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Carolyn Dever is a professor of English and creative writing at Dartmouth College and formerly its provost. **George Justice** is a professor of English at Arizona State University and formerly the university's dean of humanities. They are principals of Dever Justice LLC, a consulting firm supporting faculty-leadership development.

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The Chair's Role in Strategic Leadership

By **CAROLYN DEVER AND GEORGE JUSTICE**

YOU MIGHT FEEL AS WE DO, that the world has been spinning much faster than usual during the past couple of years. Those of us in campus-based faculty roles have witnessed changes in every aspect of our working lives; many of those changes have been drastic, even existential. It's a new normal. Maybe. So how do we go forward, as researchers, as educators?

There's a new urgency to our conversations about campus leadership. Whether you're a department chair, center director, or dean of a school or college, it has never been more important to understand your role, your institution, and even yourself: What are your strengths and weaknesses, not as a faculty member but as a faculty leader, responsible for the students, faculty, and staff in your charge? What can you change? What do you not want to change?

We invite you to join an important conversation about strategic leadership on campus. We are offering a series of leadership-development workshops, starting in August, to help department chairs and other faculty leaders, as well as aspiring leaders, gain insight, context, and strategies for doing well by themselves, and by those who are counting on them.

On most campuses, department chairs are the unsung heroes of institutional success. Yet it is a rare campus indeed with the infrastructure in place to prepare and support department chairs as the indispensable leaders that they are. Yes, chairs need to keep the trains running on time so that faculty, students, and staff can succeed. Those are skills that don't come naturally to most teaching and research faculty members. But department chairs and other campus leaders are also critically important figures who help institutions achieve strategic goals, particularly those related to student success, research, and the myriad ways colleges connect with communities.

We believe chairs need support to place their daily administrative work in the broader context of higher ed in the United States today. And they need insight and resources for understanding their own capacity for strategic leadership in the midst of ensuring departmental success.

We have selected a number of resources from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that will help chairs understand the strategic implications of what they're doing. Indeed, most of what chairs do — from fixing the copier to managing and writing annual reviews of faculty members, have strategic implications.

Two of these articles relate to one of the most significant responsibilities a chair has—managing the process through which an academic unit not only serves current students but also contributes to the sustainability of disciplines and institutions: hiring. Through hiring we refresh ourselves, and we signal our hope for the continuation of the teaching and research of areas of knowledge to which we have

committed ourselves. [“Admin 101: How to Request a Faculty Line,”](#) by David D. Perlmutter, provides sound advice on how department chairs can work with deans and provosts to help convince these “outsiders” about the importance of a particular request to hire. [“The Case for Cluster Hiring to Diversify Your Faculty,”](#) by Carla Freeman, outlines one way many institutions have deepened and widened the range of faculty and subject matter within

Whether you're a department chair, center director, or dean of a school or college, it has never been more important to understand your role, your institution, and even yourself

— and across — disciplines.

[“6 Things We Can't Afford to Lose When Campus Life Resumes”](#) is pitched to the moment, a moment that many of us, perhaps, just want to go away. Yet Rob Jenkins, a veteran voice for rational leadership, helps point to tactics chairs might want to consider as they figure out how to re-create departmental life in the near future. Those efforts are going to cause headaches — both for chairs and for the faculty members and students who think of their departments as professional homes. [“How to Manage Through Emotional Exhaustion,”](#) by Kerry L. O'Grady, provides a thoughtful and sensitive set of tips for the stressed-out chair.

We hope you enjoy these articles. The two of us don't agree with everything here — but we also don't always agree with each other. Academic leadership — as these pieces indicate — is usually not about a single person finding the one correct solution to a complex problem. It's about working with promising students, brilliant scholars, and dedicated staff to create an environment in which many people can do productive work for the institution and for themselves.

Strong academic leaders come from multiple disciplinary backgrounds and can have widely varying personality traits. What characterizes the best of them is a willingness to move outside of their comfort zones as teachers and scholars to listen, to engage, and to do hard, often thankless, work to make a shared environment happier, healthier, and more productive and sustainable.

We look forward to hearing what you think about these particular pieces of writing from *The Chronicle*, and we hope to meet some of you in the coming year at **The Chronicle's Strategic Leadership Program: Department Chairs**. We are excited not only by the conversation but also by the prospect of working with, and learning from, the faculty who have committed significant years of their professional lives to a form of leadership that links very local concerns with the health and sustainability of our venerable institutions.

Carolyn Dever is a professor of English and creative writing at Dartmouth College and formerly its provost. George Justice is a professor of English at Arizona State University and formerly the university's dean of humanities. They are principals of Dever Justice LLC, a consulting firm supporting faculty-leadership development.



NICOLAS OGNOSKY FOR THE CHRONICLE

The Faculty Job (Almost) No One Wants

Chairing a department has never been easy.
The pandemic has only made it tougher.

By MEGAN ZAHNEIS

Mary Beth Dawson had been as prepared as possible to lead her department through a pandemic.

Dawson, who chairs the biology department at Kingsborough Community College, had kept an eye on news from around the world before Kingsborough's spring term began in the first week of March 2020. As a scientist, she was trained to think in terms of potential outcomes, and she instructed her faculty to be ready to move their classes

online at a moment's notice.

So when the call came from the City University of New York system to switch to virtual learning, Dawson and her colleagues were ready. It was, in Dawson's words, a "seamless" transition for her department.

But a few weeks later, two of Dawson's adjunct faculty members realized they weren't up for teaching online and quit. That meant Dawson took on their courses; she wasn't about to ask her other faculty members to take on extra teaching amid

a burgeoning pandemic. That semester, Dawson taught 14 contact hours and worked six days a week, for 12 to 15 hours each day, all while keeping the department running and helping manage her colleagues' anxiety — something that she, even with several years as department chair under her belt, hadn't anticipated.

The pandemic, Dawson soon realized, fundamentally changed what it meant to be a department chair, already a job known for being demanding and, in many circles, undesirable.

“You’re the fall guy or gal; you’re responsible. But in terms of power, prestige? No, not really.”

Chairing a department has never been easy. Doing so means occupying a strange in-between position in academe — not quite an administrator, nor only a faculty member — and navigating a complex set of workplace dynamics, particularly with department colleagues whom a chair, for the duration of her term, is asked to supervise and evaluate.

The chair's position is often assumed to come with a measure of power and prestige; upon landing the gig, Sandra Oh's character in the Netflix limited series *The Chair* proudly places a nameplate on her desk declaring her the one “in charge,” embellished with a handful of expletives. But upon taking over as chair — which, as many will attest, does not often include the cushy office Oh's character inherits — scholars are more likely to find themselves hemmed in by administrative constraints and what they call an illusion of power.

“As a chair, you certainly have more institutional responsibility than most of your colleagues. You have some authority, although

not very much. In most systems, you really don't have any power at all,” said Kevin J.H. Dettmar, a veteran department chair who is writing a book about the job. “You're the fall guy or gal; you're responsible. But in terms of power, prestige? No, not really.”

Instead, the chair is often caught in the crosshairs of conflict between faculty members or administrators, struggling to stake a claim in both worlds.

The desire to make change, or to positively influence one's department, is one reason faculty members take on the role of chair. More often, though, they do so out of a sense of duty or are conscripted into the job by administrators or colleagues. That's what happened to Cathy Marie Ouellette, who took over the history department at Muhlenberg College in the summer of 2019 for a four-year term.

Ouellette, an associate professor, had seen other chairs struggle with exhaustion and with keeping their own scholarship current. Because she wasn't yet eligible for promotion to full professor, she worried that the administrative responsibilities of being chair would interfere with her own professional goals.

Indeed, 86 percent of chairs reported in a 2004 study that they'd significantly reduced their scholarly activities while in the role, and 88 percent said they were frustrated by their inability to spend much time pursuing their academic interests.

Ouellette took four meetings with her provost, who was supportive of her personal goals, before agreeing to the gig, but said, “it's understood that you can't really say no. I think I was a little stubborn.”

It stands to reason, then, that colleagues “are as likely to say condolences” as they are to congratulate incoming chairs on their new role. So said Carolyn Dever, who co-facilitates *The Chronicle's* workshops for department chairs. “It's more of a duty than it is a calling for many people,” Dever said. “They're sandwiched between the administration and the faculty and students without very many tools for solving problems and addressing the really complex issues that come up.”

That's another condition of being chair: It's likely to come with little in the way of training.

A 2016 study found that 67 percent of chairs hadn't received any formal training from their institution; two-thirds of those who did said it didn't adequately prepare them for the job. Nor are there many handbooks on how to be an effective chair; the few there are tend toward the wonky side, said Dettmar, who hopes his forthcoming book will fill that gap.

Ouellette's preparation for becoming chair, then, was mostly "self-imposed." "Honestly," she said, "the first thing I did was Google 'how to be a department chair.'"

Most of Ouellette's prior understanding of what it meant to be a chair came from graduate school, where, she said, "it was really communicated pretty clearly, 'Have some empathy, don't bother the department chair.' So I assumed as a graduate student that this was a stressful and perhaps exhausting position."

Ouellette started to think of a chair's role as that of an ambassador — of the institution, of the department, and, in her case as a historian, of the humanities. Student and faculty recruitment would become part of her job, as would advocating at the administrative level for her department. Still, she recognized her place within the college's power structure was a complicated one.

"Sometimes chairs think that what they have is power and authority," Ouellette said. "I think that I have obligations." As a chair, she learned, people could look to her for guidance. But Muhlenberg's faculty handbook didn't endow her with the ability to add teaching lines, hire or fire faculty members, or adjust the budget. At institutions like hers, she said, "department chairs don't have a lot of leverage. They can advocate, they can cajole, they can bring people together. But we don't have the capacity and we are not embedded with any authority to make institutional changes."

Ouellette's first semester as chair, the fall of 2019, went swimmingly. She welcomed a new hire and started to work on fostering department culture, establishing a social-media presence and a speaker series. Armed with those small victories and the "little sugar high" that came along with them, she felt ready to turn her attention to curricular reform and other big projects.

Then came the pandemic. Ouellette did her best to maintain social ties within the department by setting up a weekly social Zoom session for her junior colleagues. She stressed flexible work policies, knowing many of her co-workers had young children at home. She worked to make sure students were supported and oversaw the sudden retirement of a faculty member who decided Zoom teaching wasn't for them. And she became tethered to her phone.

"Sometimes chairs think that what they have is power and authority. I think that I have obligations."

"There were moments there where my job changed dramatically before my eyes," she recalled, "and my phone became like a third eye or a third hand."

Dawson, at Kingsborough, felt similarly tethered to work, partially out of an obligation to be reachable any time her faculty needed her. That was uncharacteristic for Dawson, who is "very much a boundaries person" and customarily doesn't email her colleagues in the evenings or on weekends. No more: "I had to sort of put that aside and say, 'You know what, I need to be available to these people, because this is an unprecedented situation.'" Her role, as she saw it, was to field panicked calls and emails with an eye toward resolution. "We can fix this," became a common refrain, she said, even if "sometimes I had to lie; I wasn't even sure if we could, but I said we could."

Then there was the matter of classes themselves. In April 2020, Dawson had to plan course offerings for the fall semester without knowing what path the pandemic would take. The lab spaces in her biology department were booked during every available time frame of the academic day, meaning she couldn't open up extra sections in order to reduce class

sizes and allow students to socially distance. Not normally one to question her decisions, Dawson agonized over this one for months. “All summer, every day, I thought about this multiple times a day,” she said. Ultimately, many classes that planned to meet face to face in the fall had to go on pause for several weeks while social-distancing arrangements were made, or revert online entirely.

Department chairs still face those sorts of conundrums daily. Some have also been put in uncomfortable positions as they enforce institutional decisions, like whether faculty members have to teach in person, Dever said.

“I felt like the faculty don’t think of me as a faculty member, but the administration’s really clear that I’m not really an administrator.”

“They may profoundly disagree, but they’re in the role of having to carry out whatever it is that the institution has decided. What makes the pandemic much more challenging than regular life,” she said, “is that it’s people’s health and safety that’s on the line, and people’s educations, and so a chair has to live with the high, high stakes of a decision every day.”

In a pair of studies conducted during the pandemic, in 2020 and 2021, by Ralph A. Gigliotti, the assistant vice president for Rutgers University’s Office of University Strategy, many department chairs at Big Ten colleges said the job straddled the line between faculty member and administrator more than ever. All that turmoil is having a clear, and alarming, effect on chairs: Just 22 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they would be more likely than not to serve another term.

Dettmar understands why chairing is generally an undesirable position. It requires that one

gives up a lot of freedom — to pursue one’s own scholarship or set one’s own schedule or even to protest administrators’ actions. (“It’s just sort of unbecoming or ridiculous to rage against the machine when you’re department chair” and helping to run the place, Dettmar said.)

He knows the liminal place between faculty and administration that chairs occupy all too well. His first job as chair was at a unionized campus; as a chair, he wasn’t included in the faculty bargaining unit. Dettmar paid union dues anyway, because he wanted to demonstrate to his colleagues that he saw himself as a faculty member. Still, he got mixed messages. “I felt like the faculty don’t think of me as a faculty member, but the administration’s really clear that I’m not really an administrator,” he said. “I didn’t have any natural allies.”

Nothing in Dettmar’s graduate training — which focused on individual scholarly growth and not building community — taught him to value chairing. He heard some say, “Those who can, do; those who can’t, chair.” The idea that a faculty member could be “relegated to a bureaucrat because you’re not one of the leading lights of your generation” was, he felt, both pervasive and damaging.

After 10 nonconsecutive years running the English department, Dettmar began directing Pomona’s Humanities Center instead, thinking his days leading departments were over. But when the dean called in July 2021 to ask Dettmar if he would consider filling in as chair for the theater department, which was dealing with personnel changes, the answer was yes.

“Chair can be something that you are or something that you do. And 95 percent of chairs, it’s something that they do,” Dettmar said. He falls into the small group that consider chairing part of their identity.

He said that’s because he’s good at it, and because he can use it to help others. He’s crossed off all of the brass rings of academe — gotten tenure, been promoted to full professor, been a named chair.

“Instead of writing another scholarly book that 17 people would read,” he said, “I’d rather put my energy into helping a younger generation of scholars be able to write their books.”

If the academy is to make chairing a depart-

ment a more appealing proposition, there are a few natural places to begin. One is compensation.

While the specifics vary by institution, most chairs receive a course release, a stipend, or some combination of the two in exchange for their service. Sometimes other perks, like an extended sabbatical or extra research funding, can be negotiated. But by and large, those affordances “aren’t commensurate with the demands of the job,” Dever said.

They are, perhaps, even less so for younger scholars who take on the role of chair. In an ideal world, a scholar shouldn’t become chair until they’re a full professor and have established their personal research agenda. But increasingly, faculty members are being tapped as chair earlier in their careers, and that’s especially true of women and of scholars of color, said Walter H. Gmelch, a professor of leadership studies at the University of San Francisco who has studied department chairs for more than three decades.

That’s a crucial trade-off of institutions’ desire for more equity for women and people of color, Gmelch said. By achieving greater representation in departmental leadership, institutions may in fact harm individual scholars and “jeopardize their career and their advancement,” he said.

After all, Gmelch said, most scholars don’t treat chairing their department as a stepping-stone to administration. About 70 percent return to the faculty after their term is through.

Establishing both initial and ongoing training for department chairs — sessions that focus on “soft skills” like leadership, in addition to administrative know-how — would help, too. Many chairs pass down those lessons informally, and Gigliotti’s office at Rutgers is working to design a new program for department chairs that they hope will become an example. Dawson and another Kingsborough chair teamed up to write a chair’s handbook, a “living document” full of resources that they’re hoping to parlay into a more-formalized chair training at their college.

Academe could also benefit from a greater appreciation and recognition of the chair’s duties, which often are largely invisible, department chairs and experts told *The Chronicle*.

“We are most definitely doing things that fac-

ulty don’t even realize that we do,” Dawson said. “The best chairs do these things quietly, to keep the ship afloat and take care of the details, and sometimes ugly things and sticky things, and insulate the faculty from that so that they can do their jobs accordingly.”

Increasingly, faculty members are being tapped as chair earlier in their careers, and that’s especially true of women and of scholars of color.

A re-examination of what chairs can, and should, do for their departments could be in order. “I don’t think that many chairs are recruited into the job with a sense of mission or a vision,” Dever said. “It tends to be a ‘keeping the trains running’ type of job, which is understandable, but also too bad.”

In fact, a chair’s job is one of the most influential on a campus, said Gmelch, the leadership scholar. Chairs are instrumental to a university’s productivity in scholarship, teaching, and student success.

Ouellette, at Muhlenberg, recognizes the importance of chairing, and she’s proud of what her department has accomplished during her term. Sometimes she even contemplates signing on for a second term.

“There are moments where I think, ‘Hey, this isn’t so bad. I can keep doing this,’” she said. “The reality is that I’m still teaching four classes a year. I’m still researching and writing, I have a personal life, and there’s a pandemic, and I think, ‘I can’t wait to be done.’”

“I really hope I don’t have to do this again.”

Megan Zahneis is a staff reporter for The Chronicle who writes about graduate-student issues and the future of the faculty.

A version of this article appeared in the March 4, 2022, issue.



KEVIN VAN AELST FOR THE CHRONICLE

Admin 101: How to Request a Faculty Line

Even getting the money to fill an existing faculty position is no small feat in these grim budget days.

By **DAVID D. PERLMUTTER**

Gaining approval to hire a faculty member — whether the position is a new line or a vacant one — is among the most important things you will do as a department chair or dean.

It's also one of the thorniest, with plenty of logistical details to manage and minefields to avoid (political, cultural, and personal). I'll be exploring faculty hiring in the next few essays of the [Admin 101 series](#)

on higher-education leadership. In March I offered general advice on the best ways for administrators to “make a big ask.” Here I am focusing more narrowly on how to secure approval to hire a faculty member in a new or existing position. Even getting the money to refill a position is no small feat in these grim budget days.

So what should you do if you are in charge of proposing a faculty hire?

Make sure you understand each phase of the process. A recurrent theme across my next few columns on faculty hiring will be the need to plan ahead of every step. Years ago, faculty hiring was pretty simple. In the

Nobody likes a budget surprise. (Unless it's an unexpected windfall, and how often does that happen?)

late 1960s, when my father was hired as an assistant professor, he hadn't even applied for the job. He told me he got a phone call from a colleague who said something to the effect of, “Good news, Howard, I just talked to our dean, and he likes that paper you wrote. Can you start August 21?”

Everything is much more complicated now — as evidenced by the many steps an administrator must complete before a tenure-track faculty member can actually start work. For example, at the college where I am dean, our recruiting process comprises a whopping 101 actions — with information to be obtained, processes to be completed, approvals to be finalized. Skip or forget just one step and the hire could

stall or fall through.

Sequential as these steps may be, they also may overlap. If, say, you are hiring in a STEM field at a research university, you will at some point have to obtain a considerable amount of money — perhaps millions of dollars — for the start-up costs of a high-powered researcher who will be expected to bring in substantial external funding. Actually allocating start-up funds might be Step No. 48, but your initial pitch will have to include commitments or assurances from multiple parties at the departmental, college, and university levels to help finance those costs.

From start to finish of every hire, you will have to track and verify an array of intricate details. It helps to know what is expected of you ahead of each step. Don't just run down a checklist without understanding the entire process.

Make sure everyone understands the total costs of the hire. Nobody likes a budget surprise. (Unless it's an unexpected windfall, and how often does that happen?) Part of your job in making the case for the position is to paint an accurate picture of the total costs. It's not just a matter of the hire's first year of salary and benefits. Your proposal has to project the initial expenses of the hire, the long-term costs, and the hidden ones:

- Let's start with the most obvious: salary. You have to identify a particular starting salary or salary range based on some combination of: (a) the going rate for the discipline and rank at your type of institution, and (b) what you can afford or expect to be allocated.
- Fringe benefits (health insurance, retirement contributions) are the equivalent of about 20 to 30 percent of the hire's salary and have to be part of your proposal. Who pays for the fringe is a point often negotiated between a department and a college or the university itself.

- What are the start-up costs after you offer someone the job? The easiest to anticipate — and the most expensive — are the costs for constructing a lab and hiring postdocs for a new faculty member in the sciences. But every new assistant professor will need a computer, a phone, other technology, office supplies, and furniture.
- Perhaps your new hire has negotiated a course buyout for the first year, in which case you need someone else to teach that class.
- Moving expenses are another likely cost and can vary widely, depending on where in the nation or world your new hire is moving from and other factors. A senior professor with a family usually has acquired considerably more possessions than a new Ph.D. who is still single and only has to bring clothing and a few pieces of Ikea furniture.
- The costs of the search itself — for example, in advertising and announcements in key publications and other media venues. Covid-19 has moved most interviews online, but if candidates are brought to campus, the department will have to pay travel, restaurant, and lodging expenses.

A new hire may happen to incur yet more costs that arise only in negotiating stages when the candidate of choice is selected. Spousal accommodation is the most prominent item in the category of hidden costs that must go onto your checklist. You want to hire a new assistant professor of anthropology whose spouse happens to be a biochemist. Some entity — perhaps your department, or the university out of a targeted fund — will have to subsidize the spousal hire for a short time, if not the duration.

Gauge the politics of the hire. Once you have planned out the logistics of the hire, and the budget for it, you need to consider

the politics of requesting and obtaining the various levels of approval. Plenty of folks will have a stake in this hire but won't all agree on the department's most urgent needs.

The chair of a department of languages at a small liberal-arts college told me about a “civil war” that ensued after a

Don't ignore the internal factional realities of the hire any more than the logistics.

professor retired. Different factions arose in the department, variously pushing for a tenure-track research hire in their language specialty, chronological era, research-method focus, or ideological bent. After months of bickering and give and take, they arrived at a compromise: The department would hire a multi-language, multi-method scholar who, the chair feared, “probably didn't exist.” Then the dean stepped in, insisting that the hire be a nonresearch instructor to teach introductory classes in the most popular language. Things got so bad that no hire was made at all, and the department lost the line vacated by the retiring professor.

The lesson? Don't ignore the internal factional realities of the hire any more than the logistics. Useful tactics include lobbying, horse-trading, and pleading for the common good. In a culture of trust and goodwill, the process may be smooth; in a culture of suspicion and acrimony, it may not.

In either case, your charge remains to uphold the most pressing needs of the department in terms of research, teaching, and service. What kind of hire will best

serve those needs? The hope is that you have helped build a political and cultural atmosphere in which a voting majority will support the greater good and not merely a narrow interest.

Be prepared to make the case in different ways to different groups. Most faculty hires (except, for example, part-time instructors) require several crucial approvals — starting with the department and then up the administrative ranks. Before going to anyone else with your pitch, identify what arguments and evidence you are likely to need before they can buy in. Professors might want to know things like how this new hire will provide teaching relief or attract more students to the major, while the dean might want to make sure the new hire can cover multiple needs and bring in external funding (in the case of research-heavy positions).

There are two approaches you can take to convincing the various players:

- Assemble a separate proposal for each constituency, focusing on aspects of concern and interest about the hire, specific to that group.
- Draft a single proposal that comprehensively deals with the key issues and possible outcomes for each constituency.

Regardless of which approach you choose, your proposal(s) should leave no big questions unanswered, nor fail to vet potential objections. If you are relatively new to your position, find some old hands on the campus who can offer a constructive critique.

Hiring a future colleague is perhaps one of the most sacred and time-honored duties of academic administrators and faculty members alike. As teachers and researchers, we actually can change students' lives for the better. A great hire has the potential to benefit the department, the institution, and the students for decades to come. So whether you are a department head, a search-committee chair, or a dean, take the time to sweat the details and paint the big picture of the kind of faculty member you need, and why.

David D. Perlmutter is a professor and dean of the College of Media & Communication at Texas Tech University. He writes the Admin 101 column for The Chronicle. His book on promotion and tenure was published by Harvard University Press in 2010.

A version of this article appeared in the November 30, 2020 issue.



GETTY

The Case for Cluster Hiring to Diversify Your Faculty

By **CARLA FREEMAN**

The numbers are striking: Within just three years, the College of Arts and Sciences at Emory University has more than tripled the proportion of faculty hires from underrepresented minority groups. How? We took many steps, but a key one was the increasingly popular, yet controversial, strategy of “cluster hiring.”

As a new hiring season gets underway across academe, we all are determined to diversify our faculties — both to meet student needs and to better reflect the full spectrum of American society. Most important, we know that diversity is a crit-

ical element in undergraduate education, research, scientific discovery, and artistic expression.

Year after year, institutions have announced bold diversity plans and ambitious hiring goals. Yet year after year, most of us have failed to move the diversity needle more than small, incremental steps — even with vast resources committed to broadening candidate pools and diversifying the Ph.D. pipeline.

That was true at Emory until we accelerated and broadened our tactics. We used target-of-opportunity hires. We identified key fields in which underrepresented fac-

ulty were concentrated. And we turned to cluster hiring.

By way of illustration: In the three years leading up to our cluster-hire experiment — between 2014 and 2017 — Emory hired a total of 65 tenure-track faculty members, only 15 percent of whom were from under-

Cluster hiring takes a variety of forms, and may differ even within a single university.

represented groups (in STEM fields that designation includes women of all racial and ethnic groups). But between 2017 and 2019, after adding cluster hiring to our other efforts, we've recruited 80 new tenure-track faculty members, 51 percent of them (or 41 hires) from underrepresented groups.

So what exactly is cluster hiring? The concept is neither new nor revolutionary. It is an aggressive approach to capture large and diverse pools of candidates who bring with them impressive research and teaching portfolios. While increasingly common, it is not without opposition or challenges.

Cluster hiring can take multiple forms, but its goals and general structure are straightforward: Prioritize and invest in multiple positions in a broad field, or across a range of related fields, rather than hiring faculty members one by one in specific subfields. This increases the likelihood of a diverse pool of candidates, identifies synergistic connections among candidates and, by recruiting faculty cohorts together, fosters collaboration and a shared experience.

Cluster hiring is not the single ticket to successful faculty diversity. To be clear,

cluster hiring entails labor-intensive, emotionally sensitive, and time-consuming work. It is work that also represents a sea change in the intentional — rather than passive — approach to diversifying the faculty.

Like most such institutional innovations, cluster hiring takes a variety of forms, and may differ even within a single university. Within the arts-and-sciences college at Emory, we have experimented with three different genres of cluster hires. The specifics of each differ greatly, but the process and outcome of each type have provided some valuable lessons.

Diversity statement, then dossier. Our first cluster hire took place in 2016-17 and involved an open-rank, open-field search across eight STEM units in the college, with more than 30 professors serving on various departmental search committees. It proved to be one of the most ambitious faculty recruitment efforts we had ever undertaken.

Here's how it worked: We prioritized the recruitment of top scientists who had demonstrated their commitment to working with minority students. How? We required candidates to write a statement about their experience with, and vision for, mentoring students from underrepresented backgrounds. Whether we reviewed the candidates' scholarly dossiers was conditional upon the strength of these statements.

Only candidates with compelling mentoring statements progressed to the next stage of review, where research excellence was assessed through the traditional CV benchmarks: publications, grant funding, scholarly independence and impact, and other factors.

In total, this search attracted more than 1,000 applicants. We ended up hiring seven new faculty members — four on the tenure track and three on the lecture track — with excellent records of mentorship, teaching, and scholarship. Moreover, we identified other candidates in the pool for positions outside of the formal cluster hire.

By foregrounding diversity in our recruitment, we attracted a pool of candidates that was both diverse and academically exceptional. The strength of that pool convinced some faculty skeptics that “diversity” and “excellence” were not competing priorities.

Indeed, the search process profoundly influenced how our departments hire in general. As a result of the success of our first cluster hire, we now require all faculty job candidates in every arts and sciences search to write a statement describing their experience and vision for mentoring underrepresented minority students. That practice signals — both to candidates and to our own faculty — the university’s central commitment to diversity.

Field-specific cluster hiring. A year ago, turning our sights toward the social sciences and humanities, we rolled out two other genres of cluster hires:

- One search in the history department aimed to recruit a cluster of three assistant professors whose work focused on the history of race and ethnicity in the United States. While enrollment declines in the field mean many history departments nationwide are worried about losing faculty positions, this subfield continues to expand in scholarly richness, faculty diversity, and student interest. We hired three tenure-track faculty members from a pool of 545 applicants.
- A second ambitious cluster hire focused on the interdisciplinary field of Latinx studies. Students and faculty alike had voiced strong desires for new course offerings, better mentoring, and scholarly leadership within this growing interdisciplinary field. Eleven humanities and social-science departments were eager to participate. We hired three senior faculty members in Latinx studies, from a pool of more than 300 applicants. Even for departments whose recruiting was unsuccessful, the search highlighted the

vibrancy and importance of this growing field.

How did we convince the skeptics? These successes did not happen without some instances of miscommunication, mistrust, and skepticism.

Logistically, it was challenging to coordinate a complicated recruitment process with so many departments — not to mention trying to involve a broad mix of people in the candidates’ campus visits (when each followed a different schedule). Our efforts to communicate clearly and deal with emerging concerns were sometimes imperfect.

The amount of faculty time and effort required for cluster hiring cannot be underestimated: More than 30 professors participated on search committees for the STEM cluster hire, and at least another 30 for the Latinx-studies search. The sheer scope of multiline searches means that cluster hiring entails a heavier lift than the tradition-

The amount of faculty time and effort required for cluster hiring cannot be underestimated.

al search process. No doubt that level of effort posed some frustrations, especially when there was no hire at the end of it.

Early on, some faculty skeptics questioned the role of the dean in setting diversity as an explicit goal, when they “simply wanted to hire the best scientists.” Others were uneasy about the competitive dynamic of so many departments eager to hire — when the administration had only promised three faculty lines.

Those reservations have been largely put to rest. The fact that the college was able to authorize a greater number of offers than initially planned — seven instead of three — helped to soothe tensions and convey the administration's commitment on this front.

One ingredient that was essential to our hiring success and to broad-based faculty support: Even when the cluster hire crossed disciplines, we organized search committees at the department level.

In the STEM cluster hire, our initial plan was to signal its high priority by naming each of the eight department chairs involved to make up the formal search committee. That idea was revised for two reasons. First, one glance at the potential lineup showed that we would be contravening our own internal goal to create diverse hiring committees. Moreover, earning the trust of departments and programs requires empowering them to lead from the very beginning and consult with the administration throughout the process.

Instead, we asked each of the eight departments to form a small search committee and collaborate with the other panels. Here, again, maintaining consistent, open channels of communication proved critical to building trust and winning over the initial skeptics.

The upshot. Our experiments with cluster hiring generated intense excitement, with professors across the college eager to collaborate on these searches. This method of hiring has demonstrated that academic excellence can, and must, be achieved by deliberately diversifying the faculty, and by intentionally adopting vigorous, expansive, self-reflective, and critical means by which to do so.

We recruited superb new scholar-teachers, yes. But in addition, the act of hiring them together, as clusters, promises to enhance their experience as individual faculty members. Being part of a cluster — whether within a single department or across disciplines — can mitigate the isolation often felt by people from an under-represented demographic on the campus. Together, these clusters begin to change the conversations and enrich departmental and campus culture more generally.

We've also designated financial and other resources for these new hires to use collectively or individually in support of their scholarly, pedagogical, and mentoring efforts. Such activities are understood to be formal service contributions, and be recognized in their annual and promotion-related reviews.

Successful cluster hiring requires significant money, forethought, energetic outreach, deep and broad-based collaboration, and meticulous adherence to the very best hiring practices. We are far from reaching our faculty-diversity goals; some fields remain particularly challenging. But by applying what we have learned, acknowledging the missteps and the successes, and extending these recruitment lessons into the full scope of academic life, we hope to make a difference in faculty well-being and retention.

Carla Freeman is senior associate dean of faculty at Emory University's College of Arts and Sciences.

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6 Things We Can't Afford to Lose When Campus Life Resumes

A year ago, who would have thought anyone would miss faculty meetings?

By **ROB JENKINS**

Like many faculty members, I am beginning to suspect that life on college campuses will never fully go back to “normal” — meaning exactly the way it was before the pandemic hit like a tsunami on a crowded beach. Simply put, the shoreline has been too drastically altered.

That is not entirely bad news. Much in academe needed to change, and many of those changes were never going to hap-

pen on their own — or they would have happened so slowly that few people would have noticed the differences and some who could have benefited from the positive shifts might not have. That includes, on a macro level, colleges’ revamping their admissions policies and, on a micro level, faculty curmudgeons like me [learning to embrace technology](#) in our teaching.

It’s also true that we have learned much

in this difficult year about accommodating people with differing needs, whether having to do with health, geography, or lifestyle. We should carry those lessons forward, recognizing that in the past we might have had too much of a one-size-fits-all mentality. Now that we've become

Spontaneous interactions have produced some of the very best moments of my teaching career. They are simply not possible when every meeting must be rigorously scheduled, whether online or in person.

experts at providing other options — Zoom calls, virtual conferencing, asynchronous meetings — we should continue to make those available to students and faculty and staff members who need or desire them.

At the same time, I see some things about higher education from the “good old days” of February 2020 that must not change entirely. In fact, those things must resume — as much and as soon as possible — if we are to maintain our identity and integrity as institutions of higher learning, not to mention our human connections with students and one another. Here are six that occur to me:

Small-group work. “Workshop” groups of four to five students have been a staple of my writing courses for more than 30 years. On several class days each semester, students bring in a rough draft of an essay they’re working on and share it within their group. I’ve [written about](#) the advantages of this teaching strategy, but suffice to say, small-group work is an invaluable, time-tested tool and one that simply cannot be replicated online.

Sure, we can approximate it, in breakout groups, chat rooms, and discussion boards. But none of those are as effective as having students gather in small groups around the classroom, while I wander from group to group, eavesdropping on their conversations and occasionally chiming in or answering a question. Having witnessed over the years how important those sessions can be for emerging writers, I am saddened to know that my current students may never experience something like that. Whether or not they know it, they’re missing out, and we are all the poorer for it.

Office hours. Like everyone else, I have established “virtual” office hours to meet with students online. That has been extremely useful, in that I have been able to work with students even when I’m at home or traveling. Because I’m teaching several sections of “blended learning” (online courses with an in-person component), I have also met with many students face to face — or, should I say, mask to mask. We sit six to eight feet apart in a large, empty classroom. In many ways, those in-person sessions are similar to my Zoom meetings: I’m on my laptop, looking at a rough draft or something, while the students sit across the room from me and stare at their own screens. But at least there is some degree of human interaction.

Convenience aside, none of that is a substitute for students’ dropping by my office to discuss the class, their work, or life in general. Spontaneous interactions have produced some of the very best moments of my teaching career. They are simply

not possible when every meeting must be rigorously scheduled, whether online or in person. And I suspect the loss is even greater for students than it is for me — even if many of them don't know it because they haven't yet experienced the normal professor-student relationship that is such an integral part of college life.

In-person faculty meetings. This one may have you wondering about my sanity. Look, I've never been a big meeting person, even when I was the one leading them. As a department chair and as an academic dean, I always tried to make my meetings as short as possible, assuming the faculty would appreciate it (and knowing that I would).

Who would have guessed that — a year into this pandemic, amid all our social-distancing and semi-shutdown protocols — I would actually miss faculty meetings?

Now we meet online, which has its advantages, such as not having to drive anywhere. We've made great strides in our use of technology to enable these productions to run smoothly, so kudos to those who have worked so hard to salvage some benefit from a less-than-ideal situation.

But it's not the same. Notably missing are the friendly greetings among colleagues (many of whom rarely see one another outside of such meetings), the spirited but (usually) cordial debates over agenda items, the humorous interjections that break up the monotony. In short, the human element.

It's probably true that, when it comes to checking off agenda items, we probably do get more done at our online meetings because we don't have all of those asides and interruptions. But in ways that matter more, we're getting less done: We're less collegial, less unified, less connected. Less human.

In-person faculty workshops. Here is yet another component of faculty life that has all but disappeared. These workshops offer many of the same advantages as faculty meetings but with the added value of

fostering professional development. They benefit not only the participants, who learn about some new idea or teaching strategy, but also the organizers. For years, leading a campus development workshop has been a staple of many a junior faculty member's promotion bid.

Sure, we've held some of those workshops online during the pandemic, but, just as with the other activities I've mentioned, it's not the same. That point was driven home to me recently when I ran my first on-campus workshop in almost a year. Before Covid-19 hit, I'd been doing 10 or 12 a year, for my institution and others, over most of the past decade. Nine people attended in person — in a room built for 200 — while five others dialed in via the internet.

Being in the physical room with those nine colleagues felt like finally coming up for air after seeing how many lengths of the pool I could swim under water (back when I was 12 years old). And based on their comments, the in-person participants agreed. Meanwhile, several of those who joined us online expressed regret that they couldn't attend in person, although they said Zooming in was much better than not getting to participate at all.

In-person academic conferences. Everything I just said about small, campus-based workshops applies to large professional conferences, only more so. The last big conference I attended was in February 2020 — and it was wonderful. I enjoyed it at the time, but looking back I can see even more clearly what an incredible opportunity it was, both personally and professionally.

After all, we have so few perks in this profession. One of those few is traveling to a new city, meeting together for two or three days with hundreds of colleagues, learning new theories and practices, going out to dinner with friends old and new, taking early-morning walks or runs in the historic district — I could go on, but you all know what I mean. It is spiritually renewing, be-

yond whatever knowledge we gain (which is often considerable). It is also a large part of what binds us together as scholars and teachers — across campuses, across states, sometimes even across disciplines.

None of that — except perhaps the knowledge transfer — is reproducible online. I'm grateful to event organizers who have found ways to carry on virtually, enabling us to benefit from conference sessions professionally if not socially. But I can tell you this: I'm really looking forward to attending an in-person conference in the (I hope) not-too-distant future.

Live athletic events. OK, so now some readers might think I've really gone off the rails here, but what I'm talking about primarily is the life of the campus. And in that regard, few things create more unity, more communal spirit, than sports. Like it or not, they are an integral part of the glue that holds many campuses together.

As a sports fan, I've been grateful for televised college football and basketball, and especially to the players, coaches, and administrators who have been able to foster competition in relative safety.

However, watching on television is not the same as being there — and I'm not just talking about Saturday's big football game or the standing-room-only basketball rivalry. If anything, I've found that watching the "smaller" sports — college baseball, softball, gymnastics — is more intimate and more fun, as well as a great way to support students who don't usually grab the headlines. It's another way of building

those human connections with students, colleagues, and our campus. Heck, show up early at your college's softball game, and you can probably get a seat right behind the backstop. When is that ever going to happen at a Major League ballpark?

But I digress. Mainly what I've learned during the pandemic is that much of what we do in higher education, technically, can be done online just as easily as in person and in some cases more efficiently and more accessibly. In areas where that is true, we should learn from our pandemic experiences and revise our policies, practices, and processes accordingly.

But on another level, the deep learning, the real personal growth — for faculty and staff members as well as for students — comes more from human interactions than from books or computers. Those connections cannot be fully duplicated online, and, in our rush to "reinvent" ourselves for the "post-pandemic campus" — and especially as we make those inevitable budget cuts — may we not forget that there are some things we just can't afford to lose.

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How to Manage Through Emotional Exhaustion

Those of us in academic leadership are not talking enough about mental health and wellness.

By **KERRY L. O'GRADY**

Last year was difficult for all of us in academe, and the start of the new year has proved challenging as well. Mental health and wellness are important components of workplace happiness and success, and those of us in management and leadership positions in higher education are not talking about that as much as we should. We're not talking enough about emotional exhaustion — defined by the Mayo Clinic as “when stress begins to accumulate from negative or challenging events in life that just keep coming.”

Let me begin by saying I am grateful to be employed. Beyond grateful. I am sure many of you feel similarly. However, being grateful does not mean you are OK. You can be both grateful and in a bad place. Every day, as you take calls, log into Zoom meetings, and write documents, you may be working through your own emotional exhaustion — and so are people working alongside you. You are going to falter. People on your team will falter.

Working and leading through turbulent times makes it nearly impossible to put your best professional foot forward, Monday through Friday. Sure, the work still needs to be done. You still need to hold teams accountable, ask for updates, and resolve problems. But if 2020 taught leaders anything, it's that our campuses won't succeed in the long term if we do not take care of the people we manage.

Leading through emotional exhaustion



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is not easy. It requires sophisticated soft skills. It means learning how to motivate your team, raise morale, and demonstrate empathy. It requires you, as a manager, to put aside your own feelings and focus on other people's needs. That can be difficult with a large team — especially if you are stressed and emotionally exhausted, too. And, honestly, taking on the energy of others is taxing (even more so if you are an unemotional person).

All of which is why I recently began practicing some unconventional leadership skills, aimed at balancing employee needs with my own. I share the most successful tips here, in the hope that they will inspire you to lead differently, too.

Say yes to crying. Crying is not a sign of weakness. In fact, crying is a strength. Biologically, it is a physical demonstration that someone is affected by a person, place, or thing (positively or negatively). It is just as healthy as swearing, working out, eye-rolling, or meditating. It is just a different release.

Crying at work does not indicate someone is unprofessional or fragile.

Crying at work does not indicate someone is unprofessional or fragile. It demonstrates the simple fact that something someone said or did — or something in one's personal life — yielded a specific reaction. If crying is not hindering productivity and is not routinely happening in meetings or in class, I say let your employees cry. And make them comfortable doing so.

Admittedly, I am a crier. I am an emotional person. Does that annoy unemo-

tional people? Sure. Does being emotional have its downsides? Absolutely. Some days, I wish I could just turn it off like a faucet. But emotional is how I do life, and the way I manage is no exception. Here are some things I do to ensure my team knows tears are welcome:

- I make my (virtual) office a true safe space for emotional release. I am proud that students, faculty members, and other colleagues know they can put time on my calendar to “cry it out” with zero questions or judgment. Sometimes I give advice to the crier. Sometimes we have difficult conversations. Sometimes I say nothing at all. It depends on what the person needs. Regardless, my office is a well-known cry zone.
- I do my fair share of crying. And I am lucky enough to have close colleagues and friends who allow me to feel secure in releasing my emotions.

Sometimes leaders forget that a crying employee does not necessarily mean a sad one. Crying can be a sign of embarrassment, frustration, or happiness. Take me, for example. If I am crying at work, you can be 99 percent sure it is because I am incredibly frustrated and cannot find the right words to express myself. I work on this constantly, but that does not prevent it from happening on occasion. I mention this because it is important for us, as leaders, to try to understand the “why” behind an emotional reaction, instead of assuming people are fragile, unprofessional, or “incapable” of handling their emotions.

Crying can quickly evoke feelings of shame and loneliness in the crier, especially if it is ignored or assumed the person will “get over it.” Leaders who witness an emotional outburst should at least take the initiative to do a wellness check on that person. A simple inquiry may be all that is needed to turn a tough moment into a lasting work relationship. Here are some questions to ask a crying employee:

Yet as leaders, we often spend more time offering negative feedback – harping on mistakes – than celebrating all the things employees do right.

- “What’s wrong? Do you want to talk about it?”
- “I see this conversation is upsetting you. Can I ask why?”
- “I value working with you, and it’s hurting me to see you like this. How can I help?”
- “Hey, that meeting (or conversation) was difficult, and you were clearly upset. I want to understand why you reacted that way.”

But what if the crying is too frequent? What if it’s unrelated to work but is affecting an employee’s productivity? Sometimes permission to take a (temporary) break and deal with the emotion is the best gift you can give. But if an inability to manage emotions is causing a series of work-related problems (missed deadlines, complaints, making others uncomfortable, etc.), it’s your responsibility to tactfully confront the situation.

For the unemotional leaders and non-criers in the room: What if you are truly uncomfortable with crying at work? And really do feel as if it is inappropriate?

How you feel is not wrong, and you are entitled to your opinion. I would, however, offer this unsolicited consideration: If you

oversee people, how can you do your job effectively if you cannot respect the way others process information? You do not have to like it, or do it yourself, but it’s your responsibility to manage the people in your department or office as individual pieces of a puzzle. They have different needs that require personalized management, or they will never be able to come together as one cohesive unit.

Focus on milestones, not moments. Most of us work eight or more hours a day. The other hours are spent with both mundane and heavy life stuff that we do not talk about at work. As much as we try not to bring our personal lives to work, sometimes we cannot help it. Emotions just appear, and usually at the worst possible times. These moments can present themselves as a rude comment, an “oh crap” mistake, or a moment of pure regret and embarrassment. We have all been there. Maybe in 2020-21, it’s happened more often than we would like.

As my dad always says, human beings are unpredictable. Thus, when someone reacts poorly or makes an uncharacteristic mistake, it is important to take a moment to look at the whole picture. Think to yourself:

- Is this person an asset to the team?
- Could this be just an unfortunate moment in time? Or is this consistent behavior?
- Is there any way I am responsible for this person’s reaction? Could I have delivered this information better?
- Do I need to deal with this formally?

Remember: A few bad days do not represent someone’s overall ability or personality. A few meetings where the tone of someone’s comments is off does not make that a habitual problem. A few mistakes or absent-minded errors do not make someone a screw-up.

Yet as leaders, we often spend more time offering negative feedback — harping on

mistakes — than celebrating all the things employees do right. And, sadly, that is understandable in difficult times, when we may focus on the negative because we are under pressure to “fix” things and we perceive our lives as negative. We may be more apt to nitpick or be hard on our employees because it makes us feel better. Or we become laser-focused on protecting our own jobs or reputation. The truth hurts. I know.

Let me be clear: I am not suggesting managers ignore repeated mistakes or avoid reprimanding employees if it is deserved.

What I am suggesting: We are in different times, and we need to think about why something is important to bring up now, and how we deliver the message. We all need fewer accusations, less defensiveness, and more listening. We need to avoid going into a conversation angry. We need to respect how others process information or events. Finally, we need to put empathy at the forefront of every conversation. Here are some ways to approach a conflict:

- “We need to discuss what happened, and it may be difficult, but I want you to know this incident does not reflect the person you are, and it’s not going to define you.”
- “I want to address the situation, but first, I’d like you to tell me your side and how you’re feeling. It may help me better understand where you’re coming from.”
- “We both understand the situation could have been handled better, and we need to discuss strategies to ensure this doesn’t happen in the future. But first, I want to take a few minutes to understand why you reacted that way.”
- “OK, I respect that you don’t want to talk about this right now. Why don’t you take some time to reflect upon what happened, and we can talk later this week? It’s important to me that we discuss this, but I understand you may need a little time to digest.”

A mishandled conversation between manager and employee can do a lot of damage, both immediate and in the long term. Once these feelings take hold, you risk someone’s becoming despondent, unmotivated, disengaged. In short, the employee becomes a product of the perceived negative environment. No leader can lose valuable employees right now. They are too expensive to replace.

Practice inclusive leadership. That term gets misconstrued all the time. Yes, it’s about living and breathing diversity, equity, and inclusion. But it’s also about more than that. Inclusive leaders are those who are people-oriented, understanding, and passionate, and are more socially savvy than procedure heavy. They inspire change, take the time to understand the jobs of those they manage, and are committed to the team’s emotional well-being. They are ride-or-die for their employees, and put the needs of others before their own. They actively listen more than talk, and ponder more than react.

In managing people, that means taking the time to check on how they are doing, not just what they’re doing. For example, I don’t micromanage my faculty’s day-to-day teaching (barring some specific reason to do so). But I do like to get into the weeds now and then, to ensure not only that team members are delivering on excellence, but also that they are *happy*.

Of course, at times, I need to make difficult decisions and choices that leave employees downright unhappy. But, over all, I know my team is happy because I informally measure it. You read that correctly: I measure workplace happiness. Their engagement, body language, and participation provide me with important insights into team morale, potential burnout, and motivation to succeed.

While I am not an expert on workplace satisfaction, I have read enough to understand that happiness is feeling or showing contentment. At work, people exude happiness in a variety of ways. They do great

work consistently, are flexible with change, are open to learning new things, and are forthcoming with information. They smile and are animated during meetings. They ask questions and feel comfortable raising concerns. They attend events and meetings, just to connect. They regularly ask for help, advice, or both.

If any or all of those traits are displayed, I can confidently surmise that employees are “happy” doing their job. Also it means they are conducive to my leadership style, which is a key variable in any employee-happiness equation. When I started in my current role, I asked for a one-on-one meeting with every instructor. With a large roster, that took months. And it was worth it. It was important to me to understand all instructors’ personalities, what made them tick, and their strengths and weaknesses. On the flip side, I wanted to share my leadership style and expectations for the faculty. This exchange is inclusive leadership in practice.

Like it or not, being liked as a manager matters. The more people like and respect

you as a leader, the better the health and happiness of the employee and the organization. After the pandemic, inclusive leaders will be more employable than revenue-driven or process-oriented ones.

I know my leadership style is not for everyone. I hide nothing. I talk about life with faculty members and students. I am open about anxiety, pain, and stress. We celebrate wins together. We follow one another on social media and connect outside of work hours. The point is: Being relatable and approachable as a human being, however you choose to do so, makes you a more respected and effective leader. Now is the time to show your heart, not just your head.

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