APPLYING THE TQM CONCEPT
BEST OF CLASS
TO THE RECRUITMENT OF MINORITY FACULTY
AT A SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to apply the Total Quality Management Concept to the recruitment of minority faculty members. Significant insights are presented by the researchers.

Many universities throughout the country have learned the value of employing a diverse faculty composed of a rich mix of individuals representing a variety of cultures, races, religions, and genders. Predominately Caucasian institutions, especially located in the South, have found it difficult to attract African American faculty members. Yet coaches of athletic teams and military recruiters from the same geographic areas have little difficulty locating prospects. Is it possible to incorporate the Total Quality Management (TQM) concept of Best of Class and increase the recruitment of minority faculty in a predominately Caucasian institution of higher learning?

Best of Class refers to the identification of those “best practices” identified and utilized by experts in fields different from one’s own. Examples of Best of Class practices in operation could be an elevator company drawing information to improve accounting from a successful bank (Payne & Blackbourn, 1993a) or a university instructor improving the delivery
of a lecture by garnering advice from a stand-up comic (Payne & Blackbourn, 1993b). In both examples, organizations and individuals looked to improve the quality of service delivery through examining practices outside their organization and profession. Deming stated, “No system can fully understand itself. One way to get outside knowledge is to ask for it” (Sharfman, 1991). In this article, members of a School of Education went outside their organizational structure to address an issue common to all institutions of higher education nationwide. This issue is the successful recruitment of minority faculty members from an overall pool of limited availability. By asking for outside advice from expert recruiters, the members of the School of Education enhanced their ability to recruit and retain highly qualified minority faculty members.

In 1989, the School of Education had six openings for faculty positions. Six search committees were established, one for each position, and a national search was conducted. After a two-month process of advertising in the major publications, including those targeted toward minorities, and using traditional recruitment techniques (i.e., sending announcements to other Schools of Education), the applicant pool revealed not one African American candidate. At that time, the services of a coach known for recruiting minority athletes and a former army recruiter recommended because of his excellent record of recruiting African Americans were secured for advice and consultation. Both individuals were Caucasian males, born and raised in the South and are referred to throughout this report as the advisors.

Based on suggestions from advisors, the School of Education recruitment procedures were substantially altered. The result was the hiring of three African American faculty members schoolwide, as well as one Caucasian female in an all Caucasian male department. The altered procedures, for purposes of parsimony, are described under the headings of Focus, Initial Contact, Homework, and Close.

**Focus**

Upon the advice of the advisors, a meeting was held of all of the committees to discuss and develop a strategy. It was decided that the six committees would initially function as one giant search committee with the purpose of securing talented African American individuals to fill at least two of the six available faculty slots. Furthermore, it was agreed that the six committees would cease to function as individual committees until at least two minority faculty members were secured. A system was developed to call every minority alumni and ask if he or she knew of anyone who might be interested in any faculty position or of another contact who might be aware of such a person. The premise was to penetrate the existing network of minority persons and get on the inside, so to speak, (or at the very least, get word to the targeted population). When contact was made, the phrase, “As you know our intent is to establish an African American presence here,” was used and amplified again and again. A massive phone campaign was then initiated which resulted in the identification of nine very talented minority candidates. Of the nine, seven agreed to visit the campus to be interviewed. Of the seven interviewed, four were offered jobs and three accepted faculty positions. During the focus phase, a unified effort was directed to penetrate the minority network, directly indicating the goal or intention; that is, to “establish an African American presence.”

**Initial Contact**

In all initial contacts, the invitation to visit the campus for an interview was handled over the phone by the dean of the school. According to the advisors, having the dean personally extend the invitation immediately illustrated the importance and intention of the visit.
The dean was instructed in the basics of phone etiquette and skill. The major points of effective phone usage that were learned included (a) take the curse off the call, (b) don’t ask a question that can be answered no, and (c) reduce fear by inviting the candidate to bring a friend on the campus visit.

Taking the curse off the call refers to getting permission to talk. Oftentimes, when a call is made, the person receiving the call is legitimately involved in some activity and doesn’t have time to talk at that particular moment. An example of how to take the curse off the call is as follows:

Hello, my name is __________. I’m the dean of the School of Education and I’d like to speak to Dr. Minority. (Dr. Minority comes to the phone and says Hello). Dr. Minority, I’m __________ the dean of the School of Education. Your name was given to me by __________ and I’d like about four minutes of your time. Am I taking you away from anything important?

The answer to this question takes the curse off the call. In other words, taking the curse off the call gives the caller permission to talk. In most cases, 90%+ of the time, the person gives permission by saying, “Sure go ahead, what can I do for you.” If, however, the person says he or she doesn’t have time right now or are doing something at that particular moment, then the caller would simply determine a better time to call by stating: “Would you prefer that I call back in about an hour or possibly sometime tomorrow?”

It is important to note that when taking the curse off the call one should not ask if the person receiving the call is busy. Everyone is busy. The statement must be phrased exactly as “Am I taking you away from anything important?”

Not asking a question that can be answered no relates to any question to which the caller doesn’t want to receive a “no” answer. The rule of thumb is if the person called is going to decline and say no, he or she will have to do it in sentence form and not with a simple “no.” Examples include:

“Would you prefer I call back in an hour or possibly sometime tomorrow?” as compared to “May I call back later?” “We very much are excited about meeting you and wish to interview you soon. Would the first (or end) of next month (or week) be preferable?” as compared to “Would you like to come for an interview?” or “Are you still interested?”

Keep in mind that professional recruiters are tactful, yet somewhat assertive. The purpose is to get the candidate on campus and, if it is determined that an offer should be made, then the objective becomes to close the deal (that is, to get the candidate to commit in writing).

Once the date for the interview is set, it becomes important to reduce any fear that may surface later. One way to reduce fear (and again indicate sincerity in intent) is to suggest the candidate bring family or a valued friend. If money permits, encourage the candidate to stay an extra day to relax and tour the community.

The whole point of the initial contact is to get the candidate to the campus in a good frame of mind. By having the dean personally extend the invitation, the importance of the visit is underscored. By utilizing two basic phone techniques: (a) remove the curse, and (b) don’t ask questions that can be answered no, the probability of the candidate accepting the invitation is increased. Finally, by suggesting the candidate bring a friend on the campus visit (technique #3), fear that may later surface is reduced, or tension as the candidate prepares for the visit is minimized.
Homework

Although information regarding each candidate was collected throughout the process, prior to the campus visit, this information becomes of prime importance. Once the invitation to interview is accepted and a date set, an all-out effort should be made to determine what is important to and what motivates the candidate. In essence, what does the candidate value in life? The answers to these questions form the foundation for the actual campus visit. Typical areas that are important to people are opportunities for career development, status, family, climate, research, and/or teaching opportunities, safety, and so forth. This information may best be determined by a follow-up call to those individuals previously contacted as references. The second call typically begins by thanking the individual for providing the reference and/or suggesting the candidate for the job. Next, the reference person is told that the candidate has accepted the invitation to be interviewed. Lastly, the reference person is asked for suggestions relative to increasing the chances of securing the services of the candidate. In other words, what does the candidate value in life? At this point, the reference person becomes a vital and valuable part of the recruitment process. The information secured forms the basis for the interview strategy.

Close

If, according to the advisors, the decision is made to offer the position to the candidate, it is imperative that the commitment be in writing and signed by the candidate on the spot.

Agreement

I agree to come to the School of Education at the University of Mississippi as a full time Assistant Professor beginning Fall, __________, under the following conditions:

1. Paid _____________ for nethr months and be able to teach during the summer session, if I so desire.
2. Provided access to faculty housing at a cost of no more than _____________ per month.
3. Eligible for promotion and tenure within three years of first appointment.
4. A formal and official offer must be made by _____________.

_________________________
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Figure 1: Sample Agreement
The technique of closing the deal is as follows. The candidate is told, directly and straightforwardly,

This institution wants and needs you and this is a great place to “develop your career,” “raise a family,” “conduct your research,” and so forth. In order to make this work I need something to go to my supervisors with. I stand a better chance of negotiating with them when we know exactly what it is going to take to persuade you to become part of our team.

At this time, the dean would begin to draw up the agreement while explaining,

I’ve found if I go to my supervisor with something in writing I stand a better chance of getting what is necessary to assure this whole thing of being successful. Let me read this to you:

Agreement: I agree to come to the School of Education at the University of __________ as a full time __________ professor beginning Fall _____ under the following conditions: Number 1 . . . now tell me what it is going to take to get you here.

The dean would then begin to write down the conditions of the agreement. If the candidate hesitated or believed things were happening too fast, or felt too pressured, the dean would simply cross out “agree to come” and insert “seriously consider coming” (see Figure 1). This procedure gets the interview refocused and paves the way for a signed commitment. One must try to keep the requests reasonable, but if a request is made that is unreasonable, the dean would list it as instructed by the candidate. The ultimate goal of this step is to get the signature of the candidate on the agreement regardless of the conditions. The basic assumption is that if the conditions are met the candidate will more than likely join the faculty.

Typical conditions listed on agreements center around tenure, rank, equipment (computer is the most common request), support help (graduate assistant is common), reduced work load in first year, faculty housing, and so forth. The agreement must include salary. If the candidate asked for more than seemed reasonable, the dean would share the salaries of comparable faculty (not necessarily by name) or regional salary averages. If, however, the salary was non-negotiable, the dean would write it down as previously described. The agreement would then be dated and signed by the dean. Then the agreement is given to the candidate with instructions to “Just OK (not sign) the agreement right here.” The dean would then point out where the candidate should place his or her signature. Most people do not like to immediately sign anything, but the key is to be patient until the candidate signs. Without a signature, the dean does not know if the candidate is serious. Additional time spent on a candidate who refuses to sign an agreement is very questionable and continual investment of time and effort in the candidate is not advisable.

Generally, candidates would sign the agreement within five minutes. However, if a candidate simply does not sign, the dean, as a last resort, might try, “There must be some reason for your hesitation. What would you like to add to the list?” After the candidate signs the agreement and returns home, within two days (no later) the candidate is contacted by telephone and informed of the status of the matter. In the best of cases, all requests on the agreement were met and a formal contract was offered. But, oftentimes, compromises are necessary and the negotiation process would begin. What is important for the candidate to know is (a) that he or she is wanted, (b) what the conditions are, and (c) that dealings are straightforward, sincere, above-board, and no nonsense. To a professional recruiter, this process is standard operating procedure (SOP), but to the average dean, the process is awkward and more assertive than those processes typically seen in higher education. After employing the process several times, it becomes more natural and is, without question, extremely effective.
Candidates used to be drawn to a university and the recruitment procedure was somewhat passive—advertise, interview, and eventually select. In changing times, university personnel find their roles somewhat reversed and now the procedure is more assertive. The process is to advertise, penetrate the network, get the candidate on campus, and close the deal before the candidate leaves. Using the "Best of Class" techniques described in this article can enhance the chances for recruiting and retaining a highly qualified diverse cadre of talented faculty for a School of Education.

Figure 2: African Americans as a Percentage of Faculty (University and School)

References