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[Executing A Model Hiring Process]

Unfortunately, some athletics departments have been notorious for not following the same Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) defined hiring processes as other campus departments, especially in the hiring of head coaches. Athletics directors will claim that coaches are “emergency hires” because no one wants to lose recruits by going through a lengthy search process. This practice should be discouraged not only because it violates the spirit and or letter of federal laws, with the potential of perpetuating years of discrimination in athletics with regard to the hiring of female and racial/ethnic minorities, but will often result in “bad fit” hires because not enough due diligence was taken to check references or have the candidate engage with a strong cross section of stakeholders prior to the selection decision. Thus, the hiring process should be respected, methodical, and laser focused on working to identify the right person for the position. Following is a practical discussion of each step that includes important management tips.

STEP ONE: REVIEW THE JOB DESCRIPTION

Prior to posting any job, the job description should be analyzed for accuracy and decisions should be made on necessary changes. These changes could result in a different reporting line, a different term of appointment, an adjustment in the compensation package, or new responsibilities. Any new hire may provide an opportunity for additional changes. The potential for change should always be explored with the intent being an accurate description of the job responsibilities for the incoming position occupant.

STEP TWO: FORM THE SEARCH COMMITTEE

For department specified non-entry level professional positions (all head coach, senior staff and middle manager positions with extensive supervisory responsibilities and/or significant duties), a search committee should be formed. There may be institutional or department policies in place that require representation on the search committee to be diverse in various ways. If no policies currently exist, it is always desirable to assemble a cross section of individuals from inside and outside the department and a committee composition that reflects gender and race/ethnic diversity. If the athletics department work force is significantly underrepresented with regard to gender and racial/ethnic minorities, consideration should be given to a search committee that has a majority of members from these minorities. Consider the following search committee composition checklist:

- The direct supervisor of the position
- Athletics department employees whose jobs will be most impacted by the new hire
- Athletics department peers of the new hire or those whose job will be minimally effected
- On-campus constituents outside the athletics department with an interest in athletics, like the athletics policy board
- On-campus constituents outside the athletics department with minimal interest in athletics (as the most unbiased voice)
- Off-campus constituents with an interest in the athletics departments
- Student-athletes
- Representatives from underrepresented minority groups

It may not be necessary to include a representative from each group for each position. For example, to hire a second assistant in compliance, the search committee may be the direct supervisor, one coach, one athlete and a representative from a minority group. However, a senior management or head coaching position should warrant a search committee that has a strong cross section of the groups listed above. In the case of a very high profile coach or athletics director, there may be other people who meet with candidates that are not part of the official search committee such as the President or the Principal and members of the Board.
Unfortunately, too often athletics department searches are completed "in-house" with no outside voices. This is partially due to the "emergency hire" practice and partially due to some longstanding cronyism. It is very important that people with independent voices that are perceived as unbiased be included in searches so the best hires can be made, there are built in assurances that hiring processes were diligently followed, and the manager is protected from accusations of selection bias. It is also important that an appropriate Chair of the Search Committee be selected who has the confidence and trust of all members.

STEP THREE: POSTING THE POSITION

The next step is for the institution's human resources (HR) office to take the job description and utilize it to construct the job advertisement. If this is not the function of of HR and a responsibility the athletics department, care must be taken to ensure that this posting announcement is accurate and functional.
In some institutions, the "hiring manager" is an assigned HR office employee while at others, this responsibility is within the athletics department and performed by an assigned athletics business affairs employee or the direct supervisor for the position to be posted. Job advertisements are usually shorter and more concise than job descriptions because of the cost of posting in various print and electronic media and the size restrictions of such postings. If the job description is comprehensive and complete, it will make this process much easier. The sections detailing education and experience required and preferred for the job and required skills, such as specific knowledge of computer programs, should be included. The actual job responsibilities, reporting line, and term of the appointment are already at hand on the job description. The hiring manager will have to decide whether to post a definite salary, a salary range, or leave compensation open ended with a statement that salary is commensurate with experience. Remember that the salary range for coaching positions in men's and women's sports should be identical. Any difference in marketplace salaries offered must be on the basis of the experience and qualifications of the individual, not the sex of the athletic team. In most instances, a brief description of benefits offered is also included in the posting as well as statements related to the institution's commitment to equal opportunity employment processes.

At the first search committee meeting, committee members should review the job description and job posting and questions or comments that may help inform thinking about the position should be invited. Collectively, the search committee should complete the posting document by determining what documents the applicants must submit (i.e. transcripts, resume, cover letter, three letters of reference, etc.), the closing date for application submission (or can leave it open until the position is filled if there is a concern that the talent pool will be limited), and where to send all applications. Another important task of the committee is to decide where and when the posting will take place. Often, there are institutional policies about the level of the job and how extensive the search will be as well as affirmative action policies ensuring that advertising reaches minority candidates. The athletics department may also have separate, institutionally approved policies that reflect what employee groups mandate local, regional or national searches depending on the needs of the position and the availability of talented people for those positions. For example, if the institution is in a well populated area with many businesses, excellent administrative assistants and personnel for the athletics business office may be easily found through local searches. If it is a requirement for certain coaches to have teams ranked in the top ten in the country, the search for those coaches may be extended to a national or international pool of candidates.

If the posting is subject to hard and fast rules, it is less important for the search committee to be part of the decision where to post. However, if there is flexibility due to the importance of the hire or a perception that the talent pool is small, it is important for members of the search committee to help determine where the job will be posted. It is especially important to get feedback from the representatives of minority groups. Typically, prior to posting the job, the hiring manager must get approval to do so through the Human Resources office of the institution or school district, and, if available on campus, the Affirmative Action Officer. Once those approvals are secured, the hiring manager may post the position at the sites agreed upon by the search committee.

STEP FOUR: DEFINING COMMITTEE OPERATING PROCEDURES

After completing the work related to posting the position at the first search committee meeting, it is always a good strategy to cover the following additional agenda items:

- review policies and procedures related to the hiring process
- create a schedule of meetings
- establish application folder reading deadlines
- create a finalist interview timetable
- designate the person responsible for producing the minutes of the meeting and emphasizing the importance of detailing reasons that candidates are not selected or selected over each other
- search committee function (to hire or to provide a ranked list?)
- agree on interview questions for references and what committee members will be authorized to contact references (draft to be prepared by supervisor for position to be hired)
- agree on interview questions to be asked of all candidates (draft to be prepared by supervisor for position to be hired)
- review and agree on a rating sheet to be utilized to compare candidates
- whether background checks will be required of all finalists (see 6-9 for a discussion about background checks)

All search committee members need to make their respective participation a priority so the sooner an agreed upon schedule can be determined; the greater the chance of full participation. The search committee must also understand the role they play. Some search committees will make the final hire based on majority vote. Other committees are responsible for providing a ranked or unranked list of finalists to a senior manager who will ultimately make the decision. In addition, it is very important that minutes be taken at all search committee meetings in case a complaint is lodged later in the process by a disgruntled applicant claiming biased selection. It is also important to detail the reasons for not selecting candidates and selecting one candidate over another. These explanations are usually required by the institution's Human Resources office.

STEP FIVE: ENGAGING IN AGGRESSIVE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

It would be naïve to believe that most important hires (senior managers, head coaches, etc.) rely on the typical job advertisement to create an excellent pool of candidates. It is normal operating procedure for athletics directors, presidents, principals and the like to research winning programs or contact valued colleagues to identify the best talent in the market place. Personal solicitation of identified individuals and encouragement of their consideration not only happens all the time but is critical to identification of the most qualified and experienced applicants. Unfortunately, athletics recruitment often takes place before the job description is even written or posted and rumors abound that the job advertisement doesn't even appear until a secret candidate has been selected. As noted above, "emergency hires" should be minimized whenever possible. However, we do encourage hiring managers maintain succession lists and to expand the applicant pool through solicitation of applications from candidates who have demonstrated excellence. This strategy will also help enrich the pool by soliciting strong minority and women candidates. There is nothing impermissible about encouraging prospective applicants to apply as long as the formal application, assessment and interview process is fair and equal for all candidates who apply. A hiring manager should never convey that a candidate will get the job or that the process of interviewing other candidates is merely to demonstrate that institutional policy or state or federal laws are being followed.

STEP SIX: ASSESSING AND INTERVIEWING CANDIDATES

Litigation surrounding search procedures is commonplace. Thus, it is critically important to follow hard and fast rules about assessing and interviewing candidates and checking references.

Pre-Interview Assessment Rules:

- Follow all affirmative action policies and procedures as provided by the institution.
- Make certain that everyone involved in the search as well as employees processing applications understand that candidate information must remain confidential at all times, even after a selection has been made.
- Make sure that every applicant has his/her own file that is available to all approved readers and that every application file includes a record of when each document (resume, reference letters, etc.) arrived. It is always a good idea to send an e-mail or letter to each applicant thanking them for their interest and letting know that their materials have been received. In the interest of efficiency, consider informing all applicants with a standard response acknowledging receipt of their application that also lets them know that they will only be contacted again if they are selected for a telephone or on-campus interview. This practice will cut down on applicants calling to see if the materials arrived.
- Create a rating sheet immediately after the job advertisement has been accepted. The rating

sheet should be based on the qualifications and job responsibilities listed on the job advertisement. Require every search committee member to complete their own rating sheet for every applicant. For head coaches, elements such as years of experience as a head coach, years of experience as an assistant coach, competitive level of experience, win/loss records as head coach and other important comparators should be added.

- Be diligent about checking references with special attention given to the most recent direct supervisors of applicants. It is amazing how many individuals are hired for new jobs without new employers ever calling the most recent supervisor or listed references.
- Only call references that the applicant has provided. If the search committee wants to call other people who are not listed as references (i.e. a direct supervisor), the Chair may ask permission to call that person and get consent via e-mail or a signed fax from the applicant stating that they approve the contact.
- Keep the number of people making reference calls to a minimum and prohibit anyone else from doing so, even "off the record". All people making reference calls must understand rules related to permissible and non-permissible employment or demographic questions.
- All references contacted should be asked the same questions to assure the same breadth of information for all candidates. These questions should be collaboratively designed by the search committee or hiring manager and distributed to all those making reference calls if more than one person is making such calls.
- When calling a reference, never ask a question that does not relate to the job or is personal in nature (i.e. marital status, sexual orientation, age, number of children, race, ethnicity, etc.). Never pose a question from a negative perspective such as, "I've heard this guy can be lazy….what do you think?" It would be better to ask, "One a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest, how would you rate this applicants work ethic?" Remember, it is highly likely that most people serving as references will call the applicant immediately and relate all the details of the call so care must be taken to remain impartial. It is acceptable and recommended to ask, as a standard reference question, if there are any "red flags" related to this applicant that might compromise his or her ability to do the job.
- Resist speaking to applicants who call about the job because getting phone time with the hiring manager can be seen as an advantage to the applicant who does so. Merely direct them to the application procedures.
- If a deadline date has been set for submitting applications, it must be adhered to unless the search is reopened at a later date. Therefore, applications that come in after the deadline may not be considered.
- Search committee meetings to evaluate applications can take one round or several rounds depending on the quality and the quantity of the applicant pool. Require all search committee members to have their rating sheets with them at each meeting. Ranking of candidates should be completed on paper, confidentially, so committee members aren't swayed by other members' rankings. Again, be diligent that the minutes of the meeting reflect the process used and the ranking lists that were derived.
- Once the search committee determines the final pool to be interviewed, the Chair should collect all the rating sheets. If an affirmative action officer or a human resources representative has to approve the finalists before interviews can be schedule, he or she may want to review the rating sheets to see why some candidates were included and others were not. If that process does not exist, the search committee members may keep the rating sheets until the all work is completed.
- Before interviewing candidates, the search committee should create a slate of questions to ask all candidates so they faced with a "level playing field". In addition, answers can be compared

across those interviewed. Remember to include this slate of questions in the meeting minutes.

- The search committee should also create an interview rating sheet based on the questions, job requirements, and general demeanor such as poise, confidence, enthusiasm, etc.
- If pre-interview assessment rating sheets were collected, hand the rating sheets of the selected candidates back to the respective committee members so they have their own notes in front of them for the interviews.

Interview Rules:

- Once a finalist list of candidates judged to be qualified to advance to the interview stage of the hiring process has been determined, care must be taken to make sure that every candidate meets all of the same people. There is high litigation risk whenever some candidates get to meet a Dean, a Principal, a Board Member, or another person in power while others don't. At times, some search committee members may miss an interview. When this happens, he or she may not take part in any ranking of the finalists unless the person they failed to meet is excluded from a ranking list determined by the rest of the committee. Remember to reflect this situation in the meeting minutes.
- Managers have asked whether videotaping a finalist candidate's interview is permissible if a search committee member is going to be absent. This is not permissible unless all candidates had the same pressure of being videotaped during their interview.
- Be diligent about asking all the same initial questions to each candidate. As the candidate speaks, other questions may arise. That is permissible.
- Never ask a candidate any personal questions (i.e. marital status, sexual orientation, age, etc.). Stay focused on the requirements of the job and his or her ability to perform the job.
- Allow time for the candidate to ask their own questions.
- Never share the names of other finalists.
- Never compromise the people who provided references by sharing information about those conversations with the candidate.
- It is always a good idea to end an interview by telling a candidate that if for any reason they decide they do not want the job, to please let the search committee chair know to withdraw their name. Conversely, if they want this job but in the meantime are offered another job, they should call the Chair to find out where the search committee is in the process before accepting the other job.
- The recruiting process is often heavily focused on the applicant's background and often lacks the commitment to provide the applicant with a clear understanding of the job and the working environment from a micro and a macro perspective. The Search Committee should specify that time will be set aside during every interview for the supervisor of the position to communicate exactly what it means to be part of the program, covering program goals, expectations, ethical underpinnings, and work climate. Applicants should be asked to reflect on how well their own aspirations, values, work behaviors, and work style fit with those elements. Inclusion of this interview element may result in some applicants questioning whether this is the right job for them and withdrawing their names from consideration. However, withdrawal is a much better alternative than hiring and finding out later that a person's goals, values or work behaviors are incompatible with those of the department. Remember that many terminations are the result of "bad fit" rather than lack of skills or expertise. Assessing "fit" early on in the process is imperative.

Post-Interview Assessment Rules:

- Determine if any search committee members missed an interview and if so, eliminate them from ranking candidates unless the person he or she missed interviewing is excluded from the ranking list created by the rest of the committee. If a candidate was unable to meet with a person of importance (i.e. President, hiring manager, etc.), another meeting should be arranged. The Human Resource Department will have to decide if a phone interview would suffice.
- Similar to the pre-interview assessment rankings, finalist assessments should be completed in a confidential manner and written on paper.
- Meeting minutes should reflect the processes used and the ranking lists, along with the final slate of candidates to move forward to the hiring manager or the final selection depending on the role of the committee.
- The committee should also discuss "what ifs". What if our selection turns the job down? Do we automatically go to the second candidate? If so, what if the second candidate turns us down? Do we re-open the search?
- When the committee's work is completed, all rating sheets must be collected and included in the search file. All meeting minutes must be included in the search file as well. This will help protect the institution if someone challenges the process soon after the process or years down the road.
- A summary sheet should be completed by the hiring manager or Chair of the Search Committee which shows the reasons why all applicants were rejected, advanced to the interview stage or ranked for the job offer.

STEP SEVEN: OFFERING THE JOB

It is standard procedure at most institutions that certain individuals (i.e. a human resources representative, an affirmative action officer, a direct supervisor, etc.) must approve a hiring before the job is offered. The person offering the position must be armed with any information that was not provided during the interview such as final salary, contract elements, and the like. It is standard form to offer the position in writing with all critical elements reviewed and acknowledge that the hiring will not be complete until all formal letters of appointment or contracts are agreed upon and signed. This conversation is a good faith job offer with as much detailed information as possible. It is not uncommon for candidates to take a day or two to make their final decision.

Most managers are excited about informing a strong candidate that they were selected for the position. However, it can be very frustrating when that person seems less than enthusiastic and asks for a significant amount time to think it over. Managers must be prepared for this occurrence before the telephone call is even made. Through consultation with appropriate others, the manager must be ready to respond with a deadline date based on a myriad of concerns that can range from worrying about losing other strong candidates, having to re-open the search, compromising the current program because there is no leader (especially if this is a head coach hire) and other issues relevant to each particular situation. Regardless of the circumstance, the hiring manager should avoid frustration and be as prepared as possible to take the next step if necessary. The last thing a manager wants to do is hire a reluctant employee. Chances are they may stay for a very short time or create unnecessary problems.

--By Connee Zotos, Ph.D., SMR Senior Associate

Topics

[Personnel Issues]