

LINDA OWENS:

I had worked in the Office of Admissions at Oklahoma State University for 17 years when Mr. Colom arrived in January 2006, from Florida Atlantic University. I was Associate Director and worked with Dr. Paul Carney, Director of Admissions. Admissions was divided into a processing division and recruitment division. I worked in the processing division, which employed 18 full-time staff. We had an amazing team, full of dedicated employees with years and even decades of experience and enjoyed a healthy relationship with the faculty, staff and students at the university.

Colom did not have a doctorate and I remember there was a question about whether he misrepresented his educational qualifications on his resume when he applied to OSU, making it look like he was months away from receiving his doctorate. He always wanted you to call him "Albert" and acted like it was because he wanted to be your buddy, when in reality it turned out it was because he didn't want to be called "Mr." Colom, since he didn't have a doctorate. Colom received his B.A. in international studies, his M.Ed. in educational leadership, and was a doctoral candidate in higher education administration, all at the University of South Florida (per internet) I seem to remember hearing much later that a staff member from OSU was at a national conference and talked with someone from Florida Atlantic and they were so sorry for us that he had been hired him at OSU. They also said that they were told there might have been an issue with him being able to complete his doctorate at Univ of Southern Florida. (Sorry I have no details.)

I have always prided myself in having a strong work ethic. My philosophy was to expect the best from employees and treat them with kindness, fairness and respect. In turn, I found I was then treated the same way. It is very difficult to "toot my own horn", but in an effort to communicate the reputation I had established at the university I would like to share the fact that I had previously received the annual Staff Appreciation Award from OSU's Staff Advisory Council as well as the first President's Service Award established by previous University President James Halligan. In all my years at OSU I never received anything but "excellent" on my annual performance appraisal.

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education is responsible for establishing and enforcing all rules and regulations at public institutions in Oklahoma. OSU enjoyed a very healthy relationship with the Regents and had an impeccable reputation for following policy. When Colom arrived he literally questioned why we did everything. After continually trying to explain processes in Admissions, which were based on Regents policy, he basically asked me why we ran so scared of the Regents and that we were going to have to learn to "bend the rules". He told me that we answered to him, not to the Regents. This was so unfamiliar to me and I knew then it was the beginning of the end of the Admissions Office I knew.

He started the reorganization process in our office immediately and within weeks of his arrival created a culture of fear/terror among our staff. We found out soon that he had plans to bring staff from Florida Atlantic to put in the Directors position as well as someone for my position. He fired Dr. Carney within a month and framed it as if Dr. Carney had decided to relocate his family and would soon be leaving. He gave him a few months to find a new job. This was a man of unquestionable character and integrity. He had applied for the job Colom got and was way more qualified so there was speculation that he didn't want Carney to show him up. Dr. Carney told me the day he was fired that I should be looking for a different job as well, because he felt I was next. Colom made a comment to Dr. Carney a few months after arriving that it was really too bad, that he hadn't anticipated liking me as much as he did and that

he could see why Dr. Carney had so many nice things to say about my character and job performance. It was too bad because he already had plans to get rid of me.

He began giving me almost impossible assignments on top of my regular job responsibilities as it related to office reorganization. He bypassed Dr. Carney entirely. He would drop by my office and ask me random detailed questions and seemed to always hope I couldn't answer them. It always felt like he was just trying to trip me up and cause me to fail to have reason to fire me. Over the next few months I was tasked with an operational analysis consisting of creating a new mission statement, explaining all job descriptions, rewriting all job descriptions, establishing new flow charts all the while pretty much in the dark as to what he wanted. He made sure that just the two of us met, with no witnesses, when I presented all of the documentation requested. He told me that he wasn't surprised that I was trying to protect the staff in maintaining current employees and that I clearly had no idea what I was doing. He handed me his operational flow chart which made absolutely no sense to me. Then he dropped the bombshell and the reason we met alone. He explained that his new organizational chart, which he had had all along, was going to be all my idea and if he heard that I blamed anything on him it would be grounds for insubordination and dismissal. To say I felt threatened was an understatement. I remember I could hardly breathe as I went back to my office because it was at that point I knew I was totally helpless. I was going to just be a pawn and be used to get what he wanted and then he would get rid of me.

It became clear that he was basically trying to mirror the organizational structure of Florida Atlantic's admissions office so things would be in place when he brought in his previous colleagues. I was tasked with eliminating experienced, qualified staff to make this work. I couldn't eat or sleep and felt like an elephant was constantly sitting on my chest. I ended up in my doctor's office and was prescribed medication just to function. I was in such bad shape that I was literally ready to quit my job without securing a new one in fear I would have a nervous breakdown. I stayed as long as I could in an effort to try and protect dedicated employees, knowing he was going to replace me anyway. A friend of mine across campus had an opening for an academic counselor and asked if I would please consider it. I ended up taking that job with a \$15,000 decrease in salary from my current position. It was as if he took away everything I had accomplished. I can honestly say that I never really recovered from the experience with Colom and stayed in the counseling position for 9 years until I retired in 2015. My retirement income suffered greatly due to the decrease in salary over the remaining years.

Probably the most heartbreaking story is that of the Coordinator of Admissions Processing. She had been with the Office of Admissions for over 40 years when Colom arrived. She worked circles around everyone, arriving early and staying late every day. I learned a lot of my work ethic and understanding of policy from her. She maintained detailed records for decades and had unbelievable recall. She was the "go to" person for everything Admissions across the university. I assume it was for this reason that Colom send someone from his office at 4:00 one day to tell her to pack up her things, as she was going to start the next day as a receptionist in the recruitment division. Within a few weeks she went on medical leave for mental stress. She utilized all her sick leave and finally left filed for retirement.

Within a year there were only two original staff members left in my department out of 18. There were several who took lesser jobs as I did, some who left and a few others who took early retirement. It was beyond heartbreaking and like slow torture to watch it happen to people I respected and trusted. It felt like watching a boat sink slowly and having no life preservers to offer the passengers.

He did bring in a new Director of Admissions (Karen Lucas) and Associate Director (?) from Florida Atlantic University as he had planned passing over more qualified applicants in the process. (I think Karen Lucas is now in a high level position at University of North Florida, so he took her there as well.) Under his control, policies were changed at his whim and decades of documentation were destroyed (placed in dumpsters) that left the office nothing it had ever been.

Several years after Colom was hired OSU got a new president and he didn't last long. I don't remember specifics, but I know Colom was removed from his job and put on permanent leave until he found a new job. Although many were glad to see him go, he had done permanent, irreparable damage that is evident in the office to this day. I think he left OSU in 2009 and went to Bowling Green University, then University of North Florida in 2014 and your institution in 2018 (per info on the internet).

I now see him as a "man-bully" or a "bully in a suit and tie". I sit here sick to my stomach as I write this and have a hard time believing it actually happened and so many people were destroyed. I wish you the very best and commend you for taking on this challenge. May your endeavor result in nothing but total success.