I love this job.

AA (*sticking head around the door*): Someone from Horizon Theatre is on the phone. She says you promised to be a celebrity playwright for a fund-raiser. You're supposed to be writing a play about a half-day in the life of a university president, and it's due by **noon today**.

Curtain.