

The Changing Role of the Personnel Program on the Campus.

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Today's personnel staff, in a rapidly changing environment, must be professional without stressing professionalism, must acquire knowledge of improved techniques, and must be sensitive and responsive to the needs of both the employee and the employer.

In examining the changing role of the personnel program on the campus, it is easy to identify the changes, as well as to note the increasing rate of change, which affect many facets of personnel activities. Before looking at what these changes are and why they are occurring, it is essential to stress the fact that everything is not changing. For example, human nature is not changing, although the specific goals of individuals are altered from time to time. Similarly, the basic principles of management, of organization, and of motivation—to mention but a few of the principles which specifically affect the personnel program—are not changing.

In addition, I want to emphasize my belief that the personnel program on the campus should focus primarily on non-academic personnel. It has been my observation, as a professor, that the personnel programs for the faculty are reasonably effective.

Although the personnel office may maintain some records relating to the faculty, such as the administration of certain benefit programs, the personnel pro-

gram should give major attention to attracting and retaining competent and productive nonacademic employees—while complying with legal and institutional requirements. The personnel staff should be alert constantly as to how any existing idea that nonacademic personnel are “second class citizens” can be eliminated. To the extent that the personnel department “goes to bat” for the nonacademic personnel—to that extent there will be less pressure for other groups or individuals to represent the nonacademic personnel at the college.

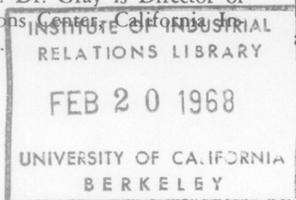
Changes On and Off Campus

Many changes on and off campus affect nonacademic personnel. Here are some illustrations; they do not constitute a complete catalog of items to be considered.

Almost every college and university is increasing in size, whether measured by number of buildings, student body, or number of faculty. All of this growth results in necessary increases in the number and quality of nonacademic personnel.

The basic functions of colleges and universities are to teach and to do research. Although in one sense these functions are not changing, both of them are becoming increasingly complex. For example, teaching devices, including audio-

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visual aids, are becoming more prevalent and complicated, and they require an increasing number of persons to maintain and operate them. I am glad to see that there is some renewed interest in a development known as "Built-in Orderly Organized Knowledge," which is usually known by its initials BOOK.

Even greater complexity has developed in research work. More and more specialized facilities, such as computers, wind tunnels, and atom smashers, are being used to study various problems. Probably because of these specialized facilities, there is a growing emphasis on team research, including technical and clerical assistants.

Libraries are continuing to expand, partly as the natural result of the passage of time and partly because of the increased demands from both teaching and research.

These are but a few of the specific causes for the increased number of non-academic personnel—an increase which does, but should not, alarm faculty, administration, trustees, and even legislators.

No college exists in a vacuum. Its policies and procedures affecting personnel are influenced by many changes which are occurring off campus. Federal and state laws and regulations, for example, are impinging on the operations of educational institutions, both public and private. All colleges have now become aware of the Fair Labor Standards Act, and some should recognize the Public Contracts Act. Changes in the Social Security Act affect some colleges and universities. All too frequently, a college or university finds that the Taft-Hartley Act applies to its operations. And without legal requirements, colleges and universities should not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, country of national origin, age, or sex.

The labor market in which each college operates also changes the role of the personnel program. For some time now, most colleges have operated in areas where there is low unemployment or, in other words, where there is a tight labor market. Supervisors report that new employees are often inadequately prepared, especially in relation to typing, shorthand, spelling, grammar, and simple arithmetic. The increasing employment of students and spouses of students causes still more problems to the colleges.

Most colleges are experiencing, whether they know it or not, higher labor turnover which should be expected from the increasing number of employees with a corresponding reduction in average length of service. Employment of students and of spouses of students also contributes to increased labor turnover.

The role of the personnel department is also being changed by the upward spiral of labor costs which includes both the continually rising levels of salaries and the broadening scope and increasing costs of benefit plans. Higher costs of social security and hospital and medical plans have been especially pronounced in 1966 and 1967, and the end is not in sight.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Personnel Department

The day has passed when any college or university can operate without personnel policies. The staff members of the personnel department are in an especially favorable situation, and should assume the responsibility, to initiate revisions in personnel policies to make them as effective as possible and also to make them consistent with each other. The four most important areas include:

1. *Compensation*, which includes both financial and nonfinancial aspects of rewards for working. In turn, the financial

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compensation must consider both salaries and benefit plans. Wherever possible, compensation should combine the financial with the nonfinancial aspects, such as title, status symbols, and, particularly, recognition of work well done.

2. Every college also needs effective and consistent personnel policies relating to *selection and advancement*. This general area also includes policies and procedures on transfer. Perhaps because of the attitudes of poorly trained supervisors, transfer is often overlooked for nonacademic personnel.

3. There is a universal need for policies dealing with *supervision*, broadly defined. Such policies would help answer questions such as these: How can present supervisors learn to set objectives and achieve them? How are new supervisors to be selected and developed? How can all supervisors be kept informed and keep others informed? How should supervisors be compensated? What authority and responsibility should be delegated to them? What guidelines do they need for decision-making? What responsibilities do supervisors have in selecting, orienting, appraising, developing, and disciplining employees?

4. The fourth area of major policies is one which is essential for carrying out the other policies on compensation, selection and advancement, and supervision—*communication*. If nonacademic employees are to consider themselves as part of the academic community, they must be promptly informed and well-informed about the activities of the college or university for which they work. No college or university employee should have to say, "All I know about _____ is what I read in the newspapers."

The personnel staff can initiate and suggest revisions on these and related policies, but obviously it must obtain the

approval of higher management and the cooperation of all levels of supervision within the college or university.

After the policies have been adopted and put into effect, the personnel department must initiate and maintain supporting and consistent procedures. Here are but a few of the areas in which better procedures could be developed which would make the operation of a college or university more effective:

1. Assist in the development, communication, and interpretation of policies and procedures so that supervisors, the administration, and the Trustees or Regents can "look smart."

2. Prepare and maintain loose-leaf manuals of policies and procedures for use by supervisors.

3. Provide supervisory training.

4. Assist in recruiting and orienting new employees.

5. Maintain current information on salaries, benefits, and similar matters.

6. Simplify paper work.

7. Develop new sources of applicants.

8. Conduct exit interviews.

9. Develop a clerical pool to meet peak loads.

10. Improve relations with students.

11. Improve community relations.

12. Assist in preparing individuals for retirement.

This list is not arranged in any order of importance, because the need for various procedures will vary from institution to institution. The personnel staff should concentrate first on those items for which it can win the greatest acceptance. This success will make further progress easier.

Summary

The personnel department can have an increasingly effective role on the campus by concentrating on some basic ideas.

It must begin by being able to distinguish between what is changing on the

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campus and what is not changing. For example, human nature and basic principles are not subject to change.

Secondly, the staff members of the personnel department must think in terms of ideas, not words. As an illustration, in dealing with some of the new problems arising under the Fair Labor Standards Act, they should not concentrate on terms, such as wage rate, salary, or stipend, but they should concentrate on the concept of financial rewards which an individual receives from working. This concept includes not only the basic salary, but also other items, such as shift differentials, meals and lodging, and even free tuition. By this time, all personnel departments have learned the danger of making a salary survey by focusing on job titles, rather than on work performed. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, they must think about the concepts of professional, administrative, and supervisory work, rather than of job titles.

The personnel staff should improve their counseling with employees on how they should fill in forms. A good illustration of this is how employees should fill in tax exemption forms required for the withholding tax. The failure to take the allowed exemptions will reduce the employee's take-home pay, and this can cause problems for the supervisor, because many employees compare their take-home pay instead of base salaries.

In all of its work, the personnel department should work *through* the organization structure at its college or university. Staff members should spend a great deal of time out of the office discussing with other members of the academic and non-academic supervisory group where and how the results achieved by the personnel department can be improved. Here, too, each personnel man should constantly bear in mind that it is his responsibility to make others "look smart."

One word of caution: *Personnel directors and their staffs should expect to be frustrated.* In order that no one will be completely discouraged, I can point out that there are only two circumstances under which you, as a staff member of a personnel department, will not be frustrated:

1. If you view your job as that of a fireman and merely wait until someone makes a frantic call for your help, you will probably not be frustrated. You will be able to read all of the ever-increasing literature in the field during the vast amount of time in which you will not be interrupted. I am sure that none of the members of the College and University Personnel Association are in this category. Each of you has many ideas on improved policies and procedures.

2. You then could only avoid frustration providing that the second circumstance existed—the college administration rubber-stamped all of your ideas and recommendations. It is a matter of fact, however, that no college administration could possibly afford to meet immediately all of your ideas. Under these circumstances, you are likely to feel frustrated, but you should not be discouraged. The mere fact that a particular suggestion or idea is vetoed today does not mean that you cannot resubmit it at a more propitious time in the future. Everyone in personnel must develop a high degree of tolerance for this feeling of frustration.

In short, the personnel staff, in this changing environment, must be professional without stressing professionalism, acquire and use a knowledge of all pertinent labor laws, keep abreast of improved personnel techniques, and be sensitive and responsive to the changing needs of the nonacademic employees and of the college or university as a whole.