

CHAPTER ONE: SEEKING THE PERFECT MATCH

“There could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison.”

—Jane Austen, *Persuasion*

QUESTIONS THIS CHAPTER WILL HELP YOU ANSWER:

- What are my primary motivations for moving to the next level of leadership?
- Am I ready, professionally and personally, to move to the next level of leadership?
- How will a job change impact my relationship with my family and myself?

Getting Ready

You find the perfect photo, one that presents you at your most appealing. You spend hours writing just the right biographical sketch, sharing what you think will make you attractive, but not too much. In doing so, you are preparing to attract a partner.

Match.com.

eHarmony.

Bumble.

Higheredjobs.

Hired.jobs.

jobs.chronicle.com.

Wait, what? What do these have in common?

Looking for a job in higher education these days is not unlike online dating. Each starts with a carefully crafted description of the possible partner, and these descriptions are not entirely dishonest, perhaps, but they are certainly focused on presenting your best qualities.

Just as you don't want to show too much skin in your online dating profile picture, you also want to find just the right balance of professionalism and warmth in your job photo. Just as you want to share characteristics in a dating profile that will attract partners, in job applications you also want to highlight your experiences and skills while also finding just the right balance of confidence and humility. In both situations, how you present yourself determines how far you will go in the process.

But just as you are being checked out, you should be doing some "checking out" of your own. Does this opportunity tick all the boxes? Will your essential needs be met? Will you be able to express yourself freely, grow, and fulfill your potential? Or will you be stifled, held back, and endlessly frustrated? Are there deal-breakers that prevent you from making a commitment? We don't advise that you resort to being a gold-digger, but you should decide if sufficient resources are available to succeed at your job, and the compensation should comfortably provide for your material needs. Note that resources include salary and benefits *and* a climate that provides the opportunity for emotional resilience.

Dating apps come in two categories—those that use algorithms and those that are swipe-based. Companies like eHarmony have proprietary algorithms designed to predetermine compatibility by asking users an extensive set of questions and then recommending matches. Swipe-based apps, such as Tinder, give the users the opportunity to review a photo and a bio and then signal either interest (by swiping right) or disinterest (by swiping left). Algorithm apps, which seem more scientific, tend to be expensive and have time-consuming questionnaires to complete. Swipe-based apps, meanwhile, are criticized for user interest being heavily influenced by the physical appearance of potential matches. Both types eliminate some but not all of the risks associated with starting a new relationship.

The application process for leadership positions in higher education tends to be more like swipe-based dating apps, where committee members review a snapshot of a candidate that consists of a CV and cover letter. Like swipe-based apps, the candidates' appearance on paper influences whether or not they are moved forward in the process. Unless intentional efforts are made to design an inclusive outreach campaign and process, hiring can easily result in choosing those candidates with identities that are already well represented within the institutional leadership.

"Good Fit" and Cloning Bias

One of the primary downfalls of search committees and hiring authorities is the pursuit of "good fit" candidates. *Good fit* is a nebulous term that can be used to exclude those who are not white, not the "right" gender (depending on the discipline), not straight, not from the region, or even those not currently employed at the institution or in some way already known to the committee members. In short, using "good fit" as a means of selecting candidates allows *cloning bias*—hiring candidates who are like the incumbent and/or committee members—to drive the hiring process.

Job searches take a lot of time and emotional energy. That's why it's important to only apply for positions that you really want. However, the job search can have extra nuances for the candidacies of historically excluded people with leadership skills and potential. By "historically excluded," we mean those qualified candidates who are often overlooked due to bias. Typically, historically excluded candidates will have more success at institutions that are doing equity and inclusion change work at the policy and practice level. We cover the topic of how to determine the status of an institution's equity culture in greater detail in *Courageous Gardening: Equity-minded Leadership in Higher Education*, the second in our series of leadership books. *Perfect Match*, our third in the series, will be useful for all candidate populations, while also providing detailed focus on support for historically excluded candidates.

Motivation

As you are preparing yourself mentally and emotionally for a new romantic relationship, it is good to take stock and be aware of your motives as well as your level of readiness to commit to a serious relationship. Likewise, having awareness of your motives and readiness to take on a new leadership role will help you as you apply for positions in higher education. This section will help you to explore your self-awareness regarding your motives and will ask questions that you can use to examine your readiness to take the next step(s) on your leadership journey.

Your readiness and needs are not stagnant. Major life events, such as a change in marital status, milestone birthdays, and mental and physical health challenges, can change your responses, as can your growth and development. Therefore, it can be beneficial to return and answer these questions again as changes take place in your life. You will want to compare your answers over time and reassess and recalibrate your career plans.

Let's start with motivation.

If you have engaged in online dating, you probably first thought about your motivation for doing so. Has it been hard to meet people in person? Have you been single for a long time and are now ready to connect? Are you looking to get out of a bad relationship and want to line up someone else before you cut ties? Just as there are a myriad of reasons to start dating, there are also multiple motivating factors to look for a new leadership position in higher education.

*What are your primary motivations for moving to the next level of leadership?
Be brutally honest with yourself.*

Answering this question honestly can help you to achieve clarity about the "why" of your next career move. Knowing your motivation to move to the next level of leadership can help you with the "gut check" test to see if your reasons align with your highest values.

In the self-reflection activity below, there is no need to share your answers with others—unless you think you would benefit from discussing your ranking with your partner, executive coach, mentor, or trusted colleague. There is also no right or wrong way to rank these items, and no need to judge yourself harshly or pat yourself on the back based on your responses. Approach this exercise as neutrally as possible. The point is to be self-aware.

SELF-REFLECTION

What motivates you to seek the next level of leadership?

Rank each of the following motivations **on a scale from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest)**.

- Service to the community (to give back)
- Create a better future (for city, state, nation, world)
- Empower and inspire others to be their best (students, faculty, and staff)
- Love of the academy (love of teaching and learning)
- Money and upward financial mobility (material security)
- Prestige and perks (recognition and respect from others)
- Egotism (a need to feed your sense of self-importance)
- Prove to self that you can do it (overachieve or to challenge self)
- Prove to others that you can do it (due to insecurity or to boost self-esteem)
- Fulfill expectation of others (partner, family, mentor, community)
- Career progression (ready for a new challenge)
- Other:

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Now that you have ranked your motivations, notice if they have changed over time: How might you have ranked these items when you began your career?

How might you use your awareness of your motivating factors to narrow the positions to consider?

How might you use your awareness of your motivating factors to frame your application materials?

Get the book at:

<https://www.academicimpressions.com/product/leadership-position/>

Sample