Questioning the Questioners: A Look at Search Processes

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Questions are integral to the field of fraternity and sorority advising, and they are never more important than during the job search and interview process. Not only should we be asking questions as interviewers and interviewees, but we should also be asking questions about the interview process itself. There is a strong parallel between hiring professional staff and recruiting in our undergraduate organizations. What are the questions we usually ask of our students when we talk about recruitment? Are they sharing all the information necessary for potential members to make their decision? Are they transparent about the timeline and what the process entails? Most importantly, are they following through with the information they provide? If we can similarly take a long, honest look at the job search process and how it is being conducted, we can make sure we are moving through the process with integrity on all sides.

There are tons of resources out there for what questions a candidate should ask, and even what questions should be asked of job seekers. But I haven't seen anything asking vital questions about the process in and of itself. In order to conduct a search process with integrity, here are some questions search committee members should be able to answer before beginning the application review process:

1. **What is your timeline and process for the search? What is your procedure for notifying unsuccessful candidates? Further, what are the policies from your human resources (HR) department? What are the components of the interview process?** Before you promise notification of status to a candidate, make sure you're allowed to give that information; if you're not sure, don't make promises you can't keep. In some cases, university-wide HR policies sometimes get in the way of the preferred timeline and flow of the process. Committee chairs should know the proscribed process ahead of time to communicate it appropriately to the candidates. Further, is it really necessary to have six different group interviews and a presentation for a coordinator level position? Extensive in-person interviews can present barriers to full participation for many outstanding candidates, so take some time to really be intentional about the number and scope of people that candidates must interact with during the interview.

2. **Why is this position open?** Take a long, hard look in the mirror on this one, and attempt to fix any fundamental issues with the job in question. Can you raise the salary? Build in flex time to accommodate for weekend council meetings or chapter visits? Add opportunities and funding for professional development? How is your search contributing to a socially just staffing model? It is important to be aware of these issues when searching for a new team member.

3. **Once interviews begin, know why you are interviewing each candidate.** Do they have the experience and skills you are looking for, or are you just filling up your time slots?

On that note, do you have enough time to complete the interview? Don't cut a candidate short because another one took too long. Don't conduct interviews out of pity or obligation; all you do is potentially get the candidate's hopes up and waste time and resources, none of which is professional or contributing to a search process with integrity.

4. **What are you actually looking for?** Be specific in what skills, experiences, and identities you want this new person to hold, and make sure you share them as honestly as possible. Make sure the committee and hiring manager are thoroughly aware of what the students and other stakeholders vested in this position need. Further, make sure you are asking the same questions during each interview, since "…interviewer judgements based on structured interviews are more predictive of job performance than those from unstructured interviews" (Macan, 2009, p.204). You won't be able to make a fair and unbiased comparison of the available applicants if you received different sets of information from them.

Integrity and character are values which are often thrown around in our line of work, and one of the best places to see if those espoused values are enacted is during a search process. From my personal experiences, I can say there are many hiring committees that have conducted their processes with integrity; but there are also those that have not. Aside from the obvious interest in walking our walk and not just talking the talk, transparency and integrity in interviews has tangible benefits for all parties involved. For example, "applicants who perceive...processes as procedurally fair and job-related hold more positive image perceptions of the company, report better word-of-mouth intentions with others, and state that they are more likely to accept a job offer from an organization" (Hausknecht, Day, & Thomas, 2004, p. 675). I concur – I have experienced search processes lacking integrity, and I have maintained negative opinions of those organizations and the professionals involved ever since.

My background is not in human resources, so I am by no means an expert on this topic. However, I believe I have participated in enough search processes to be able to point out some flaws in the way we as a field tend to conduct this vital practice. I hope we can critically examine our procedures and make sure we are reflecting the integrity we expect of our students in their recruitment process, and the integrity and character our founders expected of us as members of the fraternity and sorority community.

References

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