

J. Michael Locke

Musings

Guest Musing #2: Trust in Institutions: Denison President Adam Weinberg May 31, 2020

I wanted to share a guest perspective following yesterday's musing on the decline in trust in institutions. Here are some thoughts from the President of Denison University, Dr. Adam Weinberg.

I am really struck by the views of Yuval Levin in a new book called *A Time to Build*. Levin talks openly about the need to rebuild institutions. Levin's fundamental call is for institutions that help us develop the capacity and willingness to lead with a commitment to things larger than ourselves, where leadership less as performance and more as service to society. Everything you wrote about today is about institutions that are really nothing more than platforms for people to perform totally divorced from values or service.

Colleges can play a role by helping students understand why institutions matter and helping students develop the skills, values and habits to reform institutions. College presidents can play a role by leading with values. In a wonderful quote towards the end of the book, Levin writes, "We don't have to figure out how everyone else might do this; we just have to do it ourselves. You and I. We can do it in small ways-in thinking about how to use our time and energy; how to pursue our goals, how to judge success and failures, how to identify ourselves when other people ask us who we are, how to measure our responsibilities."

Here is what I said to our students in a recent ceremony, "Leadership is something we do with others in our communities, places of work, friendship networks, associations, and so forth. We all act as leaders and how we do it matters. The COVID crisis has forced me to peer deep inside myself to ask what kind of leadership I will lend to this college that I love and what kinds of leadership I hope this college will help our students take out into the world. For me, I am trying to lean into our values. To lead in ways that serve the needs of the Denison community, that gives people hope, and perhaps deepens their belief in and connection to the college. I don't always get it right. And I can't do everything that I want to do. But, I can follow Levin's advice and act with purpose, intent and clarity. To use practical wisdom to make decisions that I believe are right and in service of the common aspirations we hold."

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Second Thoughts

Good article on distrust and contact tracing by Peggy Noonan: *We came from people being pushed around, and mistrust of authority is in our DNA. Americans are exactly the people who won't like trackers asking them who they've seen and where they've been, and telling them where they can't go and what they can't do.* [the-challenge-of-contact-tracing-in-america](#)

I don't want Google tracing me by my cell phone. Personally, I have moved to DuckDuckGo (no tracking) for a search engine and unplugged from Facebook.