

## Women in selection and recruitment – a level playing field?

*How to ensure equality of opportunity in selection and recruitment and, for applicants for senior posts, practical tips on how to present and overcome the barriers.*

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According to Peter Daley, “brutal feedback is important”. Peter started by urging the audience to “understand the perceived deficit” when applying for senior posts. He mentioned things governors say of female candidates, but not of male candidates that are typical of the attitudes around: “perhaps suitable to be the principal of a small college?”, “too posh”, “too smart”. Listen to this feedback and use the information. Be aware that everybody is thinking things that they don’t say. “Too smart” is never said of a male – the attitudes towards dress are symbolic of the challenges that women face and show that the barriers are still there. His advice about dress for men and women? Ask a woman - and remember you need to look like a principal. Don’t try to be the person they’re looking for: be yourself.

He went on to warn women that the time is never right to make that application, so go for it now. You will never know all that you need to know. Peter referred to the chasm between the posts of vice principal and principal. Stereotypically, men close their eyes, take a run and leap. Women say to themselves that they probably need a few more weeks, then think about it some more and in the end get put off. Many men will pretend that they have always been ready for the role.

Remember that your self-awareness is not a weakness but a strength, and don’t try to be the person you think they are looking for. He advised strongly to always ask for feedback - feedback on your application and CV and your interview - and to learn from it. And when you get feedback, don’t deny what you are told, but manage and work on your deficits. Be self-aware – ask others whether they agree with the feedback. And remember, nobody gets their first principal interview.

Panel members, male and female, will have a particular paradigm of what a principal is. This may, for example, mean that they don’t believe that women can do hard things. Be aware of the paradigm and the prejudices and unseat them – have prepared anecdotes up your sleeve which illustrate your strengths and achievements.

Peter mocked the typical person specification with its endless list of skills (e.g. must be proficient in this, minimum 5 years’ experience of that). He spoke of the “welcome session” as the most important session in one respect – if you think you’ll have fun and enjoy working there, then go for it. You’ve got to think that you’re the best candidate – you can be sure that some of the male candidates will be thinking that. The personal statement is most important: it should not be a CV in prose. Remember you are applying not for A job but for THIS job. Be concise. Governors want a personal view of you: mention what you believe in, mention learners and achievements. Be able to communicate effectively with governors – get them enthused.

At the selection events, show the leader in you and make sure you engage, excite and enthuse them. Remember the white male paradigm and defeat it. It's not enough to be good at your current job - you need to prove that you have shown the qualities of principal and leader in the VP role. Make sure you are not dismissed as "operational". Never refer to yourself as hardworking - make sure you come across as visionary, inspiring, exciting.

Peter emphasised the four key qualities: vision and strategy (big picture thinking), leadership (ability to motivate people), values and business acumen. Are your values in accordance with those of the organisation? Prepare to illustrate your values. Rehearse your presentation in real time in front of someone. Face the critics, in other words know what your deficits are (learn from past feedback) and prepare to nail them. For example, explain in positive terms that gap in the CV or why you stayed so long in one college. Prepare the anecdotes that illustrate what you want to put across. And switch everything up - aim to be loud, not boring.

Where women have the advantage: making the call and asking the right questions, listening carefully, picking up signals, for example realising when you are talking too much. And not scaring the staff, for example not talking about all the changes you will bring in. Peter made the analogy of seeing round a house: you don't refer constantly to what should be changed or put right in front of the seller!

Lastly, Peter had some comments on equalities issues for governors. They should have a clear analysis of what is needed - remember that opposites don't attract -and that they have a tendency to appoint in their own image. They must remember that a balance is needed. Before sending out the application pack, test its tone on relevant people - does it convey the right message? Is the composition of the panel appropriate to ensuring equality of opportunity? And the range of activities? Engage in honest discussion of the paradigm in their heads.