

## VIEWPOINTS

### A Culture of Hiring for Excellence

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Who we work with determines the success of our institutions as well as our own personal success. Searching for and hiring new faculty members is one of the most important activities in all colleges and schools of pharmacy. All of us have been involved in faculty searches and know that our institutions have detailed rules and regulations. We write job descriptions, place advertisements, form search committees, conduct interviews, and run applicants through the ritual of tours and seminars. While all of this is necessary for a legal search, it is insufficient to ensure that a hiring decision has a high likelihood of helping to achieve the goals of an organization. The success of any faculty search is usually determined by actions not specified in the formal policies.

Every faculty member recruitment is an opportunity to change and improve the organization, to build on the existing culture, or to change the culture to one that is desired. A good search begins with the organization's administrators, search committee, and college faculty and staff committing to hiring a first-rate person who will contribute to the organization's goals, and who will enrich and enhance the effectiveness of the existing faculty. Leo Rosten, an American author and social scientist once said "First-rate people hire first-rate people; second-rate people hire third-rate people."<sup>1</sup> The best search requires that egos be put aside so there is little concern for who will outshine whom.

Many things happen in a search process that are not addressed in hiring policies and can have a major influence on the long-term success of the recruitment. One mistake often made in hiring is not considering the recruit's fit with the organization's culture and instead look for someone with a skill set that matches a person who recently departed. Over the years I have heard variations of "we need a faculty member who can teach that course," "who can help us with statistics," or "who can run the research instrument." What we should do is hire someone whose long-term potential far exceeds our short-term expectations. We should hire people not for what we want them to do in the short term but for the great things they will do in the long term that we can not possibly foresee. Often, the technical needs of a college can be met by other means such as part-time teachers or consultants, temporary hires,

or reassignment of responsibilities to existing faculty members.

Another factor that can limit a search is to insist on specific degrees for candidates, as if the degree ensured their proficiency and success. This approach can be retrogressive. A modern college of pharmacy often has people with PhD, PharmD, MD, MS, and other degrees the roles for which are not easy to categorize. Successful pharmaceutical and biomedical scientists, clinical researchers, and education scholars could have any of those degrees. We recognize that recruitment of nonpharmacist faculty members should occur with a commitment to inculcate them in the unique features of pharmacy academia if needed.

Hiring a new faculty member is an opportunity to change the culture of an organization when change is needed or support the existing culture when it is strong and vibrant. When a college is committed to change, such as setting a higher standard for research accomplishment, greater scholarship in teaching, or a progressive approach to pharmacy services, there is a natural inertia and limited capacity for change among individuals who are already in the college. New people with new ideas present the best opportunity for cultural change when it is needed. A college or school can benefit when individuals with outdated methods or attitudes retire or find employment elsewhere, allowing recruitment of new people who buy in to a new culture from the first day.

A few years ago, I attended a session where Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric, was the speaker. He has a mythical reputation for corporate effectiveness as a manager and leader and he spoke about the way that he thinks about employee hiring and retention. Put in simple terms, he said that people in an organization can be judged in 2 dimensions, by their performance and by their values. A person may be a high or low performer and they may or may not hold the same values as the organization. Hiring the high performer who espouses the organizations values and not hiring the low performer without the proper values are "no brainers." The tough calls are for the lower performer with the right values and for the high performer who does not share the organization's values. Perhaps the low performer could be hired if

the right place for his/her talents is found where the person could demonstrate a degree of excellence. Welch suggested that, tempting as it may be, we should not hire the high performer who does not share the organization's values as it will likely lead to organizational conflict. An example may be the prolific researcher who places no value on teaching but is hired into a college that places great emphasis on quality teaching. When hiring we should put more emphasis on personal character and less on credentials.

The responsibility for hiring new faculty members is shared by the faculty and administration, and this is a strength of our colleges and schools. When both groups commit to high standards for recruitments and take a long-term view of expectations, it increases the likelihood of

making a hire that will have positive effects on the college for many years. Often, urgency to fill a position leads to compromises in hiring standards. It is better to delay a hire and resume searching rather than accept a candidate of lower quality. The "right people" will advance our colleges and schools more than we can envision. They are positive reputation builders and problem solvers. New faculty hiring decisions are among the most important decisions we make in a college or school of pharmacy.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Leo Rosten. BrainyQuote.com, Xplore, Inc; 2010. <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/l/leorosten143374.html>. Accessed May 20, 2011.