

A Handy, Dandy, Quick and Practical Checklist for Woman Trustees

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There are certain risks inherent in an MIT person giving a case study to the Ivy League. I am reminded of the story of the time when Ivy League students went traveling with an MIT student overseas and ran afoul of the laws of a foreign country. They were all sentenced to death by the guillotine. One by one the Ivy League students went up to the guillotine. The guillotine started down each time and got stuck. And one by one the Ivy League students were pardoned by the monarch of that country, who thought it was an act of God and they should be let go. Then came the MIT student, who lay down under the guillotine. But he lay down face up and said, "You know, if you'd just fix that second screw. . . ."

In spite of the pitfalls of presenting a case study to the Ivy League, especially since nobody knows what the future will hold, I would like to talk about two things. The first is a major problem we have. The second is a handy, dandy, quick and practical checklist for woman trustees—what to do about your own institution.

First, our own major equal opportunity problem: a problem that troubles us a lot and one on which we have made extremely little progress, is minority women. There is some good news and some bad news on this subject. The good news is that we have had an infinite increase in the number of minority women on our faculty. We now have one. She is a tenured full professor and a very distinguished woman. But the bad news is that she is only one on a faculty of more than eight hundred fifty. That bothers us a lot. If you look at most ranks in most institutions in the Ivy League and at MIT and figure the proportion of women to men, and the proportion of minorities to nonminorities, you can calculate an index of inherited racism and sexism or of inherited inequality of opportunities for women and for minorities. Then multiply them together. You may find fewer minority women than you would expect if *both* racism and sexism were operating only "normally." Or, if you do not want to think in terms of inherited discrimination, then, fewer minority women than you would expect, if the unequal opportunities for minorities and females had been operating only "normally." So much for our major problem. If I speak only briefly on this subject, it is only because of the hour. We are indeed very concerned about this question throughout the institute, for every pay classification and for all levels of students.

How to Rate an Administration

My second subject is a handy, dandy checklist: what to do if you're a woman trustee. The first thing has to do with your top administration: you need a good one, and therefore you need to find out if you have a good one. If you do not have a good one, nothing will work. What kinds of things would a good president and a good top

administration do? One way you can recognize the good ones is that there is not a "we and they" atmosphere in the discussions of minorities and women, rather, an attitude that equal opportunity is our interest and everyone's interest. If you get a sense of shared interest, "our interests overlap those of minorities and women," you know from the outset that you are dealing with good people. A second way to recognize a good top administration is that they will choose good department heads and a good personnel director, people who are similarly committed to equal opportunity. This happens when a good president finds out, before he appoints people, how they feel about equal opportunity. The third way to recognize a committed administration is that they will take extensive personal interest in all the equal opportunity events on campus.

I was reminded of this last point vividly, yesterday, when a major black leader came to talk at a supervisory training program at Lincoln Laboratory at MIT. In thanking the very distinguished head of that huge laboratory, with its thousands of people, the visitor said, "You know, it really matters to me that the laboratory director stayed here throughout the two hours of this discussion. Usually a top administrator will introduce me and then go." So if your president and if your top administration are actually present where equal opportunity and affirmative action and recruitment and serious search are discussed, that is one way to tell you have got a good administration.

Finally, a good president and a good administration will take every opportunity they can to monitor abuse and to teach about equality. It is unbelievable what one white male can do to clean up his surroundings with respect to equal opportunity.

Routine Monitoring Functions

Another major item in my handy checklist would have to do with monitoring equal opportunity in employment. You should check for careful promotional analyses and salary equity reviews. If your in-



stitution is doing aggregated, statistical, salary equity reviews, every year for every pay classification, and also promotional analyses, you have come a long way.

Promotional analyses should be done for every group: staff, secretaries, faculty, research people. For every rank or grade, you should ask, "What is the average age at promotion, the average educational background, the average size of the budget overseen, the average number of employees supervised at promotion, for women and men, minorities and nonminorities? What was the salary before and after promotion by sex and race?" To give you an indication of our concern at MIT, several years ago when we did an early promotional analysis of some staff promotions, we found the average woman at promotion, was eight years older and had one more degree than the average man and that the salary gap between men and women actually *widened* after promotion. During four intervening years, despite a severe budget crunch, those gaps have been largely wiped out. I do not think they were wiped out by reverse discrimination but rather through the promotion of very able women available for the few administrative staff positions that in fact became available through normal attrition and turnover. The women "found" themselves because the institution of a well-monitored posting system. If you, as trustees, find there are no promotional analyses, you will not know if there are gaps. If your institution isn't doing analyses, it should be.

The same is true with respect to salary analyses. Do you have any systematic gaps in salary between men and women or minorities and nonminorities of the same age, rank, and job classification? In these analyses, the institution may want to control for age, for merit ratings, for education, for numbers of publications; you may control for any reasonable thing you want to. However, if you aren't doing any such analyses in a private institution, I think I could guarantee you that you have serious wage gaps by sex and race. Moreover, these analyses need to be done at least once a year for every pay classification. I say this because I believe that all non-civil-service salary systems go 5 percent out of whack every year. I will call this Rowe's First Law of Salary Equity. The out-of-whack-ness occurs so rapidly in non-civil-service salary systems because in flexible systems there is always a certain amount of disagreement about what constitutes equity in the first place, and small differences in judgment quickly aggregate into systematic gaps.

To underscore what a previous speaker said about legal liability, Rowe's First Law means that anybody who could successfully get your salary data out in court, and do systematic analyses, is certain to find problems unless you have been doing equity reviews. Salary problems are as ubiquitous as dust in a household. The only way to maintain equity is continuously to review. I raise this point because I meet counterparts who say, "Yes, we've done an equity review, we did it in 1974 when we filed our plan." I know that, according to Rowe's First Law, that salary system is likely to be 10 percent out of whack, already, just through normal problems.

There are some other things you could do routinely with respect to salary equity, which I'll skip over because of lack of time, but if you aren't doing *anything* in this area, routinely and monitored very carefully, you can be nearly certain that you have problems that are not only immoral but illegal.

Another major item a woman trustee could look out for has to do with another formal method of monitoring affirmative action and equal opportunity: do you have an affirmative action plan and nonunion grievance procedures? Does everybody know about

them? This is, of course, a silly question. I can guarantee you everybody will not know. Most people in the institution will barely know the president's name. It's no great shakes if everyone doesn't know about the plan and the grievance procedure, but you can do something about helping people to find them if they want to.

If you investigate and find there is no distribution of your affirmative action plan or of the nonunion grievance procedure in your institution, you know you have a problem. You have a still worse problem if there is no plan and no grievance procedure. Many places *don't* have a smoothly working grievance procedure. I say this with great humility because while I think we have a good plan, our nonunion grievance procedure is still forming itself. It has changed, and changed, and changed again over the last several years.

Grievance Procedures

Our own views of grievance procedures are, first, that they ought to be swift. If things are taking longer than a couple of weeks for an initial answer, you know there are problems. Second, we think that until the end of the line, nonunion procedures should be reasonably redundant so that most people have more than one resource or person to go to. Third, if the grievance procedure does not contain any women or minorities, you know from the outset you have serious problems. And fourth, if as you wander through the institution you find that most people think that confidences are not being held, you know you have problems. A good grievance procedure is confidential up to the point where action will be taken.

What kinds of things does a good grievance procedure turn up? How does it help with equal opportunity? Like the previous speakers, I would like to address my illustrations to that age-old question: Are women really being treated fairly or must we reverse discriminate in order to get a reasonable number of women on a faculty, for instance? My own view is that we are no where near needing to reverse discriminate because we have never tried equal opportunity. I say this from the vantage point of sitting in an office where hundreds of equal opportunity problems come in. I would like to illustrate some of them.

For instance, in an unnamed prestigious university in Massachusetts, there was an ad hoc committee convened to see whether a distinguished woman scientist should be given a tenured position. During that process, the distinguished woman dropped in to see me and said, "Mary, will you look at this reference?" As referees will, one of her referees had sent her a copy of the reference that he had sent in to the ad hoc committee (although of course this was not done openly). It said, "Jane Doe is the foremost woman archaeologist in the world. Yes, I do believe that she will become one of the women in the world to contribute most to the field of archaeology." Jane was very upset. She said, "What am I going to do? You know, all I need to wreck my reputation is to call me the best woman archaeologist going." I said, "Jane, if you don't write back to this referee, nobody else can really handle this problem."

So she did write back, and the referee said, "Jane, old kid, I was responding appropriately to the letter of solicitation." He sent her a copy of this letter. It said, "Would you please tell us how Jane Doe ranks among women archaeologists in the world?" And the solicitation letter went on, saying, "How does she rank among women?" "Will she contribute more than any other woman?" It was evident

that the standard letter of solicitation had been changed, substituting *woman* for *man* at every point in the letter. It also ended with a wonderful paragraph that said, "Would you tell us in detail the nature of your association with this woman?"

I remember another incident, a time when God was clearly on my side. I was trying to persuade a lab director that references could be a serious problem, and he said, "Oh no, our references are terrific." Then he said, "Look, give me the name of anybody, I'll just haul out her dossier and we'll look in it." I said, "Okay," not actually expecting anything. But he pulled out, at his first try, the dossier of a woman scientist, in which the top reference, written when she came to employment at MIT years ago, said, "You can hire her if you want, but really I'd rather have her body than her mind." She, by the way, has a spectacular figure. She also has a good mind, and it happens that I was able in this one fortuitous instance — we didn't go through any other files! — to find a vivid example of what I was talking about. Yes, if you have a good, hard-working grievance procedure, you will find all kinds of ways in which the ordinarily white male atmosphere is in fact tilted against women and minorities.

Value of Informal Processes

My last point has to do with informal grievance procedures, something that just sprang up at MIT. You may ask why informal procedures of the kind that I will describe are necessary. You should remember that I spoke about working with a good top administration. The better your top administration, the *more* you are going to need informal networks. The reason is that nobody misbehaves around a good president. So if you are blessed with a good university president, you can guess for a certainty that he, because of his rectitude, or she, because of her uprightness, knows less about the pathology of your institution than anybody else. Everybody will behave around that person. At MIT it has happened that we have a fair number of minority groups and women's groups scattered around the institution, organized on every conceivable basis, functionally and geographically. There are the Women of Information Processing, the Women of Lincoln Lab, the Women Faculty, the Women Staff, the women of this building, the women of that building. Some groups are for faculty, or research staff, or secretaries; some are only one pay classification; some are vertically organized. At any given time, there are perhaps twenty-five such groups on the campus, loosely linked together in an advisory group appointed by the president. They provide upward feedback to the top, and they have a fascinating effect on the environment around them.

I recall, for instance, the beginning of one group in a department where there seemed to be endless complaints. The women streamed in to my office from that department with all kinds of trouble and concern and pain. The turnover rate was high, for professionals and others. Finally, in desperation — this was early in my career at MIT — I said, "You know, why don't you get together and talk about these problems?" So the women invited all the other women in their department to lunch on the following Thursday. Before the meeting, three of the male top managers of that department came to my office and said, "What are they doing?" And I said, "I don't know. I think they're getting together to talk."

For the following six weeks the women of that department got together at lunch time to try to decide whether or not they wanted to go on meeting with each other. And the men cleaned up their

house. Initially the women did practically nothing except get together for lunch and talk, so far as I know, but the level of abuse dropped very sharply. That taught me a lesson about the value of people getting together in a responsible way.

Other groups that have continued to meet have done all kinds of things. A large number of woman faculty, students, research staff, and administrative staff got together to study women in athletics, for instance. Their report has produced important changes. Some women's groups have done studies of subtle racism and sexism within their departments, usually with a cover letter signed by the department head. Nothing is so useful in convincing dinosaurs about subtle discrimination as these reports, because they bring together many different instances of problems, in such a way that one can begin to see how, in the aggregate, they will really affect the lives of minorities and women within any given working environment.

These informal groups take care of a lot of small problems, which then do not have to come to an administration. They cool out the fanatics among women and minorities. That is, they have a tendency to centralize around responsible issues. They can do an enormous amount to help you have an effective equal opportunity environment. Of course they also have a strong tendency, as do the salary equity reviews and every one of these mechanisms, to improve the environment for white males. I think, therefore, that anything you can do to support formal and informal procedures that responsibly deal with equal opportunity, the more improvement you will see in your institutions.

I would like to finish by telling you an old joke that I used to tell and my daughter's reaction to it. When I first came to MIT, I asked a friend what affirmative action was all about. He said, "Mary, it's like the mating of elephants. It goes on in high places, there's an enormous amount of trumpeting, and nothing happens for four years." My fourteen-year-old daughter heard me telling this and said, "You know, that's a male chauvinist's view of pregnancy."

It has occurred to me that maybe some of our discouragement in these first four years of affirmative action has to do with watching a gestation period. We are just about to see the infant come forth, so it is not time yet to give up hope.



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