

## APPENDIX H

### THE RIGHT SEARCH COMMITTEE

An article by Jean Dowdall from *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 30, 2004 edition

In the next few months, colleges will be completing an annual rite of fall: naming search committees and appointing their leaders. If you are charged with that task, what considerations should you keep in mind?

The head of a search committee plays a very significant role in the recruitment process, and the importance of having the right chairman or chairwoman is heightened if the search faces challenges, controversies, or complications. Let's consider what qualities you should look for both in a committee leader and in the members.

Fulfilling all the goals listed here -- many of which were generated at a recent meeting of my Witt/Kieffer colleagues -- may make the task of appointing a committee seem more difficult, but the value can be enormous.

**The committee's leader must be able to invest sufficient time in the search.** That is an absolutely essential requirement. The workload will vary over the course of the hiring process, but someone who has significant competing demands on his or her time, or whose schedule conflicts with that of other committee members, will have a difficult time being an effective leader.

If the committee is working with a search consultant, that relieves the burden on the leader to a certain extent. The consultant can prepare an agenda for each meeting and even lead the meetings; keep in touch with candidates and prepare and debrief them before and after interviews; draft notices to the campus; negotiate an agreement with the selected candidate; and so on.

But even with a consultant, the head of the panel must still be ready to work. He or she will have to be available to the consultant to approve the plan for each meeting, to review and approve critical documents like the position description and advertisement, to assure adequate institutional support for the search, and to negotiate with financial officers for the compensation package.

If your committee is working without a search consultant, the workload will be much heavier on the chairman. In addition to all the items just mentioned, he or she will also have to plan and lead each meeting; recruit and communicate with candidates; prepare text for the position description, the advertisements, and letters to candidates, nominators, and nominees; oversee the checking of references and probably make a lot of the reference calls; and much more.

If adequate time isn't available to carry out those responsibilities, the search will drag on, and the conclusion may suffer.

**The panel's head must have the skills to provide at least symbolic leadership for the search.** Even if a search consultant leads the meetings, the chairman or chairwoman will normally want to welcome participants and assure them of the importance of their work, deal with controversy as it arises, and present the committee's recommendation to the appointing officer or the board of trustees.

Aside from the nuts-and-bolts duties that I've already mentioned, the head of the panel -- especially one working without a search consultant -- has to take the lead on a host of key issues. He or she will have to

find a balance between encouraging a free exchange of ideas and bringing each step in the search process to a timely conclusion. Committee heads are responsible for enforcing confidentiality rules and ensuring that the institution's commitment to diversity is realized in the panel's work. They must decide when to forge ahead in order to stay on schedule and when to delay, or even repeat a step in the search, in order to achieve other important goals. Finally, they have to help build a consensus as the committee screens and selects the strongest candidates. It also helps if they know how to make committee meetings enjoyable, or even fun.

If the leader does not have such skills, the search process can flounder or become mired in controversy, and committee members or outsiders can create limitless mischief.

**The committee leader should have substantial knowledge of the position and its institutional context.** In the process of recruiting and cultivating candidates, many unanticipated questions arise. If you are hiring a vice president for enrollment management, it may be well known that enrollment on your campus has declined in recent years, or that out-of-state students are being replaced by in-state students, and so on.

But the reasons for those changes may be complex and subtle. Candidates will typically look to the chairman or chairwoman for an understanding of such issues. While some questions can be passed on to other committee members, the committee's head needs to know enough about those matters to be credible as the search leader.

Additional challenges can arise when the head of the search committee comes from a department outside the one in which the appointment is being made. For example, say a search panel for a new dean of engineering is led by the dean of arts and sciences. That dean needs to convey, both to committee members and candidates, a respect for the different mission of the engineering school and an eagerness to collaborate with the new dean.

**The chairman or chairwoman should have a clear understanding of what kind of candidates the position is likely to attract.** A public regional university whose students come largely from its own state may desire a president from a world-class research university. A private college with a \$10-million endowment may hope for an experienced president from a private college with a \$200-million endowment. Neither of those hopes is likely to be fulfilled.

Ambitious goals are a valuable force in the search process, but not if they are seriously unrealistic. The search team's leader should be able to strike a balance between high aspirations and realistic expectations.

Now let's turn to the committee membership. Every search leader needs a good team. Although the demands on committee members are less rigorous, they are no less significant.

**Committee members also must be able to invest sufficient time in the search.** During some phases of the process -- when candidates are being recruited or are sending in their applications -- committee members have little to do. But they have to participate in formulating the position description, and once the candidate pool is assembled they will want to review applicants' files with care.

Committee members who can't be fully involved in those activities shouldn't be involved in the search. Some people would say that it is essential for members to participate in every single interview in order to evaluate the candidates. I don't happen to agree with that view, but I do think that committee members should be able to attend almost all of the interviews.

**Committee members should be prepared to be part of a team.** That responsibility is very easy to fulfill on some campuses and very difficult on others. At colleges with a strong constituency-driven culture, people can have a hard time putting aside their narrow interests and focusing on institutional interests or balancing the needs of their own group with those of other, possibly more needy groups. Sometimes, even individuals with very sound judgment feel compelled to "vote a party line."

Part of the panel leader's responsibility is to try to create the conditions under which such divisions can be minimized. But that responsibility is made a great deal easier if care is taken to appoint committee members who can make fair appraisals of candidates and support those who will serve all interests effectively.

Committee members must trust and respect one other. There will always be meetings that one member or another cannot attend. Without some level of trust, the search schedule can be endlessly protracted in an effort to find the "perfect" meeting dates. The ideal committee member listens well enough that from time to time his or her views will change in response to compelling arguments from others.

**The committee as a whole should possess a full and balanced understanding of the institution and the position.** Individual members of a committee don't have to know everything about the institution and the position. One member may understand the financial resources available to carry out the job. Another may know the history of the position. Yet another may have a good grasp of campus politics. A well-informed committee can go a long way toward recruiting a strong candidate.

**The committee should reflect the diversity that the search claims to be seeking.** If you want to attract a diverse candidate pool, it makes sense to start with a diverse committee. That will not guarantee a mixed slate of candidates, but it will increase the odds.

**Committee members must be good recruiters as well as good judges of candidates.** If the search goes well, there will be strong candidates who have other options besides the position at your institution. They may get a counteroffer at their current university or other outside offers. You also want to leave candidates with the impression that you and your fellow panelists are a good group of people to work with.

Committee members need to be able to paint a full and attractive picture of the position, the institution, and the location, while also being well informed and open about the challenges. If it requires extra time to attract a candidate (e.g., additional personal calls, a special tour of the campus or the area), committee members should be willing to make the effort.

Putting together an effective committee is the first step toward a successful search.

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