

# Achieving Departmental Excellence:

## *Starting with the Hiring Process*

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### **Introduction**

- The overarching premise of the presentation is that the **Right People + Right Work = Excellence**
- This is an executive level session; all are welcome and can benefit, but the conversation is focused on higher level thinking and those with hiring authority.
- Hiring is the most critical decision we make. It is an opportunity to mold our future. Every hiring decision is an opportunity to improve, so we need to be strategic.
- Presentation will funnel down in focus from the profession (Kathleen), to the institution (Tom), and to the department (Maureen).

### **Learning Objectives**

After this session, participants will be able to:

- Identify at least two competencies needed on their team to do the work of the future.
- Identify at least three tools and hiring techniques to help them make the right hire.
- Articulate the importance of hiring someone who knows WHY they do the work (versus HOW they do the work).

## **Right Work** (Kathleen)

### **Profession: Higher Education Priorities & Needs**

- How do we create environments that can look ahead? It is not so simple when we are juggling all the demands on our organization, but we must start to look out and position several staff at leadership levels with the responsibility to think about the future -- not only when we have time, but as part of their job description and expected duties. How can we position ourselves to contribute to the 'white space' between the normal jobs on an organizational chart and reconsider how to advance our voice on campus and in our profession?

### **Institutional Priorities & Needs**

- Any department needs to work within the opportunities or limitations depending on their organizational alignment and stated priorities. Given the significant reduction in institutional budgets, we need to find ways to examine our opportunities to contribute and create new resources to share. As an example, when many institutions are centralizing marketing, technology, fiscal and administrative support, how can Rec Sports be an integral player? Find ways in your own environment to consider non-traditional funding models and reporting lines with essential work in your area. Look for opportunities to build new positional funding opportunities within and outside of your department. Additionally, it may make sense to consider creative Memorandums of Understanding with other units to consider anything from shared positions, developing new collaborative partnerships, or simply building a new campus relationship.

## Organizational Priorities & Needs

- It is important for our organizations today to not just work on cultivating the easy relationships on campus but the challenging ones as well. What are the compelling relationships that will open new doors and opportunities to influence? Can we position for aligning communities of practice versus the old paradigm of functional units. Every organization will go through growing pains and have different moments of organizational maturity to close gaps and communicate with purpose. Typically our organizational structures don't represent our work. So how do we scan our environments to identify ways to widen our reach with key topics (e.g., WSU Environmental Wellbeing Coordinator helps to advance sustainability within our organization and leverages our reputation on campus)?

It is essential for collegiate recreation professionals to identify opportunities to convene the right people for the right work. Our best work may indeed be in the white space on our organizational chart. As we keep looking for opportunities to define our future work, and with our most important resource our staff, potentially we should consider that all leadership positions in our departments will have 20-30% of their job responsibilities being outside of the core job, looking at the future and wider university strategic goals.

## Right People (Tom)

Quotes/thoughts from Jim Collins, author of Good to Great:

'Great vision without great people is irrelevant.'

'Reject the old adage that people are the most important asset. The right people are.'

Right people, right questions, and vigorous debate equal a climate of success.

There are not enough leaders in the world; what better place to nurture and develop leaders than in Higher Education? It is our responsibility to do so. Archie Manning said that we can be leaders if you consider this definition: "the ability to influence one's environment for positive change."

## Clarifying values

- **Organizational Foundations:** use and review often your department stated mission, vision, values, and guiding principles in order to ensure alignment. This review is critical at the time of hiring. Conduct an honest and open evaluation of your foundations and make changes as necessary to ensure you are still who you think you are, that you are clear what you stand for, and that you are conducting your work in a manner in which you aspire.
- **Needs of Department/Needs of the Position:** Conduct an honest and open review of department need and align the position with it. It is not uncommon when a position is vacated we assume the need to be the same. However most if not all positions change over time as the department and university environments change over time. The lack of this important step could result in the department ending up on the margin as others move to address the changing environment. When that occurs, you become irrelevant, and then expendable.
- **Environment & Culture:** Conduct an environmental scan of the department's culture. Determine the maturity or immaturity of the unit. What is the organization ready to do, how developed are the interpersonal relationships, how does work get done in the department? This is not a question of good or bad but rather one of organizational readiness and capacity. Check out the Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni – a great resource on organization development. Consider the need for balance in the organization when hiring. Considering just the needs of the position may result in lost opportunities when determining the work needed in the white space. The technical requirements should be only one part of what individuals can bring to the department.

**Desirable Competencies:** When making hiring decision, first consider WHO, then consider WHAT. A person's characteristics and traits are of greater value than their technical skills, which can be taught. Consider: what does the person bring to the organization that is fundamental to who they are? What are those things that others cannot influence or change? Consider:

- **Passion:** someone who loves and believes in what they do. They understand the value of their work, how it impacts others, and clearly recognizes that all our work is for the success of students. In our culture, 'every action and every decision' should be in the pursuit of the success of students.
- **Learner:** knowing we are in a dynamic and ever changing environment, this person must be a lifelong learner who always seeks ways to become better, seeks new ways or means to deliver, wants to be involved, and knows that trying and failing will bring better results in the future. Knowing the *why* not just the *how* provides for a perspective and understanding that builds from a base that opens up many opportunities that can bring improvement, creativity – best and rare practices – thus excellence.
- **Collaboration:** this is all about the ability to work with others. In our culture, our focus of work is in collaboration within and outside the department. This is an area where there can be the most conflict and the decision in hiring is critical in finding those individuals that fit into your environment. I often ask staff 'How are you supporting or contributing to the success of your colleagues?' This question can set a clear expectation of how you want to work as a unit.

## Recruitment

- **Position Description:** When developing or updating position descriptions, spend time reviewing the position requirements not only for the job responsibilities but with your department foundations, department overall needs, and the potential opportunities for this individual. The latter is the piece that will assist you the most in identifying the 'right person.' I am always scanning at conferences and other professional meetings for students and professionals who have the traits or characteristics that we want in our team so that when the time comes, we are prepared to recruitment them. I have a list of names of NIRSA colleagues to be considered for future hires for nearly all of our positions.
- **Reputation:** The above statement relates to the issue of reputation. It is important to understand the reputation the department locally, regional, and nationally. Particularly for students and young professionals, the 'fit' is extremely important. What do we have to offer that will attract others to us? Culture, working conditions, relationships, etc. will certainly play into their decisions. An insightful resource to read is Not Quite Adults by Richard Settersten & Barbra E. Ray.
- Attracting the best candidates

## Right People (Maureen)

### The Interview Process: Operationalizing your vision

- **Determining who to involve in the search**
  - Be strategic in assembling the search team. Considerations: the entire department or select representatives? Strategic partners on campus? HR rules and university culture. What else are you trying to accomplish with the search process (building credibility? Creating or strengthening relationships? Role modeling?)
  - Determine how to involve others. Considerations: separate interview groups or comingled interview groups. Interview teams or demonstration audiences. Initial reviews, on campus interviews, reference checks.
- **Structuring the day**
  - Consistency is key. Aim for the same ORDER, the same DURATION, the same PEOPLE, the same QUESTIONS, and even the same person starting and ending the day.
- **Determining who is the right person**

- **Interview questions**
  - *Open* questions required a detailed response: Why did you leave your last job?
  - *Closed* questions are good for verification: Are you still working at XZY?
  - *Leading* questions are those that broadcast the desired answer, and should be avoided: You don't mind working late, do you? We really value student development at our institution. Do you believe students have a valuable role in an organization?
  - *Behavioral* questions (self-appraisal and situational) are difficult to answer with fabrications or exaggerations; this style of questioning is based on the premise that past actions are the best predictor of future behavior.
    - **Self-appraisal** questions require the candidate to self-assess: Why are you a strong leader? If you could design your own job to require either more public speaking engagements or more written reports, which would you choose and why? How well do you work in the white space and why?
    - **Situational** questions require the candidate to provide examples of past behavior/performance: Tell me about the biggest mistake you've made as a professional. Give me an example of a time you strongly disagreed with your supervisor. Describe the professional accomplishment you are most proud of. Give us an example of how you have brought value to your university outside of your job description.
  - *Follow-up* questions allow you to probe further, clear up contradictions, or to rephrase a question that wasn't directly answered by the candidate: Why did you react that way? What would you do differently next time? Were you satisfied with the result? What did you base your decision on? What were the ramifications of your decision?

Choose questions that will help you determine which candidate is the best hire.

- Think about past 'bad' hires. If you could redo the search, what would you do differently to ensure that you didn't make the same mistake?
- After a search, review the questions that were asked. If a question didn't lead to helpful information (in distinguishing between candidates), then consider eliminating it from future searches or consider re-wording the question so it yields more useful information.
- Example: "What are your weaknesses" can often yield standard evasive non-answers (I am too organized. I care too much.) A slight reframing might be more helpful (When I hire someone on my team, I assume it is part of my responsibility to help them continue to grow and develop. What are the top two areas that you identify as your improvement opportunities?)

Resource for interview questions: Falcone, Paul. (1997) 96 Great Interview Questions to Ask Before You Hire. American Management Association. New York, NY

- **Demonstrations, Presentations and Portfolios** are alternative ways of ascertaining a candidate's skill set and characteristics. Demonstrations and presentations are a good way to assess public speaking skills; or passion for, and knowledge of, a particular topic area; or seeing how they organize their thoughts. Portfolios are a good way to assess scope of work and can be a more comfortable way for candidates to talk about their experiences. Think beyond the typical focus on technical skills (e.g., teaching a mini officiating clinic, wellness seminar, or group fitness class) to get a more complete picture of the candidate's competencies (e.g., lead a discussion of how you work in the white spaces, or use a portfolio to demonstrate how you have shown initiative).

- **Reference checks:** questions should be carefully chosen; who calls should be strategic; university protocol should be followed; if possible, consider asking for references at a variety of levels (e.g., supervisor, colleague, employee).
- **Who makes the decision?** This may be dictated by university rules or guided by department culture. When you have latitude in determining the final hiring authority, make the decision deliberately. Perhaps the director will make all final decisions, or perhaps the position supervisor will make the final decision (with or without the director having veto authority), or perhaps a committee will make the final decision. Whatever the protocol, it should make sense for your unit.

## Review

Determine the RIGHT WORK

Determine the RIGHT PEOPLE

Experience EXCELLENCE

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## Effective Interview Questions

Avoid questions that don't help you differentiate between candidates (*Do you work well under stress? What are your weaknesses?*) Ask questions that help you determine which candidate will be the most effective in the job.

1. Give me an example of a time you strongly disagreed with your supervisor.
2. Describe the professional accomplishment you are proudest of.
3. Tell me about a time you organized a program that failed. What would you do differently?
4. Describe a situation in which you assumed a leadership position.
5. What have you done to recognize/reward your employees over the past year?
6. Do you relate best with your supervisors, peers, or employees? Why?
7. Tell me about a time when you fired or disciplined an employee.
8. Give me an example of a time when you showed initiative.
9. Summarize a situation in which you performed well under pressure.
10. What have you done to build your team?
11. What is the most difficult part of your current job? Why?
12. What would you change about your current position to make you more satisfied with work?
13. On a scale of one to ten, how do you rate your communication skills to those of your peers? Why?
14. Compare your professional experiences at your last two jobs.
15. What have you done to encourage a positive culture in your work environment?
16. What concerns do you have about this position, department or campus?
17. What motivates you to do your best?
18. What three things frustrate you more than anything else?
19. What work-related situations cause you stress?
20. How can people tell if you are frustrated or angry?
21. What sets you apart from your peers?
22. How many hours a week do you expect (or expect your employees) to work?
23. How would your supervisor (colleagues, employees, students, coworkers) describe you?
24. Tell me how you have been involved in furthering the profession.
25. Give me an example of a time when you took a significant risk.
26. Tell me about a time you worked with someone who was difficult to get along with.
27. Describe a time you made a critical decision in your supervisor's absence.
28. What is the most important project or task that you have ever delegated?
29. What have you done to continue your professional growth and learning?

30. During an interview everyone has a mental checklist of things they are looking for in order to accept (or decline) a job offer; what is on your list?
31. What did you learn in your last position? What are you hoping to learn in this position?
32. Tell me how you've grown your job responsibilities since you started your last job?
33. Tell me about a difficult ethical decision you have been faced with.
34. Give me an example of a time when you enforced a policy you did not agree with.
35. Describe your role in the development of a recreation program. What were the key components and who was involved in that development process?
36. Describe a situation where you instituted structural and/or organizational change. How did you work with all levels of staff to develop, communicate and implement the plan?
37. How have you gone about making connections and building bridges across campus? (What departments/areas would you start with?)
38. Why do you think you are a strong leader? Give supporting examples.
39. If you could design your own job to require either more public speaking engagements or more written reports, which would you choose and why?
40. Give some examples of how you have worked in the 'white spaces.'

Follow-up Questions:

Why did you react that way? What would you do differently next time? Were you satisfied with the result? What did you base your decision on? What were the ramifications of your decision?