

## How to Leave (A Legacy)

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Leaving a place one loves is never easy, but as I look back on my 10 years of leadership at Wheaton College (MA), I am somewhat astonished at how much has been accomplished: I have been so preoccupied with the “doing” that I have not, until recently, taken much time to contemplate what has been done!

But in the spirit of passing along what I have learned, with the hope that others may also find it useful, here are a few guiding principles that have served me well:

1. **Start with a clear set of goals.** The board of trustees, in its wisdom, was very clear about what it wanted the new president to accomplish when I was appointed in 2004. Concomitantly, I had my own personal and institutional goals in mind as well, all focused on serving the institution through effective leadership.
2. **Lead, but stay flexible.** Since the first days of my presidency, I have stayed focused on ensuring that Wheaton became a stronger, more inclusive academic institution. Over the last 10 years, however, the manner in which this objective has been accomplished has changed significantly as a result of the environment. Namely, the global economic recession in 2008, which has caused seismic changes in all sectors of higher education.
3. **Fit the solution to the institution.** Colleges’ and universities’ responses to the economic challenges posed by the recession have varied. For Wheaton, I thought that it was critically important to look beyond the immediate crisis and take an evolutionary as opposed to a disruptive or revolutionary approach. In my opinion, this approach has had a much more enduring impact on the college.
4. **Be patient and persistent.** Case in point: We were on our way to what appeared to be a very successful capital campaign in 2008. However, we decided to delay the public phase by one year to the fall of 2009. During that same year, one of the key priorities of the campaign, a state-of-the art science center, was put on hold for 18 months shortly after the site preparation had been concluded. Faculty and students were extremely disappointed with this decision, and many believed that the new facility would never be built. But it was the right choice, given the fact that the capital markets were virtually closed. In the end, we built the Mars Center for Science and Technology at a lesser cost than originally projected, and it received a higher level of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification than originally planned (LEED Gold).  
Over the past six years, my colleagues and I have worked tirelessly to chart a more sustainable path for Wheaton. As a tuition-dependent institution, this has not

been a simple task. Indeed, it has been painful at times—for instance, when we implemented a reduction in force for staff: We made a set of operational decisions that have benefited the college. We have also developed a set of strategies intended to demonstrate the value of a Wheaton education and to produce more net revenue. For instance, we have added several new majors over the past three years, including an interdisciplinary business and management major.

5. **Embrace the moment.** I have made many decisions that were not necessarily on the list of goals and objectives that I started with 10 years ago. However, the realities of the situation facing Wheaton and, indeed, all of higher education made it necessary for us to adapt and to act. As a result, I believe Wheaton is on a much more sustainable path than when I began my tenure as president in 2004.

*Ronald A. Crutcher will step down as president of Wheaton College (MA) in June 2014.*