

Emphasizing the Positive: Forming a Strategic Identity for the Ross School of Business

Scott DeRue had served as the associate dean for executive education at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business for just over two years when he was chosen to assume the position of dean in 2016. DeRue joined the Ross School as an assistant professor nine years before and was promoted to full professor after just six years on the faculty. He was widely published in the areas of leadership, team development, and human resource and talent strategy. DeRue's appointment as dean followed a very dynamic five-year period at the Ross School.

When his predecessor, Alison Davis-Blake, accepted the dean position in the Ross School, she was aware that a \$40 million deficit existed. The school had run a deficit eight of the previous ten years, and she recognized the need for the Ross School to develop a coherent strategy to guide decision making and resource allocation. Davis-Blake's legacy after five years was her success in getting the fiscal house in order, changing the culture of the school, and establishing a strategic foundation to guide the future. This strategic foundation was based on four pillars: analytical rigor, action learning, boundarylessness, and a focus on the positive. The positive pillar was the most controversial, but also the most differentiating.

DeRue wondered if he should keep the positive pillar as a key part of the Ross School's strategy and vision. Would the pillar align people around a shared vision? Would it attract the required human and financial resources? Would it resonate with students, staff, faculty, and alumni? If he did not embrace Davis-Blake's legacy, what would his alternatives be? He would have to decide soon. The next all-school meeting was coming up, and members of the faculty and staff would be clamoring to learn about the school's short- and long-term goals.

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