

# Recruitment and Retention

Assuming that you are going to remain in your administrative position for several years, the most important thing you can do is hire excellent people: teachers, custodians, principals, assistant principals, department chairs, school aides, and others with whom you can work well and who will fit the developing view of a culture that you share with your staff or encourage as part of your school's renewal.

These people will likely have considerable allegiance to you because you were instrumental in selecting them. Perhaps of even more importance, over a period of several years, these are the people who will assist you in putting your stamp or notion of culture on the organization, to the reasonable extent that you can and wish to change the organization. No matter who you are, you cannot do anything of significance alone! The days of the powerful leader who dictates policy are over. The job is just too complex for that. Without question, a “strong” leader will always make a difference, but in almost any school organization in the early twenty-first century, it takes a team with many skills to maintain a fine program, renew a school or district, or bring about a serious—let alone seismic—cultural shift.

## **RULE NUMBER ONE: SET UP A LOGICAL AND EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT COMMITTEE**

If, for example, you are recruiting an English department chairperson, obviously you will want two or three English or humanities teachers on the committee. Just as crucial will be having one teacher from some other discipline, maybe a parent or even a high school student, and one administrator on this committee—perhaps

an assistant principal or a chairperson of some other department. You may or may not wish to have the current chairperson of the English department, the person who is leaving, on this committee.

Be sure the English teachers represent different grade levels, somewhat different points of view, and different levels of experience. Don't choose three like-minded "usual suspects," the same teachers who often serve on committees. Of course, you may wish to have some very informal conversations with prospective committee members to make sure they want cultural changes similar to the ones you want. You should tolerate and even promote some differences, but not cultural subversion.

## **RULE NUMBER TWO: ESTABLISH CLEAR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE NEW POSITION**

Just what, precisely, are your expectations and those of the committee for your junior high school's new chief custodian? There are really three serious questions here:

- What are the limitations on the new hire: the civil service list, political considerations, the number of dollars available for the complete salary package? Be coldly realistic.
- What are your, not the committee's, top one or two needs? Make these clear at the outset. Depending on what you need, you may ask the committee to consider your needs seriously as they think about priorities, or you may insist that at least your one top priority be included among the four or five priorities developed by the committee.
- Make the list of expectations manageable and determine which could be negotiable. Having a list of fifteen or twenty expectations is the same as having no list. Crafting a thoughtful list of four to six major or central expectations is very helpful. The expectations should be clear, operational, and available to all candidates before the interview.

*Example of one expectation:* as part of a final interview, the two finalists will demonstrate the ability to determine what work needs to be done and in what priority by walking through two classrooms and completing the district work-order form. Each candidate will be provided thirty minutes for this task after having the work-order form carefully explained to him.

## **RULE NUMBER THREE: CHARGE THE COMMITTEE WITH CREATING AN EVALUATION RUBRIC**

Committees don't have unlimited time, so application of the rubric might be restricted to the final two to three candidates. The rubric must be strongly related to the expectations, should have no more than five or six characteristics, and should include either four or five levels of competence.

Here is an example of one item in a rubric for an assistant principal who will play an important role in curriculum in a middle school; it is followed by a list of levels of competence:

**Item 1:** Demonstrates knowledge of the field by impressive review of state and national requirements; suggests pertinent local issues; is aware of several important issues and concerns that have appeared in the past few years in such publications as *Educational Leadership*, *Education Week*, and *Phi Delta Kappan*.

### **Example of Levels of Competence**

*High competence.* Discussed issues easily and knowledgeably; brought up most important issues, including some the committee had not considered; had good understanding of application to local concerns and classroom performance.

*Good competence.* Discussed most issues easily and relatively thoroughly; needed some prompting on selected issues; had basic understanding of some issues of local concern and classroom performance.

*Average competence.* Discussed several issues, but occasionally was less than thorough or completely informed; needed a fair amount of prompting to discuss selected issues; not always certain about local and classroom applications.

*Below-average competence.* Discussed a few issues, mostly superficially; needed considerable prompting to go on; had very limited ability to discuss local concerns or classroom performance.

You will not always be able to locate a candidate with high competence, but you never want to hire below good competence, if that is at all possible. While you are going through the interview process, always keep in mind the possibility of growth. If, for instance, a candidate has taken courses to learn new information, attended conferences at some inconvenience or expense, subscribed to several pertinent

journals, or done considerable research to learn about your school and community, those are good signs of a willingness, even an eagerness, to grow. A young or relatively inexperienced candidate who has made this effort but rates only at the bottom of your good category may be an excellent choice.

## **RULE NUMBER FOUR: RESEARCH THE CANDIDATE COMPLETELY AND EFFECTIVELY**

Although you will call back a small number of candidates who do well in the first interview, you have only one opportunity to go through the initial interview process, so you want to learn as much helpful and revealing information about the candidate as the position warrants and is legally permissible. The goal for any new hire is to choose the person about whom you will be just as enthusiastic two years later as you were when you and your committee first made the decision to offer the position to him.

- For a teacher or administrator, ask if the candidate has a portfolio. Portfolios are becoming more common; some colleges even require new teacher graduates to accumulate a portfolio for job interviews.
- A portfolio might include a video of parts of several lessons from student teaching or previous teaching. There are often examples of student work or artifacts related to planning. An administrator's portfolio might include anything from a Friday memo to some material related to budget, supervision, or scheduling. Some administrators submit part of the record of a presentation to their current faculty, administrative council, or board of education.
- References can be laden with traps. Most people can get three or four good references, but those are not always to be fully trusted. Consider the quality of the reference: Did this person see the candidate on the job in the last six months? Is this someone in your local area you can easily contact for more detailed information? Was the reference in a position to supervise the candidate and know this person's work rather well?
- It is a good idea to follow most written references with a phone call. Ask questions about any aspects of the reference that interest or bother you. Always ask, "Is there anything else I should know? Is there any reason you know of why I should be hesitant to hire this person? On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest, how would you rate this person for the position we have available? Again, is there anything else I should ask or know?"

- If at all possible, visit the one, two, or three finalists at their place of work. Ask if you can be free to ask questions of anyone you wish. The more that is hidden from you or denied to you, the more you should worry. It is important to see several people individually who work directly with the candidate. You are more likely to get some very candid off-the-record comments in a one-to-one setting than in a group where people will worry about confidentiality. These staff members may be concerned about revealing confidential information in a setting where some other group member might reveal what was said at a later time.
- Some schools now routinely do a criminal background check for each finalist. Consult your school attorney and local police to learn what is legal and ethical.
- Virtually every professional position will require several forms of writing: reports to parents, e-mail to staff, a summary of custodial work completed, a brief article for the district newsletter or newspaper, program proposals, and so on. As part of a final interview, it is a very good idea to give finalists an appropriate prompt and ask them to write a short response. The last thing you want is a new teacher, administrator, or chief custodian whose work you must edit heavily or whose work will cause you embarrassment.

Of course, the finalists should know from the get-go that this writing sample will be part of the process, that it will be done as part of a second or third interview and cannot be submitted in advance, and that it will be judged as a first draft. Candidates should be assured that you are not searching for Nobel Prize writing, just writing that is professionally acceptable and that could be improved in a subsequent draft or with very modest help. Your standard for “acceptable” writing will vary by position. The English teacher or principal will be held to a higher standard than the chief custodian whose writing for eyes beyond his or her immediate staff could be edited.

## **RULE NUMBER FIVE: PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE MENTOR FOR THE NEW HIRE**

Each committee will go through whatever procedures are required in its locality to gain final board approval, but the moment approval is completed, the mentoring program should begin. The mentor is often one person, but there could be more than one person for different purposes.

- Do something more than just make a phone call informing the new hire that she got the job—make her feel welcome and on her way to success. Invite her for a congratulatory visit, which could be anything from a one-hour opportunity to meet a few people, have a cup of coffee, or even an invitation to a formal dinner. This should be followed by one or more “working” visits before the actual date of hire, if this is at all feasible. The mentor will play a leading role in setting up these working visits, making sure the new hire meets as many people who can be of assistance to her when she hits the ground walking fast, not running, on her first day. (There is still more to learn early in a new assignment. “Running” is more likely to lead to tripping!)

- The mentor should not be a person who will evaluate the new hire in any way. The mentor could be a teacher for a new teacher, a chairperson of another department for a new chairperson, and so on, but not someone clearly “above” the new hire in the supervisory hierarchy.

- Work out a method of either giving the mentor time to do this important task or compensating the mentor in some acceptable way (a stipend, funds for conference attendance, or supplies and equipment the mentor would not otherwise get).

- Be clear about the amount of time expected of the mentor. The duration of the role should be at least one year. The weekly or monthly time expectations can vary with need, but there must be a minimum expectation. Many mentors, in my experience, take professional pride in being of help to a new colleague and will voluntarily exceed the minimum expectation.

- Choose a mentor who is not necessarily an expert in every aspect of the new person’s job, but can guide the person to people who can help. A new principal may need to find a real estate agent or a pediatrician, and the mentor may wish to suggest several people or recommend a couple of staff members who know more about this than she does. Some schools or districts even have a list of people in various professions whom people new to the community might wish to consult. Larger communities often have some form of newcomer’s group.

### **Rules for Recruitment and Retention**

1. Set up a logical and effective recruitment committee.
2. Establish clear expectations for the new position.
3. Charge the committee with creating an evaluation rubric.
4. Research the candidate completely and effectively.
5. Provide an effective mentor for the new hire.

### **Keywords**

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Teacher retention

