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The Joe Isuzu Dean Search: A Guide to the Interpretation of Announcement Letters

Paul A. LeBel and James E. Moliterno

Each year, law faculties receive numerous announcements of searches to replace retiring administrators. Those that are forwarded to our faculty are taped to the side of the refrigerator in the faculty lounge. Like nursery school drawings—the only other category of items that are routinely taped to refrigerators—the contents of these announcements fall into a familiar pattern, but they might not always present a completely accurate picture. The following example of an announcement letter and its interpretation is presented as a public service to faculty members faced with the task of deciding whether to update a resumé and get a friend to make a nomination.

The Letter

Dear Dean X:

Dean Y has recently decided to fulfill his longstanding ambition to return to full-time teaching and scholarship, and plans to return to a position on the faculty at the beginning of the next academic year.

The Interpretation

This letter is addressed to someone with a demonstrated history of the poor judgment involved in taking a job like this, so maybe we'll get an application from the addressee. The Madison Avenue equivalent is the cigarette ad targeted at those who already enjoy smoking.

Y hasn't written a word other than memos to faculty in the last fifteen years, and his students think that "Cancelled" is the last word in the course title, but he hasn't managed to land another dean job yet.

Accordingly, the ABC School of Law is pleased to announce a nationwide search for a dean who can fill the position so ably held by Dean Y.

ABC is a law school that has undergone considerable changes during the ten years of Dean Y's innovative leadership.

Enrollment has risen by nearly fifty percent, as the school has attempted to make legal education available to a wider segment of the state's population.

The law school enjoys a close relationship with its loyal body of alumni, many of whom are engaged in practice within a short distance from the school.

Maintaining good relations with the state and local bar associations has also been an important part of the law school's contribution to the profession.

Located in the center of the state capitol, the law school is housed in a building that was recently added to the state's historic preservation register.

Expansion of the physical facilities in a cost-effective yet aesthetically pleasing manner that is architecturally consistent with the existing structure is one of the highest priority goals of the law school community.

Having finally gotten rid of Y, we now have a chance to get someone who has some clue about how this business works.

Correcting the mistakes of Y will be the main task of the new dean, and we've had enough of this innovation nonsense—the best ideas are our ideas, and the new dean had better understand that.

The only way we've stayed afloat is to admit every warm body who can come up with the tuition.

Because every decision is certain to displease at least some segment of the constituency, a good third of your time will be spent dealing with phone calls from alumni.

After a few years of bar luncheons and dinners, you'll be qualified to publish a comparative guide to the preparation of chicken in every Ramada and Holiday Inn in the state.

Making sure that there are enough pails to catch the leaking water will occupy more of your time than faculty development and curriculum reform combined.

A blend of the talents of Frank Lloyd Wright, Henry Kissinger, and Donald Trump wouldn't be able to pull this one off.

Applications, nominations and recommendations should be sent to Professor F.G.H., Department of Sociology, chair of the Dean Search Committee.

There are so many inside candidates for this job that the law faculty can't even run the search.

The Search Committee will make every effort to maintain the confidentiality of applications.

We realize that one of the few things that would be more embarrassing than getting this job is applying for it and not getting it, so your secret is safe with us.

