

TEACHING A NEW DOG OLD TRICKS

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If it has not happened yet, it is going to happen. Someone on the music faculty will contact the chair by visit, email, or phone and tell them that they will not be returning to your institution next academic year. A less comfortable situation may occur when the department chair calls in a faculty member to inform them that they will not be offered a contract for the next academic year. In any case whether the vacancy occurs by retirement, moving on to another position, the creation of a new faculty line, or termination, this is just the first step in what has become known as “the search” for a new faculty member.

So, for people looking for their first position or looking for a new position, here’s the chain of events that will finally lead to an appointment with most institutions. Assuming the faculty line will be continued by the institutional administration, this is a time to evaluate the faculty position. Perhaps the position needs to be redefined due to student demand, new programs, technology, or new subject matter that has become part of the curriculum. Discussion to reach a faculty consensus on the job description for a faculty search may be active with some “turf protection” involved, but finally the department chair will be able to make a determination on the parameters of the position and start the advertising process. Naturally, an ad in the *Journal of Higher Education* and other professional journals is still a good idea, but in this age of email it’s not the only way to advertise. Sending an email with the job description in the email to the appropriate applied teacher, chair, or subject area in institutions with recognized programs will yield a wealth of excellent candidates. It spreads quickly when a good job is open to a new master’s candidate, an ABD, new doctorate, or someone looking to relocate.

Soon the curriculum vitas will begin to flow in. It’s best to have a central location for their reception, acknowledging each as they arrive. Email notification will be fine, in fact as many c.v.’s will arrive as email attachment as through the postal service. As the committee sorts through these it becomes apparent that there will be three stacks, the yes’s, the no’s, and the maybe’s. Phone interviews are a good way to narrow the search, but trying to do more than four in a row will prove less than fruitful. A couple of phone interview sessions may be needed. Speaking of the committee, a number more than five will be unwieldy. Major areas should be represented, but not overly so. In fact, a member from a department outside of music with a good institutional reputation will be an asset when it comes to presenting the final candidate to the administration.

On campus interviews of the top three candidates are recommended. The visit to campus will necessarily include stops with administrators, but the major focus should be on the candidate’s interaction with faculty and students. If the position included applied teaching, a lesson with a representative student should be scheduled along with a performance time for the candidate. It doesn’t have to be in a formal setting. A final exit interview with the chair is a good ending to the visit. At that time the candidate should be informed of the timetable for making an offer of

employment.

There are many things to consider in the selection of a finalist for a music position. Obviously, background, performance skills, classroom manner, and the prospects of long term employment are important, but perhaps more important is the intangible of the best “fit” for the department. Is this the person that will be the best to work with day in and day out? Is this candidate going to be high maintenance and demanding or cooperative and self sufficient.? Candidates should be honest in all responses during the interview. If there is a weakness in an area, don't be afraid to admit it. No candidate, particularly for positions with multiple responsibilities, is perfect on all fronts. A willingness to take on a new subject area or applied area is easily perceived at the interview.

Many candidates are interviewing for multiple positions. The candidate would be well advised to let the chair know at the exit interview if there are other offers to be considered. The chair should let the candidate know what the institution can do in the way of assistance with moving, securing housing, and a general salary range. Once the finalist has been selected it will be much easier to teach them the “old tricks” if the process has been thorough and honest in all aspects. The new faculty member, particularly those who are accepting their first full-time position, needs to have such things as committee assignments, tenure, and expectations of participation fully explained. Candidates who did not get the position should be notified that the position has been filled. It is common courtesy to call the ones who visited campus. Others can be emailed or sent a general letter. All materials, c.v.'s, CD's, and reference letters should be returned to the candidates.

The week before classes start and the first week of class will be the biggest adjustment for the new faculty. There will be orientations for new faculty with academic offices, personnel offices, student groups, and more. Chairs are well advised to appoint a more senior faculty as mentor to take care of such things as how to get your class roll, submitting grades, what to do about excessive student absences, how the purchasing system works, what the annual review is all about, and endless other questions that will arise. Particularly at smaller institutions where the faculty are generally expected to cover one or two areas of private lessons and one or more academic areas such as music theory, history, or education, care should be taken to find the proper balance for new faculty in such areas. It's good to develop a wide palette of courses, but it doesn't all have to be done the first year.

When a new faculty member joins a music faculty there is more involved than just rehearsals, classes, and lessons. To help with the move, new faculty need to become involved with community activities. This can be through civic, recreational, and church groups. Finding social contacts away from the department helps the new faculty become part of the neighborhood and is good for relations with folks with the community and the institution. Likewise, participation with institutional life beyond the department is also a positive. Chairs should look for committee assignments that would introduce and involve the new faculty with folks from other disciplines as well as staff and administrators.

Here's some practical advice for new faculty. First of all, though it may be tempting, do not socialize with students evenings and weekends. Be friendly, but

professional in your relationships. Even if you are closer to their age than you are with the rest of the faculty, insist that students call you by the proper title, Ms. Jones, Mr. Jones, or Dr. Jones, never on first name basis. Secondly, don't oversell yourself by offering to take on tasks that you are not prepared to do. On the other hand, if an academic challenge comes your way as requested by the department take it on with enthusiasm. You may become the expert in a field you have never studied before. Thirdly, make an appearance at all of the concerts and recitals you can. Especially at smaller institutions, your presence will be noted and appreciated by students and faculty alike. And finally, if you are in a tenure track position remember your countdown clock, which is usually five years, has begun to tick. If you haven't finished the doctorate do that first, then start building your resume right away with excellent teaching in the classroom and studio, professional growth with research and performance, and service to the institution and the discipline.

In dealings with the rest of the faculty, first names are fine in conversation. Even if the chair is old enough to be your mom or dad, go with a first name. It may be awkward at first, but you will get used to it. You are colleagues now. However, in the presence of the students you should always refer to your colleagues by title, Mr. Smith, Dr. Smith, or perhaps Professor Smith. Under no circumstances demean a fellow faculty member in the presence of students. Younger faculty will not regret this decision. One last piece of advice, make friends with the departmental secretary. This person will know who to call, how to access what you need, and where to go to take care of many of your concerns.

There will be time in future years for the "new dogs" to learn all the "old tricks", especially if the selection and mentoring process are well done. As time goes by they will be the ones passing the "old tricks" along to the next generation.