



Never Again: The Promotion Denial

It did not take the new President long to demonstrate what she meant when she had said at the Annual Fall Faculty Meeting: “I promise you that there will be no soft promotions on my watch.” The new President declared, “Every level of review is expected to evaluate each case in the light of the strategic vision for our campus, as expressed by the Board of Trustees. We are not a research university, yet we do expect all faculty to be publishing scholars. Our mission at the undergraduate level is to prepare working professionals and educated citizens, so, excellent teaching is also essential. And we must not neglect the common good; thus, we require campus service marked by positive contributions, collegiality and initiative. In my view teaching and service do not make up for a deficit in scholarship.”

Dean Rosalyn Klugh knew that Bill Moorland’s promotion case was not the strongest. But it was no weaker than some of the successful cases in the years immediately before the new President had arrived. Bill had been a fine Associate Dean for many years; yet, perhaps as a consequence, he didn’t have much of a publication record. The few pubs he did have were as an assistant professor, and Dean Klugh knew that Bill’s tenure case might not have succeeded at all were it not that those few pubs he had at the time were co-authored with one of the University’s strongest researchers.

The Dean wondered what the President thought she would accomplish by denying Bill promotion to full professor? Now in his fifteenth year as an associate professor and eleventh as Associate Dean, Bill had been working hard for the college and the University for most of his career!

As sure as fog in San Francisco, Bill appealed his promotion denial. Dean Klugh looked at the appeal that Bill Moorland had submitted. Not much new here, thought the Dean. The appeal had been supported, but with reservations regarding scholarship, by the department and the college’s appeal committee. Dean Klugh knew that the institution relied on the goodwill and generosity of hardworking people like Bill. Campus governance and the myriad other projects that the new President had initiated – strategic planning, accreditation review, outcomes assessment, reform of the general education program, residential learning communities – took energy. Denying promotion to good citizens like Bill Moorland would be sending the wrong message, thought the Dean. Colleagues like Bill should be the ones doing the important service jobs and they should be full professors too, thought the Dean. On the other hand, the Dean felt she owed to the President to support her policies.

Questions:

- 1. Should Dean Klugh support the appeal and try to persuade the new President to grant the promotion? If so, on what grounds? If not, why not?**
- 2. Do questions like “what’s to be gained by denying this promotion?” and “what message is being sent?” apply? Or should promotion and tenure decisions be made strictly on the merits of the case, independent of consideration of potential consequences?**



PART II -

As Dean Klugh could have predicted, as the academic year was drawing to an end the new President denied Bill's appeal. And, as also could have been predicted, Bill was crushed. Bill did not show up for Commencement Exercises and, in fact, missed several end of the year events. A few weeks into the summer term, angry and disillusioned, Bill calls you on the phone to let you know that he is "done being a fool." He is going to resign as Associate Dean. He says he has put up with too much administrative nonsense and too many lazy colleagues for too long. "Look at the gaggle of academic narcissists who were promoted this year," he says. "Sure they're all publishing. But their work doesn't make the world a better place, it doesn't cure disease or eradicate poverty or educate the young. None of them gives a damn about their teaching or the students, and you can never get any of them to put in an ounce of serious effort on committee work or anything else around here! What claim can they possibly have to the resources of this college? The President may want to coddle them and exploit the rest of us, but I have a different plan," says Bill. "I'm going to teach my classes and show up for mandatory department meetings. And that's it! You won't see me busting my backside while those other hotshots get the promotions and the merit pay increases. Maybe I'll do something more rewarding - like sell real estate."

Questions:

- 3. You are [Dean Klugh, or the college's other Associate Dean, or Bill's department Chair, or Bill's best friend on the faculty]. What do you say to Bill?**
- 4. Are promotion standards or promotion review policies in need of revision at the college? If so, what, why, and how will the changes be brought about? If not, why not?**
- 5. How much should things like the common good, the institution's strategic vision, the college's national recognition, and the like have to do with tenure and promotion decisions?**
- 6. Is there any way to salvage or assist disillusioned colleagues like Bill so that they can again become productive, respected and fulfilled members of the college community?**

PART III -

At an administrative retreat later that summer you have the opportunity to ask the President privately about the promotion denials during her first year. She says, "For one, I was simply taking seriously the standards that the University has had on the books for a long time. Second, if we are going to become a stronger University we really do have to raise our standards; people like Bill would never have been tenured at our peer institutions, and certainly they do not get promoted. I know, I've served as a dean at one and a provost at another. It might not be a popular view with the crowd that spends their mornings reading the paper and sipping coffee in the Faculty Club, but we really aren't 'excellent in every way.' Look, we're never going to get anywhere by being self-satisfied and complacent. Sure I feel bad that Bill happened to be one of the people whose case came up last year. But that's on you. At last summer's administrative retreat, in preparation for the talk I gave at the Fall Faculty Meeting, I talked with the academic vice president and all of you deans about all of this. As I recall, you and the other deans agreed then with the need to refocus on scholarship as a standard for full professor. You should have talked Bill out of applying, and certainly you should have discouraged him from making that embarrassing appeal. Don't send any weak cases up this year. Okay?"

- 7. As Dean [Associate Dean, Chair] Your response would be...?**