

10

NOTES ON RENEWED EFFORTS FOR
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY IN 1980'S --

1978-1979

Notes on Renewed Efforts for Equal
Opportunity in the 1980's in Higher Education

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1978-
79

As I look back over six years at M.I.T., from the vantage point of being one of the ombudspeople at M.I.T. (at the end of the line of the non-union grievance procedure for everyone employed at M.I.T. and for some student concerns), I would like to talk about four major subjects concerning progress in equal opportunity.

Of these four major subject areas only one is really directly amenable to Government regulation and action: addressing the occasional occurrence of manifestly illegal behavior, sins of omission or commission. This category includes such problems as making appointments to white males without any serious attempt to search for equally qualified minorities and women, in institutions required to make a serious search. It also includes unequal pay for equal work, gross sexual harassment, racial abuse and so on. This category of problems has been addressed abundantly, though unevenly, by the Government and the courts, with varying degrees of success. This class of problems is also well recognized, and under considerable study from many points of view: Are illegal acts really adequately covered by laws and regulation? Does the protective machinery work well enough? Does it discriminate against white males?

DRAFT

Is the paperwork useful? Is the cost of compliance appropriate? Can we reduce the psychic and economic cost of compliance while improving its effectiveness?

My own view about this area of EO endeavor is that affirmative action compliance and protective machinery, as we now know them, basically set a limit on gross discriminatory behavior--a floor beneath which we may not sink. At present these limits to abuse are necessary. They could be much improved. But most important, they are not sufficient to lead to sustained progress. In any case, since this arena is much in the public eye, I will skip over it.

The other subjects I would like to touch on are less directly amenable to Government action. They are: "steady state" recruitment for minorities and women; a "mentoring framework" within each institution; upward feedback channels that work. Each of these subjects is important also for white males. And progress for women and minorities in each of these areas depends, I think, on having the appropriate system designed for use by everyone, regardless of race or sex. I will however discuss these topics from the point of view of minorities and women, for whom I believe they are essential.

Steady-state Recruitment

Even in times of retrenchment, every viable institution does some new hiring and has some promotions. Historically, as the cliché says, white males recruited white males via the old

DRAFT

boy network, usually by word of mouth. However, in the late 60's it appeared that most white males could not very effectively recruit women and minorities. It appeared that minorities and women could recruit qualified people like themselves, more readily than white males could, and many were asked to do so. By and large this relatively successful recruitment of non-trationals by non-trationals was also done by word of mouth. The success rested on two principles as I see it:

- 1) minorities and women (and of course white males) are not "invisible" to persons like themselves;
- 2) if you are recruited by someone like yourself you are more likely to believe the interest in you is real; the recruitment is "credible."

Recruitment of qualified non-traditional people has slowed or stopped in many places. The original non-traditional recruiters have tapped their own networks and they are tired. Most important, they often lack credibility in recruiting for positions more prestigious than their own. All these points of course led to the requirements for wide advertising now encouraged and mandated by Federal regulation. But wide advertising is not sufficient. What then to do?

Recommendation One: Train Everyone How To Do Steady-State Recruitment of Minorities and Women

My own view of this is that we need to get more white males to build their own women's and minority networks, on a

DRAFT

steady-state basis. It means that everywhere one goes, one introduces oneself to minorities and women, routinely. At conferences, on airplanes, at parties, the critical thing is to cross the "invisibility" gap and to get to know lots of non-traditional colleagues. This widespread net of minorities and women then serves as a recruiting net, and even as candidates, at a time when one is actually hiring.

Most able white male managers and academics find this prescription perfectly comfortable ^{once they have tried it for a year or two.} It fits exactly with what they have always done. It generates no paperwork. And it works.

A Mentoring Framework

When I first came to M.I.T. six years ago, I was much interested by role modeling theory as a path to success for junior people. But we had practically no senior women to serve as role models. I then asked the top administration to help launch a mentoring system, thinking originally that department heads would "assign" mentors. Our top administration tried hard to discuss this question with department heads and others, and so did I, at least once or twice a year. But everyone was concerned about the social tensions and incongruities involved in just "assigning" mentors. I then asked senior faculty women if they would discuss the question at women's faculty meetings, so that junior women would learn what is expected of them here. This the senior women have done, with great courage, humor and

DRAFT

dedication, at meeting after meeting, even to the extent of discussing in detail their own career paths here.

Finally I began to work individually with every junior faculty member here, ^{who wanted to come in,} to try to help teach him or her what would be expected for promotion at every stage. Depending on the different mores in each discipline we would discuss how to get grants, how to get to be known, and above all, how to find mentors. For women in particular, the classic one-on-one, long-term mentorship with a senior man can pose some difficulties. So we began to develop some principles in working with junior faculty:

- 1) each junior person must take on the responsibility to find adequate guidance and mentorship; nearly everyone who succeeds must apprentice themselves to those who know more;
- 2) multiple mentors, and men and women of every age and type may be able to help (and be helped);
- 3) one does not need to like everything about a mentor in order to learn from that person; one does not have to accept being patronized or exploited in order to learn;
- 4) if all else fails in one's own environment, one can and must find mentorship elsewhere.

Recommendation Two: Build Mentoring Frameworks

There appear to be several components of an adequate framework. First, the top administration must explicitly legitimate mentoring (especially in order to overcome the natural

DRAFT

diffidence felt by many senior males toward females). Second, someone must work steadily to elaborate on that legitimation with all line managers (department heads, etc.). Third, it helps enormously to have senior women discussing the need to learn how the system works and how they did it; a little "role-modelling" can affect many people rather effectively this way. Finally, junior people must come to believe that they bear the real responsibility for finding adequate sponsoring and guidance. Each set of "actors" in the framework can be helped to learn to make the system work.

As with the recruitment pattern above, most able white male academics are willing and interested, both in extending the customary junior faculty support system to everyone and in making sure it works for non-traditional junior faculty.

Upward Feedback Channels*

It is a commonplace that many women and minorities find traditional, white male environments very uncomfortable, alien and/or "cold." It is also a commonplace that changes in policies, procedures and structures may be needed in traditional environments to make them appropriate to the needs of new employees. Finally, racist and sexist behavior even of very gross varieties still is very frequent.

A critical problem however exists: white males may not know of all the adjustments needed in their environment. And first-rate managers almost never know even a fraction of

*The many assertions in this section can be affirmed by the author ^{at} considerable length with substantial data from the past six years.

DRAFT

the inhuman, inappropriate and often racist or sexist behavior that goes on among their subordinates. Most junior people are actually very reluctant to complain, for fear of retribution, misunderstanding and humiliation, or simply because they are determined just to get on with the job. And finally, many ordinary complaint channels represent an inappropriate scale (or weight) of redress, (for example, address to the Office of Civil Rights).

For many different reasons then, it is difficult in general to keep adequate information flowing upward to decision-makers. In the specific area of equal opportunity it is extremely difficult to keep information flowing up to those who need it. Usually what happens is that those who feel uncomfortable in a given arena simply quit--and minorities and women often feel very uncomfortable. And often quit. Retention of excellent non-traditional people then virtually requires that top administrators in our traditionally white male institutions keep themselves adequately informed about what is going on, in a non-confrontation manner that permits peaceful progress and change. This means supporting well organized upward feedback channels.

Recommendation Three: Low Barrier, In-House Mediation Offices

Around the country many different corporations and neighborhoods are experimenting with local and/or in-house, low-barrier mediation services. It is important for justice and credibility that such services dispassionately serve everyone.

DRAFT

It is equally important for perceived ease of access to non-traditional people that in-house ombudspeople should include men and women, minorities and non-minorities with a (limited) degree of redundancy in the channels (to permit different kinds of people to find someone they are comfortable with).

Ideally these mediation offices can and should serve both to help individuals immediately and to illuminate to top decision makers areas where structural and policy changes are needed. In practice such offices appear very effective in fostering peaceful change. A frequently observed serendipitous result is that in-house mediation may obviate or reduce litigation and its attendant financial and emotional costs.

In summary, then, I would like us to address the major questions of recruitment, retention, promotion and productivity of minorities and women in ways which are different from, and add to, our minimum affirmative action "compliance" efforts. These proposals derive directly from the processes which have always worked best for white males. They can and should be instituted in a framework designed for everyone: male and female, minority and non-minority. These proposals do not add to financial costs and may actually reduce budget pressures in a time of retrenchment. They in no way infringe on traditional academic rights and values, but rather support equal access to academe as we have always sought to do. And, perhaps nicest of all, these proposals actually ^{can} work.

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