

Council of Deans Chairman's Section

Searching for a Dean

Charles O. Rutledge

School of Pharmacy and Pharmacol Sciences, Purdue University, Heine Pharmacy Building, West Lafayette IN 47907-1335

For the past several years, at any given time, more than twelve of the seventy-five Schools of Pharmacy have been searching for a dean(1). As positions are filled, other positions become vacant. The pharmacy academy is not making much progress in having a full complement of leadership in schools of pharmacy. Pharmacy education has accepted tough challenges as we modify our accreditation standards to adopt the outcomes and competencies of Position Paper II of the AACP Commission to Implement Change in Pharmaceutical Education and as we prepare for the PharmD degree as the single entry level degree. We urgently need for each school to have dynamic stable leadership in the dean's position.

Why have so many schools had difficulty recruiting and hiring deans? A simplistic answer is that it is difficult to attract someone to be a dean in a time of declining resources. That is only part of the answer, and even the difficulty can be overcome with good planning and action by dedicated people. A more accurate answer is that many schools do not adequately prepare and conduct a search for a dean. Some schools realize this after their first or even second search is unsuccessful, and some when the new dean fails to reach either their own or the school's expectations. Other schools are quite successful in attracting a dean who provides just the leadership they were seeking and they do it on the first attempt. How do these searches differ?

The successful search consists of a series of stages, each of which must be successfully completed before the next one can begin. The first stage is reaching consensus on the mission of the School. The consensus should begin with the faculty but should include the upper administration, students, and external constituents. Is the mission of the School solely or primarily to educate pharmacists? Does it also include contributions to scholarly pursuits? Does it include a graduate program? What is the relationship of the School to the profession and the scientific community? Is it within the mission of the School to attract women and under represented minorities into administrative positions? Are the allocations of school resources consistent with the mission as stated on paper? Candidates for dean's positions will want to know the answers to these questions, and in the successful search the answers given by the numerous people who meet with the candidate are consistent. It is essential that the School and upper administration agree on the mission. Otherwise, the upper administration may choose someone to fulfill the mission as they see it, and the School may be disappointed.

The second stage of the search involves an objective analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the School. The faculty often view the school as ten to twenty years of past accomplishments, while the candidates will view the school as ten to twenty years of future challenges. The self-analysis must contain a balanced view

which can be presented to the candidate. Once this analysis is complete, the search committee can begin to write a position description to attract a candidate who possesses the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will allow the School to maximize its strengths and to correct its weaknesses. A successful search will be a good fit between what the candidate has to offer and what the School needs. It is well known that certain deans with their own administrative styles and past experiences function much better in some environments than in others. It is up to the School to agree on the characteristics that are necessary from the School's point of view to achieve a good fit because they can be assured that the candidates are going to be asking the same questions from the candidate's viewpoint.

The next stage involves the selection and initial work of the search committee. There is often much anxiety about who is on the search committee and concern about whether all of the various constituencies are adequately represented. It turns out that the composition of the search committee is less important in the final decision than completion of the first two stages in the search and provision of ample opportunity for communication between the search committee and the various constituencies. It is often at this stage that the politics of internal and external candidates emerges. It is very helpful if this can be resolved early, so that when external candidates appear for interviews, the status of internal candidates can be explained. The search committee should be assured that the first two stages are complete and then finalize a job description. If the School has difficulty in coming to an agreement at this stage, it is helpful to consult deans or others experienced in the process of searching for pharmacy deans. Outside consultants can often provide the search committee perspective on how the School presents itself to someone from the outside.

The stage involving identification of candidates requires considerable energy on the part of all who want the search to succeed. It is very helpful if the Chair of the search committee assumes personal responsibility for assuring a sufficiently large pool of candidates who will fit the job description. This often involves engaging many of the faculty and external constituents in soliciting nominations of suitable candidates. Those searches which have relied only on advertisements and word of mouth have been less successful than those in which candidates have been personally solicited and urged to apply. Candidates need to feel that they are truly wanted even at this stage in the process. Good candidates are often intrigued by challenging and rewarding opportunities at another institution. However, it is important not to mislead candidates into thinking that they are "wired in" to the position.

Once the nominations with appropriate documentation are received, suitable candidates are identified and invited to campus

Candidates are looking for situations in which they can work with the upper administration, faculty, and students to achieve mutually agreed upon goals. Sometimes search committees are looking for a knight arriving on a white horse to solve all of their problems. This is not appealing to candidates, who instead view themselves as the scout of a wagon train who is trying to guide the settlers to a new beginning. It is helpful if search committees understand this and work towards modifying the image which they project to the candidates. Checking on the past performance of candidates from a variety of sources is essential. Letters are helpful but not conclusive. It should be remembered that energetic people who have a series of accomplishments are bound to have offended someone. The question is, whether there is a pattern of behavior that would interfere with the ability of the candidate to lead the school toward achieving its mission.

The final stage is closing the deal. Although the faculty often view the availability of resources provided by the upper administration as the major stumbling block in attracting a good dean to their school, it is the experience of many schools that this is not the limiting factor. It is the School that presents itself in an unattractive way that limits the search. Sometimes the deal cannot be closed for personal reasons that were not clearly identified during the process. However, if all of the previous stages were successfully completed, closing the deal should be relatively straightforward. To all of you who are in the process of a search for a dean of a School of Pharmacy, "Good Luck!" and I hope that there is something in this message that will be of help to you.

References

- (1) Trinca, C.E., "Tomorrow's leaders and academic managers: dearth or mirth," *Amer. J. Pharm. Educ.*, 57, 291 (1993).