



# SELECTING THE CREAM OF THE CROP (PART III)

**F**or 10 years I have been ruminating and writing about the nature and importance of leadership selection in Catholic health-care (see my articles in *Health Progress*, July-August 1989, and April 1992). For about half that time I have had a chance to observe how closely my theories fit reality, and the points below are conclusions I have made. While I use the selection of a chief executive officer (CEO) as the paradigm for these remarks, they apply, with appropriate modifications, to selecting managers and trustees.

**1. The selection of a CEO is the single most important ministry decision an organization makes.**

Many forces, both external and internal, shape the culture of corporate ministry. Of the internal shapers of corporate culture, nothing competes in power and importance with the selection of the CEO. Twelve to 24 months after the arrival of a new CEO much will have taken shape: people will have moved in the organization—some up, some down, some in, and some out; resources will have been allocated; long-range plans will have been launched; and new programs and systems will have emerged. As more time passes, the character of the organization—its people, allocation priorities, plans, programs, and systems—will increasingly mirror the character and priorities of the CEO.



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*Search*

*Process*

*Should Stress*

*Candidate's*

*Lived Values*

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**2. The primary issue in the selection of a CEO are the candidates' lived values.**

Each of us affirms a broad range of values, but among our *voiced* values stands a cluster of lived values that give shape and character to our lives. (Card. John Henry Newman referred to these as our "real assents," in contrast to our "notional assents.") These are our core, lived values (CLVs). These core values determine how we spend our time, energy, and money; with which individuals, groups, and causes we associate; what we read and study; what most inspires us; and where our conscience and consciousness hover. In a mature person these core values continue to grow, deepen, and further integrate life, but only rarely does a mature person make substantial shifts in these core priorities. So, since these core values give shape and character to the CEO, and he or she in turn gives shape to the organization, these lived values should be the primary focus of the selection process. The goal is to find maximum congruence between the ministry's core values and the CLVs of the CEO candidates.

**3. Lived values leave their footprints in the candidates' past and can be tracked.**

A person's core values leave indelible footprints in that person's history, just as one's checkbook register and date book give abundant evidence of what one prizes and pursues. Consequently, the place to look for the evidence needed for a solid and detailed comparison of candidates' CLVs is in their past. It is much more to the point to examine the past in depth than to discuss hypothetical future scenarios.

A detailed review of the workplace(s) for which the candidates have been responsible can reveal their attitudes toward work and workers; what they consider to be the relative importance of workers at various levels of the organization; how



they balance personal and professional life; how they demonstrate concern for marginalized populations, such as women and minorities; how they support employee development; how they promote a family-friendly environment and policies; and their attitudes toward unions and employee empowerment.

#### 4. It is essential to clearly identify the desired CLVs.

An early and demanding stage of the search process consists of identifying the five or six foundational CLVs that are needed to lead the organization into the desired future. Then specific behaviors that demonstrate those CLVs must be determined. These CLVs become the determinants for

- Identifying potential candidates
- Narrowing the field to a short list
- Communicating with the final candidates
- Checking references
- Developing overview reports of the final candidates
- Conducting interviews
- Making the final selection

#### 5. A CEO search is a corporate *kairos*, not a bureaucratic task.

It is a common mistake to regard the CEO selection as just another organizational project for which a few persons are responsible. Actually, it is a "corporate *kairos*"—a time of blessing and opportunity for the entire community of ministry. It is a time when all the key stakeholders—sponsors, board members, managers, medical staff, and other employees—can look together at the challenges that the environment poses to their mission, vision, and values, and think about the CLVs a leader will need to meet those ministerial challenges. Indeed, a process should be developed that will enable them to do so.

#### 6. Widely disseminate the established CLVs during the search.

Once developed, the CLVs should be widely circulated.

- All the stakeholders who contributed to selection of the CLVs should know the results of the process they were part of and which key values will propel the remaining stages of the selection process.
- The search firm chosen must understand that its success depends on finding final candidates whose track records have been outstanding in terms of the identified CLVs. The firm's research, reference checks, and evaluative reports should all

center on these CLVs. Since these CLVs are ministry oriented, they differ significantly from normal search firm parameters. It would be hard to overestimate the effort needed to ensure that the CLVs drive all aspects of the search firm's efforts.

- The candidates must understand that they are finalists because they have demonstrated the CLVs and that the final selection will be based on a comparison of how they have done so. It is helpful to ask them, prior to the final interviews, to submit written accounts of their strengths and accomplishments, as well as weaknesses, in regard to the CLVs. The interviews can center around these self-assessments.

#### 7. The selection process is an opportunity to address diversity issues in the organization.

In her historical study of U.S. hospitals, Rosemary Stephens wrote: "Hospital staffing is still a good reflection of contemporary class, gender, and racial relations—from the cadre of well-paid (still largely male) attending physicians, through the (largely female) ranks of nurses, therapists, and technicians, to the army of blue-collar workers in lesser-paid occupations, who are disproportionately members of minority groups. Indeed, in some ways the occupational divisions are now more important than they were in earlier decades, because of the sheer size of the hospital enterprise" (Rosemary Stephens, *In Sickness and in Wealth*, Basic Books, New York City, 1989, pp. 357-358).

Catholic healthcare institutions offer little evidence to challenge this observation. Given the Catholic principles of social justice and the strong public presence of Catholic healthcare organizations, the CEO search process should be an occasion to address the issue of diversity by recruiting minority candidates and by discussing with candidates their CLVs regarding diversity.

#### 8. Leadership selection continues to need emphasis.

The points above may seem obvious, but they need to be emphasized because they so easily become lost amid the other pressures that surround a search, such as urgency, expediency, turf issues, egos, custom, corporate politics, and confusion. Because such factors tend to operate on a silent, implicit level, they gain power and intransigence. To keep them on the margins, where they belong, an organization needs a strong and explicit consensus about the importance, the nature, and the essential components of an effective search process. □

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