

FOREWORD

From our first meeting I was aware that I was a threat to him, and he didn't want me on the team. What I didn't know was why. Did he sense my ethics that might question some of his decisions? Was it my gender? My years of campus experience and relationships? My expertise within admissions? My positivity? My passion for campus? Or was it simply that Admissions Directors on his campuses must be replaced? I'm still not sure. However, given that he saved some of his less ethical directives for after my departure, and he seems unable to resist mistreating someone on his staff at all of his campuses –I have to believe it's a mixture of all of it.

This statement is less about his professional decision making: Cancelling all admission recruitment staff meetings; bullying within the UW System to get his way-without regard for the campus impact; applying recruitment practices that, in the Midwest, will be perceived as desperate; refusing to speak with junior staff; making outlandish demands on projects then seeming to save the day by changing his mind in the end – done on projects such as the Welcome Center building, number of recruitment events to be held, physically and organizationally separating admission processing and recruitment, etc.

This statement is more about the personal/professional way in which he behaves.

A few weeks in, I started to get the feeling he was frustrated that he couldn't fire me - due to both having no cause and the ripple effect that it would have across campus. I felt he was trying to tear me down and force me out, however I just kept on doing excellent work and tried to survive it. I still felt I could outlast it and make him see I was his right-hand person for enrollment... I had survived much worse in my life, and if it was contained to just him, I felt I could persist.

THE INTRODUCTION

My first meeting with Albert was a dinner with newly contracted enrollment consultants on August 27th, before his Oct. 1 contract start date. Throughout the dinner he was very aggressive with his ideas, and his language and behavior was disrespectful at times. He was particularly dismissive of the female consultant, joking she was just a stranger who had decided to sit with us. He referred to UW-Eau Claire as a no-name campus and indicated that if he could implement all his ideas here, he could do it anywhere. He said he was seeking an innovation lab.

After dinner I gave him a ride to his hotel and asked if there were any particular reports he wanted me to prepare for our meeting the next day (he was to meet with each of his direct reports individually). He indicated it was just a get to know you meeting, a time to talk through families, hobbies, etc. Before exiting my vehicle, he looked at me and said, "What I really need to know is that you aren't going to get in the way of the things I want to do." I was surprised by his comment, and I explained that I was excited he was here and that I was an advocate of his position for our campus.

I had my individual meeting with Albert at the end of the next day, August 28th. There was no getting to know each other, as he dove right into business, which was fine with me. I had printed our organizational chart and a few enrollment reports. However, at one point he inquired about visit data which I hadn't printed, and promised to email. He whipped his glasses off and angrily blurted out, "Jesus Christ, you didn't anticipate that I would inquire about that!?" and from there it was an inquiry into my qualifications, demanding my resume and indicating that "your 17 years of admissions experience are basically worthless. They are all within the UW System - so what have you actually

innovated? No really, give me something.... anything really... yeah, that's what I thought." I was stunned into silence. He received a phone call and the meeting quickly ended.

The nature of those initial interactions with Albert were alarming enough for me to request a meeting and a crucial conversation with the Chancellor. I wanted him to be direct with me about his/their intention to bring in someone else to lead admissions, as I could find no other explanation for Albert's behavior. I also needed to confirm enrollment targets as Albert indicated he wanted a larger first year class than we had planned. In my meeting with the Chancellor on September 12th, he confirmed his support of me, applauding the work I had done and assured me that I was one of the most capable people he knew, and he couldn't imagine admissions being led by anyone other than me. He also assured me that our enrollment class sizes couldn't change without an intentional cross divisional strategy, including out of state recruitment, which was why Albert was brought here. I left assured of my role and with returned enthusiasm in working with Albert when he started his contract October 1st. I convinced myself he was just a tough boss who was testing my mettle.

MY RESOLUTION TO PERSIST

And so, despite the first meeting, I continued in my normal professional capacity— stepping up to lead several of Albert's initiatives, including organizing his initiatives into a cohesive plan, gathering the key data needed for enrollment decision making, leading the Scholarship & Financial Aid Leveraging committee, implementing new recruitment initiatives, including three receptions - planned and promoted within three weeks of inception, and creating partnerships with two schools in the Minneapolis School District. I obeyed his commands to give all admissions communication responsibilities to the IMC unit. I contributed greatly to the timeline that would mean opening an application much earlier, and worked to create templates for the Student Success Plans. All within the two busiest months of our recruitment cycle. I can't imagine how anyone could say I, or admissions, wasn't on board with his plans.

I believed I had the Chancellor's confidence and that he would communicate to Albert the strong leader he had in me. I believed Albert would see my proven leadership ability, my ability to cultivate a strong team, build a positive and effective culture, build rapport with students and colleagues, my excellent presentation skills, my commitment to collaboration across campus, my ability to strategically plan, and that he would witness my character and optimism and energy. I had reported to five different bosses during my six-year tenure as Director, and had no issues in succeeding in the transition and the new directions asked of me. I thought that I would prove to be a valued asset to him. And so I kept his treatment of me fairly quiet, and I tried to persist.

VACILLATING BEHAVIOR

In his first couple months I witnessed erratic and vacillating behavior. He set weekly one on one meetings with me, and they were almost always at the end of the day and went well past their end mark. They typically included his demoralizing comments such as telling me he didn't feel I had what it takes to do the job, that my poor attitude was rubbing off on others, that no admissions director has survived his arrival, and they need to find somewhere else for me. Then some days he would tell me that he is grooming me to be the next Vice Chancellor, that another colleague and me would be his right hands, and then back to comments about lying awake at night because of me.

I witnessed his divisive behavior, and it gave me great concern for our campus morale, which was just starting to come up after budget cuts and centralization. After meeting with an individual one time he would assess their worth – deeming them or their entire unit as useless. He would solicit opinions on the performance of staff within and outside the division, and use foul language to measure their worth. He was very dismissive about our admissions team. “You have a couple rockstars on your team, a few bad employees and the rest are just average.” I disagreed and pointed out that he hadn’t even met the entire team. He indicated his perceptions were all he needed, and he’s been in enrollment a long time. Our senior admissions staff met with Albert in early November to review all of our recruitment plans, data, organizational operations, budget, etc. In the meeting he observed one of our senior staff sitting back in her chair. He addressed her with, “What’s this all about – gesturing to her body language.” She said, with surprise, “Nothing, I’m listening.” He indicated he is observant and can judge people right away, and ignored her the rest of the time. The next day in my one-on-one meeting with Albert he said, “I felt that meeting went well, however you better tell your number two that if she wants to cop an attitude with her boss’s boss she can find a new fucking job.”

He would talk about using data to distract, and how to situate the enrollment division so that we could easily pull a fail valve if enrollment initiatives didn’t work out - as to avoid blame. I was shocked and saddened to hear this from a campus leader with incredible power. A colleague of mine shared that several times they heard him state, “Fuck the academy! Give ‘em the elevens!” (middle fingers). He never spoke of students, families or good service. He would say strange things such as “Are you with me?” or “I need to know you’re not going to throw me under the bus.” And when I inquired why he asked these things he indicated I had a lot of respect and connections on campus, and that I had ties in academic affairs and that I’d have to determine what that means with this new division. He seemed angry and paranoid about those connections.

On November 28th, in a Division meeting, Albert highly praised me in front of the other directors, “Thank you Heather... Heather and her team have done a great job at pivoting and opening up to new ways of working. The leadership of her team is strong and this is the kind of work I want to see in our division. Great job.” The next day in my one-on-one meeting was when he called me the weakest link in the Enrollment Division.

At one point when I pressed for evidence of his perception that I couldn’t do the work, he cited that I was not available to him enough. I had, on average, 5 meetings a week with him including my one-on-one meetings, and I made myself available for twin cities day trips, and made it clear to him I could attend meetings prior to 8am and meetings after 5pm. I had never met more than twice a month with previous bosses. Albert never cited any other reason for his repeated statements that I was the weakest link in the division, or why he felt I was unable to do the job.

QUESTIONING HIM

Albert appears to solicit advice and input by saying things such as, “You need to tell me if this won’t work on this campus. You need to help me learn Wisconsin recruiting.” However, in reality he doesn’t want his ideas or decisions questioned.

On November 28th; I was in a meeting with a fellow Director who was co-leading a committee with me. We wanted to firm up committee membership and I inquired about adding someone since the project was eventually moving to their unit, and the only expertise to carry out some of the imperative work resided in their unit. Albert went into a temper tantrum, threw his hands in the air and interrupted me,

using foul language and stating that his two supposed super stars in the division didn't believe in his initiative – even though he'd implemented it at every other campus he had been at. When my colleague tried to interrupt and share that wasn't what I had communicated at all, Albert indicated he was taking us off the project and another unit would run it. He tersely ended the meeting.

In my one-on-one meeting with Albert the next day, Nov. 29th, he indicated he didn't think I was going to work out, and that I wasn't on board. He called me the weakest link in the division, and said he would've told the Chancellor sooner had he not been in China. He said it was time for me to look for other jobs. After two months of this kind of talk, and recent events where I thought things were going better (particularly his previous day's praise of my leadership and being open to new ideas – shared in front of the Division Directors) I'd finally found a voice. I shared that I imagined he would arrive and identify me as his right-hand person. I asked what wasn't working out, and how I wasn't on board when I've implemented more than has been asked with his new initiatives. His response was "It's just my perception... a feeling I have. I've been a lot of places, and I just don't see this working. You're going to begin looking for new jobs, right?" I inquired about his double speak of my leadership from the previous day, and he responded that he calls it as he sees it, and doesn't need to explain himself to me.

I asked, "Is this about yesterday's meeting when I was clarifying committee membership?" Albert said, "Yes." I asked if my male co-leader of the committee had asked the same question, would he have reacted in the same way. He said flippantly, "No. I wouldn't have." I was certainly upset at this point and shared that it seems there was little else to discuss then, and that we both needed time to reflect on things.

On Dec. 3rd, after the weekend, I had another one-on-one meeting with Albert and he began it by diving into agenda items. I indicated we needed to talk about where things stand. He seemed surprised and said, "Can we start fresh? Begin again? Over the weekend I thought about it and you obviously have the respect of many people across campus..." I shared that it isn't about me starting fresh, it's about him continually looking for things to put in the column that convinces him I'm not on board with his vision. I shared that he doesn't do that to anyone else and there is nothing to indicate that I haven't been moving things forward- it's not about if I can restart, it's about if he can. He shared, "Yeah, you know you're not tired like other people on this campus – you aren't worn down like XYZ person. You definitely don't lack shine. You are energized; you are illuminated. If we can just move in the same direction..."

Feeling resigned and frustrated, I again share that he has yet to explain what I'm not on board with. Albert tells me he understands that I'm upset and that he would be pissed off too, that sometimes things just don't work out. He said, "I've been in this situation – but I'm a VC and you're just a Director, so you don't have the option...you're not in the position to do anything, but leave. It's time, and the Chancellor agrees. I think we tried to restart, however it's just not working and you need to look for jobs." I said, "Well, let me be clear – there isn't anything that I could do to help this situation as it seems to be about you being unable to restart and let go of whatever issues you came in the door with regarding me and/or my position." Albert responded, almost with a sick pride, "It's true, I will say you have lasted the longest of any Admissions Director at a campus I've gone to. You are tenacious." It was almost exactly two months since he started.

A couple weeks later, on Dec. 14th I asked to discuss his reasoning regarding a significant decision to not send me to a recruitment strategizing session with our enrollment consultants. A decision he couldn't deliver to me himself. Division leaders, and other Directors were attending along with 5 other staff from

another unit – and he wanted to send only one member of admissions. I let him know that the particular person from admissions he wanted to send was looking for jobs (as he had advised me to tell her to do after being in his first meeting with her) and that it was a risk to only send one admissions person, who may be leaving soon. I advocated to go, as it was a strategy session where it would be laughable at another campus to not have the Admissions Director present, and I was one of the co-leads on managing the consultant. His response was angry, “You know your poor attitude is spreading to other leaders in your office. I can see that your leadership is bringing the whole office down.” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing – and just a few weeks after applauding my leadership and helping my team be open to new ideas. He said the admissions person going on the trip could very well be the Director and that his decision stands not to send me and he’d like to talk with her about her future at UWEC. He was livid when she couldn’t come to campus to meet with him that morning, as she was preparing for a Campus Ambassador event; she offered to call in. He said, “Well, she is still on the company dime and she needs to meet with her boss’s fucking boss when demanded!” He reminded me that I need to be looking for other jobs, “and you’re leaving, right?”.

THE PATTERN

At this point my senior admissions team knew I’d been asked to leave. They were understandably upset, and one of them reached out to a colleague who knew Albert and had expressed concerns early on about his alarming behavior and questionable past at several campuses. Several statements from colleagues/subordinates from Albert’s past came forward and it became evident that the awful treatment I endured was a pattern of behavior many others had suffered. I decided that I needed to find out if the Chancellor really did agree with Albert’s directive that I look for new jobs and resign. And I decided he needed to have the information that had been shared with us, that demonstrated the alarming leadership behavior on our campus and at others. He could do with it what he wanted, however he needed to know it was more than just me vs. Albert, and the behavior was likely to continue.

THE CONCLUSION

A big part of me didn’t believe Albert when he indicated that the Chancellor agreed with him in calling for my resignation. I couldn’t imagine any evidence Albert had, nor could I believe the Chancellor would take this man – known to UWEC for a short few months – at his word.

Our meeting was set for January 4th. When I shared what Albert said and inquired about what might have changed his opinion of me it became evident he was going to side with Albert and wasn’t going to do anything about the toxic work environment I’d described. What hurt most is that the Chancellor admitted very little discussion had even taken place about what I did/didn’t do, and he admitted that it was never a question of my capabilities – more Albert’s perception that I wasn’t on board. I assured him it was not a case of me not ‘being on board’ and shared all the work I’d done for Albert. I explained to the Chancellor that it was a case of Albert walking in the door and creating a toxic environment/relationship from our very first meeting. The Chancellor indicated he hoped we could “work it out”. I was incredibly sad, and very hurt. He was the only person who could have intervened, and he did nothing.

I then shared that had it just been an issue of Albert and me, he would have my resignation letter. However, I needed him to know that others had come forward to share their statements, and what was

in the folder were four statements that matched the awful experience I had with Albert the past 4 months. I am a strong person, and even Albert has noted that I have lasted longer than any other Admissions Director he's inherited, as he indicated every single one has left or been fired. I told the Chancellor that the behavior I've endured is unacceptable, and I wouldn't be here today if I thought his behavior was limited to me and my role, and would end with my departure. I told him that he had an inherent risk that somehow the search firm failed to uncover for him. I left the folder of four statements for him to do with as he saw fit. I added that I would write out a statement of my own for him if needed. He admitted, and I appreciate his honesty, that he would not look at the letters and needed to stand by his person.

I was his person, too, I thought. And more importantly, this is his campus to protect, too. Other than repeat that he had hoped things would work out, he never called for anything to be done to investigate the environment, behavior and relationship I described. Affirmative action was never involved, Human Resources never inquired, and he never spoke to me again.

EPILOGUE - THE LETTERS

When I turned in my resignation letter Friday, Jan. 11th, Albert seemed surprised – panicked almost when he asked what I was going to do and I shrugged, as I had no job secured. That makes it harder to spin for him. I asked him how he could be surprised when he's been degrading me and demanding my resignation repeatedly from the very beginning. He insisted that he and the Chancellor wanted me to architect my own future and plans... well, my plans were to retire from my alma mater, having served her community with excellence.

He was worried about what I would tell my staff, and was flustered when I told him that I'd already told them that afternoon. He indicated that he and the Chancellor would want to review my email communication to campus regarding my departure, to ensure it was conveyed as "amicable".

When I turned in four of my staff member's resignation letters the following Monday he tried to remain calm until finally hatred flared and he hissed, "You know statements like this have a fucking shelf life, don't you!". I'll end it here by saying if he thinks the women who turned in their resignation letters that day did it to *take him down*, or because I'd asked them to –then he grossly injures those brave women. They stand for ethical leadership. They stand for all that we created as a team – including the positive culture and enrollment success. They read the heartbreaking testimony to his pattern of behavior over several campuses. And unlike me and so many in his devastating wake, they were able to make a choice and step out.

Lots of people wonder how Albert could have acted this way to so many people, at so many different campuses...and gotten away with it. If they wonder, then they have not been behind a closed door with this man who decides you are his target – and manipulates you, has you doubting your self-worth, breaks down your strength, and isolates you. If it weren't for what I've already survived in my life, and for the kind of community/family we have at UWEC– where people know me, know my worth, trust my judgement, I couldn't do this. I have always said this is a special place, and I'm even more convinced of it now. #notonmycampus. If it weren't for those women who chose to stand beside me, I couldn't do this.

I find it hard to believe the search firm UWEC contracted with to hire Albert didn't find any of this. And I hope that by sharing my story, the search firm for the next campus will have no problem conveying exactly who they are hiring.