

CASE 12.2

CHOOSING A CHAIR

The chair of the Political Science Department, Joe Hussein, died suddenly from a heart attack, and the dean needs to put a new chair in place quickly as the department is in the midst of an arduous accreditation process that Joe was leading.

The dean feels there are five candidates on the department's faculty who might fill the role, and asks the department's administrative assistant, Donna Russell, to meet with him to help vet who would be the best of these candidates to fill the gap. The dean worked with Donna in another department before she transferred to Political Science and knows Donna was Joe's right-hand person and because of that has unique insight into the faculty and staff of the Poli Sci Department.

The five faculty the dean discusses with Donna are

- Mark Andrews, who has been in the department for 22 years. Mark has the most seniority and certainly knows the department well, although he takes a very low profile in the department and seldom goes to any faculty social events. He attends faculty meetings, but rarely makes any comments. He has participated on prior accreditation teams and is serving on the current one as well. Donna reports that while Mark is very knowledgeable, his participation on the accreditation team is limited to providing advice and statements like "This is the way we did this last time." Unlike other team members, he does not volunteer to do any extra work involved in writing the accreditation reports.
- Kathy Dorn, who was turned down for the chair's job the last time it was open. Kathy told Donna that she believes she didn't get the job because she is a woman. Donna says, however, that Joe told her that Kathy was denied the chair's job because other faculty

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don't like working with her, stating that she is petty and vindictive. Kathy has strong administrative skills and seems to enjoy the prestige that comes along with having power. She is the adviser for the undergraduates and has been known to say bad things about her colleagues, including the department's chair, to students.

- Corrine O'Brien, who has only been a faculty member for five years, but has gained a lot of attention for her work in environmental politics. She has brought in multiple, multiyear grants and was recently appointed to an advisory board for the Environmental Protection Agency. Corrine has a reputation for advocacy and has met multiple times with the university's president to discuss the institution's sustainability practices. Donna says Corrine, who is also on the accreditation team, has brought energy and focus to the team's efforts and happily volunteers to take on extra work. Some people dislike Corrine because she seems driven and too research oriented. Donna greatly respects Corrine, but feels she may be too busy to take on the chair's role.
- Marius Donovan, who Donna describes as a "quiet giant." Not outspoken, Marius is liked by everyone and seen as the "bed-rock" of the department. He was the one who aggressively recruited Corrine to come to the university and suggested many of the changes that Joe put in place to make the department run more smoothly. Marius, however, is introverted and greatly dislikes confrontation. He overheard Kathy Dorn tell a student not to enroll in one of his courses because "it was outdated and trivial" and chose not to address it with her.
- Benjamin Torres is a popular teacher and well-regarded researcher in the field of state politics. He is often interviewed by the news media about state politics, which some of the other faculty think makes him a bit arrogant. As evidence of his arrogance, Donna (who admits she butts heads with Benjamin now and then) says that Benjamin was never afraid to question Joe about department issues, even in front of other faculty members. She says that didn't seem to affect Joe and Ben's relationship; they were running partners who worked out together nearly every day. She

knows that Joe often talked departmental business with Ben on those runs, but whatever was said stayed between them.

Questions

1. Donna Russell is in a good position to observe different faculty members. Her observations seem directly related to how well each faculty member plays the follower role. Does it make sense to use *followership* as a criterion for selecting the chair (*leadership*)? Explain your answer.
2. Which of the typologies identified in Table 12.1 most accurately describe the different roles the faculty members play? Which individuals would you characterize as being passive followers, anti-authoritarian followers, or proactive followers?
3. Using the roles identified in Chaleff's follower typology, what roles do each of the faculty members the dean is considering play in the department?

Advanced Questions

4. Using the criteria identified in the new perspectives of followership (*getting the job done*, *challenging leaders*, etc.), how would you evaluate each of these faculty members?
5. By job description, Donna is an administrative assistant, or follower, in the department, yet she seems to have power and exerts leadership. How do *leading* and *following* get played out in Donna's work? Based on your observations of Donna's work in the department, what is more important—leadership or followership?
6. Unhealthy followership occurs as a result of people's needs to find safety, feel unique, and be included in community. Using Lipman-Blumen's psychological factors and dysfunctional leadership, discuss how the faculty described above might engage in negative followership behaviors.

—Authors

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