

## CASE TWO

### THE NEW DEPARTMENT CHAIR

For seven years the political science department at York State College in which I have been teaching was under the leadership of Professor David Beaufort. As a department chair he was autocratic (by almost anybody's definition) but he had the personal qualities necessary to command respect and loyalty. He made and enforced all rules, regulations, and policies (which were not the domain of the dean or trustees) in almost infinite detail. For example, he assigned secretaries and office space and decided who had to teach the freshman survey courses. Beaufort was willing to accept complete responsibility not only for his actions but those of his colleagues, as long as their actions were within the well defined limits of his policies. Consequently, the faculty as a group was always careful to adhere strictly to his wishes. He can best be described as a paternalistic autocrat.

Professor Beaufort's methods left little to the individual faculty member's imagination about experimentation, freedom in teaching, and handling of students. Still, he did provide an atmosphere in which everybody, faculty and students, knew exactly what to expect.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Professor Beaufort's leadership philosophy, faculty morale seemed generally high and faculty turnover was modest during his tenure. The following statement by one of my colleagues adequately summarizes the frequently expressed sentiments of the faculty and may be some indication of their performance:

I've taught here for fourteen years under three department chairs. There were times when I wanted to strangle the old crank, but he always knew what he was talking about. I didn't mind being told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it because I always knew where I stood. I always tried to do a good job because I knew I could trust him. I'd like to teach under him again.

Attitudes could generally be termed passive, subservient, respectful, dependent and, as my colleague's comment suggests, ambivalent. I asked ten of my colleagues if they thought his manner impaired their teaching. Only four believed that the quality of their teaching would have been better in a less restrictive atmosphere.

Practically all professional contacts between administration and faculty originated at the top. Individual faculty rarely sought out the department chair--except when a special problem arose that needed his help. Beaufort always remained somewhat aloof on the job, but frequently visited socially at the homes of faculty members.

Beaufort was also extraordinarily adept at handling his superiors. The dean and provost appreciated his organizational skills, high research productivity in his department, and the fact that the political science faculty did not cause problems. Professor Beaufort frequently lunched with senior administrators, and occasionally invited a junior faculty to come along.

The president and the trustees were on the department's mailing list to receive a quarterly newsletter and advance notice of important speakers.

It is not easy to get a good picture of how well an academic department is performing. Course enrollments were high. Scholastic achievement, measured in terms of the percentage of students going on to graduate school, was above average for the state. The department budget was ample and had increased more rapidly than any other academic department in the school of arts and sciences.

Professor Beaufort died suddenly near the end of the spring semester last year. He was replaced at the beginning of the fall semester by Helen Nelson. She had several years of experience as a faculty member and assistant department chairperson at a state college in a neighboring city. The search committee had selected her from a field of many applicants. I, with a few other faculty members, saw her for the first time at the first department meeting of the semester.

At that meeting Professor Nelson clearly voiced a strong belief in the principles of a democratic administration. She said that the department could best achieve the goals of undergraduate education through a cooperative effort of administration and faculty. She then pointed out several budgeting, scheduling, and other matters formerly decided by Professor Beaufort in which she was considering a greater role for faculty decision making.

Specifically, she suggested that the faculty, because of its intimate knowledge of classroom needs, might be in the best position to allocate supply funds for the department library and equipment. They could get together, express their needs and preferences, and decide some priorities. She suggested that faculty also might wish to pursue some special or innovative educational activities, such as organizing study groups of students with similar career interests. She offered to help with administrative arrangements for these activities if the faculty needed help.

She also said that not only did she feel that faculty-administration cooperation was desirable but that she wanted to make genuine student participation in administration a reality. She requested that faculty cooperate to achieve that end. In concluding the meeting, Professor Nelson asked the faculty to give these matters some thought before the next meeting when we could discuss them.

Two weeks later, at that next faculty meeting, Professor Nelson asked for discussion of the issues previously mentioned, but no discussion was forthcoming. She attempted to evoke discussion by mentioning several alternatives, but still no discussion followed. She then asked for a vote on each proposal. The faculty voted almost unanimously to reject each proposal, and several colleagues openly expressed the belief that Nelson should handle these problems herself, as Professor Beaufort did. The meeting quickly broke up on an

unpleasant note. Professor Nelson subsequently took action on each of these items herself, which the faculty accepted.

After the meeting adjourned, many faculty members regrouped informally, minus Professor Nelson, in the faculty lounge. Their comments emphasized a variety of matters. Yet, one recurrent theme was a feeling that the topics on which Professor Nelson wanted faculty cooperation were not proper matters for faculty decision. They amounted to a burden the department chair should bear as her predecessor had done. She should not try to foist these duties off on the faculty. Morale was poor. One full professor said: "When they pay me a chair's salary and give me the corner office and reduced courseload, I'll do a chair's work

Professor Nelson made no specific assignments of the faculty's non-instructional duties in their meeting. Instead, she anticipated that all faculty would continue to attend committee and department meetings, advise student groups, be punctual, etc. But the anticipated cooperation did not happen. Only about half the faculty attended department meetings, hardly enough for a quorum. No one was willing to serve on the college admissions committee or stand for election to the faculty senate. Instructors arrived on campus only a few minutes before their classes began, and frequently left in the middle of the afternoon. Office hours were reduced and students complained that the faculty were inaccessible.

The dean became concerned about these problem and invited Professor Nelson over for a "chat." A few of the students had gone so far as to complain to their state representatives. This was not helping the college's budget request that was pending in the legislature. More importantly, the dean lamented that she and the provost "no longer know what's going on in political science" and were concerned that perhaps Professor Nelson was not up to the job of department chair.