

A CASE FOR CHANGE AGENTS: Traditions

Juan liked to walk and think, and besides the county office was too hot to finish the paper work ahead of him. Making certain he had his cell phone, he left the building. No matter where he went, he knew he had to return Marcy's phone call before the end of the day or face three more calls tomorrow. Marcy was a great 4-H volunteer leader; she was also relentless in wanting more money and more service. Program budgets were under review, and he knew she was frustrated. He also knew he didn't know what he should tell her.

Changing program audience

Juan had not been in his position very long so he was not part of the team that had developed the new program of work "affirmative action plan" which expressed the goal of expanding contact beyond current youth participants in CES programs. He knew his administrator would be in support of new programs for all youth and especially for those that had been underserved by CES.

Administrators were now responsible for documenting efforts to reach new populations and had informed county agents that they were critical to the success of the new program goals. But they hadn't talked with Marcy. Marcy was the third generation in her family to be involved in 4-H, and she wanted more of what her family experience had been.

Besides Juan wasn't sure what the commissioner support was for the new affirmative action efforts in CES. He did know that Marcy knew one or two very vocal county commissioners. With all programs under review, Juan did not want to be the one that provoked a budget discussion that resulted in losing more funds because political differences could not be settled.

Changing roles

Marcy's messages had also made it clear that she expected him to act as her agent – the way Bob Francom had done for years! The implied message was that Bob would not have abandoned traditional 4-H programs and members.

Juan had not sought his new position in order to be a politician! Was it his job to sell Marcy on new program changes? Were community or personal politics going to overtake the delivery of good programs? He had not heard much discussion among other agents except a sidebar offer if he wanted help in making the outreach reports look good. Was he the only one trying to figure this out? He wasn't sure the administrators would welcome a discussion with the commissioners just as he wasn't looking forward to his discussion with Marcy.

Juan's cell rang and the caller ID notified him that Marcy was calling again.

A CASE FOR CHANGE AGENTS: Diverse personnel strategies

Episode One:

Once again the current staff looked at the data while waiting for the HR specialist from across campus to join their meeting. In their view, the employment numbers in front of them did not tell the story of the effort that had gone into recruiting a diverse pool of candidates for the County Extension Director positions. The obviously missing population was people of color.

The staff knew that all college and extension administrators were very supportive of hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds as county directors. They knew there would be no hesitation in hiring qualified applicants. They also knew there had not been and were not now any black, Hispanic or other people of color who were County Extension Directors.

The positions were not remote and the demographics of the county's were themselves diverse. Past meetings had generated some innovative and useful recruitment strategies --- with no successful results. Where were the candidates they needed?

Episode Two:

Compiling a search committee can be the most difficult task. Frank had been working with a task force of specialized people from the cotton industry. Cotton is an important and growing crop in the state. The college recently received legislative money to hire a new cotton breeder and Frank's charge was to form a search committee to recruit the best candidates for the position. Frank's task force was the "perfect" group to turn into a search committee because the task force was comprised of the most respected cotton growers and producers in the whole southern part of the state. They just happen to be an all white males except for one female.

As the chair of the search committee, Frank sent the names of the committee members forward for approval. What he received in return was a note that the makeup of the committee was not diverse and that he had to include more females and Hispanics. Well, he thought, I don't happen to know any Hispanic, female cotton growers or producers. The EEO office sent him the names of two Hispanics from the Northern part of the state. Frank worried that their travel expenses would simply increase the expense of carrying out the search process.

He finally found one Hispanic woman in the college who worked in a related field (entomology), and he placed her on the committee. He could see where she might represent two groups (Hispanics and females) even though she really doesn't have a feel for the qualifications necessary for a good cotton breeder. Frank felt that the central administration did not understand that expertise was more important than gender or color! He also felt he wasn't the person to make that point. Besides the search committee wasn't long term.

Episode 3

Monique was not looking forward to her next appointment. Charles had been the new regional director for only six months, and already she had two informal complaints about his hiring practices. She knew there had been a big push on increasing CES diversity in hiring and appointments, but this time the issue itself was a bit different. Charles had been the first Black regional director in a long time. He had made two appointments and was influencing the candidate pool for a new agent. The fact that his recommendations were all African American seemed to concern some county and staff personnel who had been quick to share their concerns with her.

In addition, the Regional Office part time staff person was also a woman of color, and Monique wasn't sure who had hired her. One long term county volunteer had seen Monique at a program last week and "joking" asked if the regional office was going to be all black and, if so, was that what the diversity committee supported? Didn't it seem like, she had asked, that things had gone to the opposite extreme under the guise of diversity? Would traditional county clients feel welcomed in that office?

Most of her discussions about diversity had been with white people in CES who were in positions of power. This would be new territory for a diversity discussion for her, and she wasn't sure how to begin the conversation.

A CASE FOR CHANGE AGENTS: whose organization is it?

Everyone Marc talked to in the last twenty-four hours disagreed with the new policy statement from the University's EEO Office that excluded prayers at University events. Some seemed to have heard about it before he saw the statement himself. They had labeled it as banning prayer and telling individuals that they could not pray! They also seemed to think that Marc was on their side!

The statement had been fairly factual. A brief overview stated:

Court cases have indicated that state institutions and their representatives are not to have religious prayer before university sponsored functions. Any invocation of a religious nature is prohibited and unlawful.

This was followed by the names and key points from four important legal cases and a brief interpretation by the University's counsel. Marc was glad to learn they had included a few suggestions about what could be done -- but those failed to get much attention.

Marc felt stuck in the middle. He had an extension director who was trying to develop an educational strategy to focus on inclusion and create environments that don't simply reinforce service to traditional CES populations. However, he also had community people, legislators, and some of his own colleagues pushing for "non-enforcement" and/or avoiding the statement and the issue.

What he did not have were a few key administrators who were able to step into uncomfortable conversations and focus on the principles that were the basis of the original statement. He had excellent relationships with other administrators and saw them as very effective in their positions. However, being able to influence and create dialogue on controversial topics was a new skill for many. How was he supposed to make people like being uncomfortable?

A CASE FOR CHANGE AGENTS: Perspectives on leadership

Ted was glad he had driven alone to the meeting because the ride back to the office gave him a few additional minutes to think over the hallway conversation that took place as the meeting ended. The Diversity Task Force had made some excellent points, and he thought he had been accurate in his guess about how his assistants would respond. Ted's longterm service and commitment to CES programs made his leadership in "moving things through the system" invaluable. He didn't anticipate that it would be very different on diversity issues. He already had put in long hours in reviewing and reading materials that would enable him to have additional insight into the Task Force findings.

What surprised him was the way the conversation stopped as he joined a small group of staff in the hallway. He thought he had heard his name and was wondering which of his responses to the Task Force had been picked up on by his employees. However, his joining the group had produced an awkward silence before someone started bantering about their latest golf score. Now he wondered what the perceptions of his leadership on diversity issues really were.

Perspective One

He doesn't intend to weigh in on the diversity issues. He will find a way to make the report available, thank the committee and, in effect, put the report on hold for a while. Sure he knows about the issues, but we don't know what he thinks. And he seems reluctant to allow a discussion about sexual orientation to even be on the table.

Perspective Two

Things take time. I believe he is committed to inclusion and is open to learning about our perspectives...and the perspectives of any of the groups represented in CES. He is not a demonstrative personality, and you won't see him take on an issue, but he will pay attention and get the Task Force recommendations on the President's agenda.

Perspective Three

He can't be trusted on these issues. I have no criticisms of his program leadership and competency. But when it comes to diversity issues in extension, it is not who you know and how long you have been here – it is what you do as an individual in our system. I am in a lot of meetings with him, and I see much more he could do and he isn't. So, I ask why not?

Perspective Four

That's my point. We don't see all that he has done. We should be asking ourselves why we don't provide more feedback and opinion. If it is about day-to-day execution or culture change in our organization, we are all part of that. He's got my vote and I expect you will see many things happen that may not be credited to him. We need to be different to see him differently.