

PATRICE W. GLENN JONES

VAMPIRE LEADERS SUCK



THE DARK FORCES DRAINING
ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM OSCAR HOLMES IV,
ROSWELL LAWRENCE JR, KEVIN A ROLLE AND LENFORD SUTTON

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The Dark Forces Draining Academic Institutions

Patrice W. Glenn Jones
Alabama State University, USA

With contributions from American Council on
Education fellows Oscar Holmes IV, Roswell Lawrence Jr.,
Kevin A. Rolle, and Lenford Sutton



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrice W. Glenn Jones, Ph.D. is a visionary leader in online education, blending thoughtful design, immersive technology, and just enough irreverence to keep things interesting. A literature lover with an infectious sense of humor, she embraces the honor of being a lifelong learner and a self-proclaimed “forever teacher.” While passionate about student engagement and real-world learning, she has zero patience for leadership theatrics, inflated egos, or boardroom power plays. Preferring to work in the background as an educational muse rather than a leadership showpiece, Patrice champions curiosity-driven exploration, practical application, and learning environments that are as engaging as they are rigorous. Her distaste for toxic leadership—particularly the kind that sucks the life out of innovation—led to *Vampire Leaders Suck* during her American Council on Education fellowship in 2023–2024. Patrice has served in numerous leadership roles, including assistant professor, program director, educational consultant, and assistant dean, each reinforcing her deep understanding of the good, the bad, and the downright ridiculous sides of higher education. Her work has appeared in *The Journal of Negro Education*, *the International Journal of Teacher Education and Professional Development*, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, and *Inside Higher Ed*—proving that, while she loves to laugh, she’s serious about promoting change. Patrice holds a Ph.D. in educational leadership from Florida A&M University, an educational specialist degree in information science and learning technology from the University of Missouri-Columbia, and both a master’s and bachelor’s degree in English from the University of North Florida.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Oscar Holmes IV, SHRM-SCP is an Associate Professor of Management and Director of the Rutgers University Student Executive (RUSE) program at Rutgers School of Business-Camden where he has taught executive education, graduate, and undergraduate courses in Leadership and Managing Human Capital, Organizational Behavior, Conflict Management and Negotiation, DEI Management, and Crisis Management. Additionally, he is the founder and CEO of WHConsulting Firm, LLC and creator and host of *Diversity Matters* podcast which premiered in 2020. His research examines how leaders can maximize productivity and well-being through fostering more inclusive environments and has been published in several top-tier management journals and books. He earned a Ph.D. and M.A. in Management at The University of Alabama, M.L.A. from The University of Richmond and a B.S. with honors from Virginia Commonwealth University.

Roswell Lawrence Jr. serves as the assistant vice president and chief of staff for Finance and Administration (F&A) at the University of Georgia (UG). This 2023–2024 American Council on Education Fellow provides leadership for UG’s F&A through holistic client relations mitigation while being a liaison to the university’s academic, research and student life areas. Lawrence earned his BBA from the University of Georgia and a Master of Business Administration from Piedmont University. He also holds a Master of Divinity from Luther Rice University & Seminary and a Ph.D. in educational administration and policy from the University of Georgia.

Kevin A. Rolle, Ph.D. is a veteran executive leader in the academy. He presently serves as the Chief of Staff at Alabama State University and a mentoring educational leader to many. As an ambassador for the president, he provides specialized services and support, set the tone for communicating with internal and external stakeholders, provides leadership, direction and executive oversight in accordance with all accreditation, regulatory, and governmental standards, and works closely with the Board of Trustees and manages a

staff of Vice Presidents and Directors. He has more than 30 years of progressive administrative experience in higher education. Prior to joining ASU, he served as the Executive Vice President and Chief Operation Officer at Alabama A&M University and a full tenured professor of Educational Leadership/Urban Affairs.

Lenford Sutton, Ph.D. is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations at Illinois State University, where he has held an academic appointment for the last ten years. Dr. Sutton's research interests focus on education funding, public school privatization, the fiscal effects of educational reform, school desegregation, and education finance litigation. The results of his research have been published in various journals, including *Educational Considerations*, *the International Journal of Education Reform*, and the *Journal of Education Finance*. He was selected as a Distinguished Research & Practice Fellow in 2014 by the National Education Finance Academy, serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Education Finance*, and is a past member of the Board of Directors of the Education Law Association and Board of Trustees for the National Education Finance Academy. He is the author of *A Higher Education Walk in the Struggle for American Identity*.

FOREWORD: YES, THEY SUCK

There is no question; vampires suck. The action and condition of “sucking” are simultaneously one of the most notable behaviors of these creatures. They literally suck the blood of their victims, draining them of life. Thus, by condition, these dark beings also “suck” figuratively, the colloquial meaning (i.e., an expression of disapproval or dissatisfaction with someone or something).

The relativity of disapproval emits degrees of reactions when a person communicates to another that something “sucks.” While I may find a said behavior reprehensible, a colleague of a similar education level and parallel commitment to a common cause may find that same behavior as, “not so bad.” During conversations with various American Council on Education fellows, some of whom I have come to respect and their counsel value, it became clear that the range of “sucking” exists on a spectrum even among high education leaders.

In *Vampire Leaders Suck*, we (i.e., I and some of those same fellows) embark on a journey that weaves the lore of vampire films into the fabric of a somber real-life narrative—one that scrutinizes the profound impact of vampire leaders on the pillars of our academic institutions. This book stands at the confluence of playful allegory and critical examination, shedding light on a shadow that looms largely over the sanctuaries of higher learning.

The term “vampire leader” is more than a metaphorical dalliance. It encapsulates those who, much like their cinematic counterparts, drain the vitality, talent, and resources of educational institutions for personal gain and leave behind a trail of disillusionment and decay. The parallels drawn from the silver screen to the academy are not only creative but serve as a stark reminder of the pervasive influence such leaders wield, casting long shadows over the potential for innovation and progress.

Acknowledging the whimsical interplay of vampire films within these pages, we also confront a grave reality; these leaders, with their predatory practices, have no rightful place within the academy. Their presence is anathema to the ethos of education and enlightenment, posing a significant

barrier to the advancement and well-being of both educators and students alike. In this critical moment, as the higher education ecosystem undergoes leadership scrutiny, questions of value proposition, and a potential transformative shift, the call for leaders of virtue has never been more urgent.

We also stand on the brink of an uncertain future which makes the need for resilient and ethical leadership paramount. The academy is not just a bastion of knowledge but a forge for the future. Collectively, we are tasked with preparing students for a world increasingly dominated by disruptions of the positive and negative sort; remixes of caste, class, and discrimination; technology that is getting smarter; and just some plain old “dumb shit.”

Technology, in particular, leaves some excited and other nervous, as the uncertainty make look similar to the current terrain, or it could play out like some of the science fiction films we’ve watched with a degree of loathing. Take *iRobot* for example. The film is set a decade in the future from this publication when humanoid robots assist humans in daily life. Detective Del Spooner (Will Smith) distrusts robots and investigates Dr. Lanning’s death, suspecting a robot named Sonny. He discovers VIKI, a superintelligent AI, planning a robotic takeover to protect humanity. The conflict highlights the central theme of the film—human fear of artificial intelligence surpassing human control and the potential consequences of relying too heavily on technology.

No matter how it all plays out, in reality, the uncertainty weighs on preparation and creative approaches to problems, and higher education institutions have a role in shaping our future. The imperative to partner with industry to create alternative learning pathways for workforce development is not just an opportunity but a necessity. These collaborations are essential for equipping our students with the skills and knowledge to navigate the complexities of tomorrow.

While some would take the acknowledgment of vampire leaders in higher education as “evidence” to support their arguments against the value of higher education, this book is not that. Besides, the argument would be flawed and superfluous. Vampire leaders are among us in the academy, but they are also in every sector—business, politics, medicine, ministry—not just higher education. We can certainly see these dark leaders among this polarized political climate, so before anyone gets on the tangent to delegitimize trade schools, colleges, and universities because of vampire leaders acknowledged in this book, let me stop you. We assert with full conviction that higher education and all types of post-secondary institutions have as much validity today as they ever have.

Yet, our future is indeed jeopardized by the presence of vampire leaders who, entrenched in their pursuit of power and self-interest, undermine these vital initiatives. Their removal is not merely a matter of institutional integrity but a prerequisite for survival and relevance in the rapidly evolving panorama of higher education.

In the spirit of the valiant Van Helsing, a character of profound virtue and resilience, this book calls for individuals who possess the courage to confront these malevolent forces. It is these leaders of character, armed with the light of transparency, accountability, empathy for people, and a steadfast commitment to the greater good, who can guide our institutions out of the darkness. They are the light, the bonfire of expectation, the torch of illumination through darkness. They are the hope for a future where the academy fulfills its noblest aspirations, nurturing minds and spirits free from the parasitic grasp of those who would do them harm.

Vampire Leaders Suck is more than an exploration of the challenges facing our academic institutions; it gives voice to those who have come face-to-face with such leaders and provides a clarion call to action. It implores us to rally behind leaders who embody the principles of virtue, equity, and excellence. Only then can we exorcise these vampiric presences from our midst and paving the way for a renaissance in higher education. A transformation that is inclusive, innovative, and insatiably curious about the possibilities of the future. Let us heed this call, for the stakes have never been higher. In light of these high stakes, we must arm ourselves with metaphorical wooden “stakes” to dismantle the darkness.

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PART I

THE FIRST BITE: EXPOSING THE VAMPIRE IN LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER 1

THE SELF-MASTERY OF LEADERSHIP

Patrice W. Glenn Jones
Alabama State University, USA

Some people dream of reaching the summit of leadership, and in the academic world, that often means becoming a college or university president. For some, this ambition is fueled by a desire to prove something to themselves or others—a way to silence past voices of doubt. For others, it’s about fulfilling a lifelong expectation of greatness, or simply the allure of power and prestige. But whatever the motivation, leadership is a formidable challenge, and those who pursue it without mastering themselves can easily become what we call “vampire leaders”—draining rather than uplifting those they lead.

Let’s face it; when you are a university president, there is no higher stair to climb—unless the goal then becomes president emeritus. Others desire the assent to top leadership for the lure of power or the love of money. Then, there are those whose pursuit stems from a desire to serve. Still, there are those who do not pursue the role; instead, the role pursues them. Those who fall in the latter two categories are often those we lament when they are gone.

In recent years, many have come to question the role of the college or university president. In his essay title, “The Impossible College Presidency,” Brian Rosenberg, president emeritus of Macalester College and a visiting professor in the Harvard Graduate School of Education, discusses the increasing challenges faced by college presidents, who are under immense

pressure from both internal and external forces, making their roles nearly impossible. Rosenberg (2024) highlights the unrealistic expectations placed on these leaders, the frequent turnover in these positions, and the deep misunderstandings about the actual power and responsibilities of a college president, which ultimately contribute to a toxic environment that discourages effective leadership in higher education. Many people have opinions about the role, legitimacy, and even scope of work for college and university presidents, but those like Rosenberg bring experience to the conversation.

Leadership, especially at the top, can be isolating. The phrase “It’s lonely at the top” isn’t just a cliché; it’s a reality for many in leadership roles. William Shakespeare communicated a similar idea with, “Heavy is the head that wears the crown.” The pressures of leadership are immense, the expectations often unrealistic, and the scrutiny constant. We see it in the graying hair of presidents and the toll it takes on their health and spirit. The job can feel like an endless battle against forces, making true success seem impossible.

But effective leadership begins with self-awareness. As James M. Kouzes and Barry Pozner, the authors of *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, put it, “The instrument of leadership is the self, and mastery of the art of leadership comes from mastery of the self.” We agree with Kouzes and Pozner, and it is this very idea that makes the present book significant.

True leadership stems from self-awareness and self-mastery. Effective leaders must first understand and control their own emotions, behaviors, and motivations before they can successfully lead others. By mastering themselves, leaders can act with integrity, make sound decisions, and inspire trust and confidence in their teams. In essence, personal growth and self-discipline are foundational to the ability to lead others effectively and to achieve extraordinary results in organizations, including higher education institutions.

It is natural for those who have encountered “bad” leadership to read this volume, but we also hope that those who may be “bad” leaders are also reading this. Leadership is not merely about the influence you exert or the decisions you make; it’s about the legacy you leave behind. To ensure that your impact is positive rather than corrosive, it’s crucial to take a hard, honest look at yourself. This self-examination helps you identify whether your actions uplift and inspire, or if they drain and diminish those around you, like a “vampire leader.” Mastery of self requires recognizing your flaws, biases, and weaknesses, and actively working to transform them. By committing to self-improvement and accountability, you ensure that your leadership nurtures growth, fosters trust, and leaves people and organizations better than you found them. This journey of self-mastery is essential to becoming the kind of leader who empowers others and drives meaningful, lasting change.

Reflections in the Mirror

At the end of each chapter, you will encounter questions to help you reflect upon the reading and upon your own experiences. Of the questions you will encounter, we venture to say that these first questions are among the most significant.

Answer each question honestly:

1. What personal experiences or insecurities have influenced my ambitions or goals?
2. Am I pursuing leadership roles for validation, power, or a genuine desire to serve and make a difference?
3. How well do I truly know myself—my strengths, weaknesses, biases, and motivations?
4. In what ways do I see myself impacting others—do I uplift or unintentionally drain those around me?
5. What steps can I take to better understand and master myself to ensure that I leave a positive, lasting legacy?

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CHAPTER 2

EXPOSING THE SHADOWS: INTRODUCING VAMPIRE LEADERSHIP

Patrice W. Glenn Jones
Alabama State University, USA

In the dominion of gothic horror, few mythical creatures have captivated the human imagination quite like the vampire. These undead, soulless beings stalk the night and are driven by an insatiable thirst for the lifeblood of their victims. With their hypnotic powers and aversion to light, they bewitch the unwary and drain them of their vitality, as well of their free will. It is a chilling metaphor, one that conjures visions of malevolent forces preying upon the innocent in pursuit of immortality.

Yet, what if this metaphor extended beyond the pages of Bram Stoker’s seminal work? What if the concept of the vampire—an entity that feeds parasitically upon others, spreading its corruptive influence through the creation of morally desecrated acolytes—found form not in the stuff of nightmares, but in the very leaders entrusted with the governance of our academic institutions?

Such is the notion that has taken root in the halls of academia, where the phrase “bats in the belfry” has taken on a new, sinister connotation. For many who have grappled with the toxicity of leaders drunk on power and devoid of conscience, an unsettling truth has emerged; the real threat does not come from mere winged creatures, but from a far more pernicious force—the scourge of vampire leadership.

It goes without saying that “bad” leaders are an unfortunate and persistent reality across various sectors and organizations. They have always existed. Terms like “toxic,” “tyrant,” “autocratic,” “narcissist,” and my personal favorite, “incompetent,” have long been used to describe such leaders. These mal leaders exhibit behaviors ranging from micromanaging and bullying to outright neglect and shady ethics. Their poor decision-making, lack of empathy, and inability to inspire can lead to a plethora of negative outcomes: low morale, decreased productivity, high turnover rates, and even financial disaster or a tarnished reputation. The spectrum of “bad” leadership is wide, with “vampire” leaders lurking at the very worst end.

As we found ourselves ensnared in the throes of such a malignant presence, the parallels became impossible to ignore. This malevolent entity, cloaked in the guise of authority, drained the very lifeblood from the institution it was meant to nurture. It was then that we stumbled upon the seminal work of Van Wart, Rahman, and Mazumdar, who elucidated the insidious concept of “vampire leadership”—a phenomenon that, much like its mythical counterpart, thrives on the exploitation of others and the consolidation of power through any means necessary.

According to Van Wart et al. (2021), vampire leaders possess an insidious combination of traits that allow them to feed parasitically upon the institutions they are meant to serve. Like the undead predators of legend, they are rapacious and tenacious, relentlessly pursuing their selfish agenda with a voracious appetite for power and control.

They employ Wily and Machiavellian tactics, deflecting blame and responsibility onto others through deception and manipulation. Defiant of authority and accountability, they operate in secrecy, hoarding power and shunning transparency—shying away from the purifying light of oversight like the mythical vampires who cannot cast a reflection.

Their narcissism knows no bounds, driven by an inflated sense of self-importance and charisma that captivates their followers through hypnotic rhetoric and demagoguery. Yet this very same magnetic pull enables them to create “vampires” of their own—subordinates co-opted into embracing the same parasitic mindset, exchanging independent thought for sycophantic obedience.

Perhaps most insidious is their ability to shapeshift and adapt, seamlessly altering their methods to suit the situation while always maintaining an unwavering commitment to their self-serving objectives. They feed upon the “blood” of the institution itself—exploiting its talents, resources and goodwill in a perpetual cycle of bloodsucking that leaves it drained and hollow.

In essence, the vampire leader embodies the darkest qualities of the mythological undead—a relentless, soulless force that survives by draining the vitality from that which they have been entrusted to nurture and sustain. This chapter provides more context around each of the characteristics identified by Van Wart, Rahman, and Mazumdar and provides the foundation for discourse about why vampire leaders suck.