

No More Dr. Nice Guy

by Duane Cobb

Management professor Stephen Bushardt once remarked to a then-CBA colleague that “if *you* don’t like George Carter, then there’s something wrong with *you*.” That was years ago, in the time just after Carter resigned as chair of the economics department in the late 1990s. Since hearing of this statement back in those days – a statement that has become conventional CBA wisdom over the years – I have thought little about it. However, events of the past few weeks and months that have been reported by this website have me thinking about that statement again.

. . . Stephen Bushardt once remarked to a then-CBA colleague that “if you don’t like George Carter, then there’s something wrong with you.

If you’ve been around the business college for any length of time then you’re familiar with the endless “Happy day!” barrage from Carter. And, if you’re like most, you’ve always thought of it as way over the top, clearly contrived. After getting quite a dose of it early on in his tenure at USM, one former colleague remarked that Dr. Carter seemed more like “Dr. Prozac.” It’s this persona that Bushardt was referring to – that plastic, make-believe gregarious guy that Carter always seems to be.

Bushardt’s statement about Carter, though simple in structure, is rich in significance. It represents a small but important part of the unspoken campaign, along with the “Carter as ethicist-in-residence” idea, to elevate Carter’s character. As the statement goes, any disparagement of Carter’s character is not only misplaced, it speaks negatively about one’s own character. Given Carter’s past and present administrative position in the college, this sort of “elevation” of Carter’s character has the potential to lend legitimacy to “the administration’s” actions.

What have we heard about Carter over the years, as supplemented by what has appeared on this website, that allows us to rethink the “conventional wisdom” of the old CBA? As reported on this website, it seems that Carter participated in an effort to deny Trellis Green’s promotion to associate professor (and possibly Green’s tenure) in the early/mid-1990s. In doing so, I have been told that Carter reportedly phoned Green’s wife and informed her that he (Carter) planned to have Green fired from USM. In response to the denial of his promotion in 1994, Green filed a lawsuit. When Green’s

lawsuit got to trial in 1997, the University settled and Green was awarded promotion to associate professor (and an undisclosed financial settlement). Around that time Carter resigned as chair of the economics department.

What have we heard about Carter over the years . . . that allows us to rethink all of the "conventional wisdom" of the old CBA?

Are we to suppose that there must be something wrong with *Green* because he took action against Carter? Hardly. The University's move to settle the case speaks against that. I was recently told that in the years following Green's case that Carter refused to invite Green to his home whenever he (Carter) hosted departmental social gatherings. And, at one point, Green asked Carter why he was left off of the list of invitees, and Carter reportedly responded by saying that his (Carter's) wife refused to include Green because (as she reportedly put it) ". . . he [Green] tried to take my house." This statement presumably reflects her take on Green's lawsuit against her husband, wherein Green sought promotion and \$800,000 in actual and punitive damages.

In all of this, where is the consideration about what Carter's (et al.) actions potentially took from Green? It's completely lost. It appears that Carter wanted Green fired, and, failing that, sought to deny him promotion to associate. Carter took these actions even though his own tenure was acquired after 12 academic years on the job. It's as if the Carters live in their own little world, wherein nothing other than their own comfort and joy is relevant.

Since those days, Carter has once again ascended to chair the economics department. I am told that he is once again hosting departmental social gatherings at his home, and that Green has been included on the list of invitees. However, as I was told, Green's inclusion occurred only after economics professor Charles Sawyer had a meeting with Carter to explain that the exclusion of Green from departmental social gatherings is not a suitable move for a department chair.

Carter also appears to have learned very little in other familiar areas over the past decade, as indicated by the two grievances that were filed against him in the fall of 2006, just 12 months after regaining the chairmanship. In the grievance filed by economics professor Frank Mixon there is the familiar allegation that Carter, along with Dean Harold Doty and Associate Dean Farhang Niroomand, conspired to force Mixon to resign from USM because he (Mixon) apparently reported improper administrative

behavior in the college. I am quite certain that a forced resignation would threaten Mixon's, or anyone's, family/livelihood (house). Where is Carter's, or the Carters', concern about that? Of course there is no concern from that quarter, as we learned from the Green case. In the Carters' own little world it's okay to "dish it out," it's "taking it" that's the problem.

Carter also appears to have learned very little in other familiar areas over the past decade . . .

We *have* seen that, even in Carter's own mind, he *can* do wrong. We witnessed, almost firsthand (thanks to audio available on this website), Carter speak disparagingly of Dean Doty. After a public airing of his statements, Carter made a public apology for his (Carter's) transgressions. However, what we know about Carter's belief system is that trespasses exist only when a superior is trespassed against. Because Doty is his boss, Carter sought forgiveness for his trespasses. (This essay doesn't address the fact that Carter's "apology" implicated, without proof, a junior faculty in the "transgression"). Former finance professor Michael Madaris, on the other hand, is a different story. Carter's inflammatory statements about Madaris, also available (in written form) on this website, are not transgressions, precisely because Madaris resides beneath Carter on life's mast.

All of this takes us back to Bushardt's years-old statement to a former CBA colleague about Carter. Here's something to ponder. The opinion that Associate Dean Niroomand is a corrosive figure is one that is almost universally held by those who have experience with his administrative style since the late 1990s. George Carter recently made the comment that Farhang Niroomand is a person that he (Carter) works with real well. What does that say about George Carter?