Chapter 7
Undermining Leadership Effectiveness

Linda B. Akanbi
Kennesaw State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights the tactics used by faculty, students, and administrators to undermine the leadership of a minority female hired from a national search to chair an academic department of all-White faculty. The tactics ranged from lack of support from her immediate supervisor to collusion to re-assign this minority female to a lesser position. She also received biased evaluations from faculty and students. This faculty member was able to persevere through self-confidence, through refusing to be intimidated, and through her ability to turn challenges into opportunities to showcase her strength and determination to prevail. At one point, she filed a discrimination complaint. As part of her legacy, she established an annual scholarship in her name for African American education majors matriculating at the institution.

INTRODUCTION

Too many black administrators are placed in positions and are refused or denied the power to make them effective. . .. The black administrator cannot allow himself to be immobilized by the swirl of conflicting forces that may seem to engulf him, nor can he sit back in a position of power and be by-passed or ignored. (Dark, 1982, p. 286)

I was hired to chair an academic department in education at a predominantly White regional university in the southeastern United States. I was the first African American female to be hired to chair an academic department on that campus, thus making
history. The department consisted of 14 full-time faculty including 3 males and 11 females, all of whom were White. The departmental secretary was White as well. In addition, the director of Graduate Studies for the College of Education, who was a White male, was housed in my department although he reported directly to the dean of the College of Education as did I. The previous chair of this relatively new department had been demoted by the dean and that is why I was recruited and hired. However, she remained in the department and some of the faculty still felt loyal to her, which I later came to realize. She and I were the only ones in the department with the rank of full professor.

I felt confident in my new role, having completed one year as a Fellow in the Regents Administrative Development Program for the University System of Georgia two years prior to assuming this position. The purpose of that program was to prepare more faculty of color who were within the university system to assume administrative roles at the system’s predominantly White Colleges and Universities. It was the university system of Georgia’s answer to integrating its administrative faculty without having to go outside the system although normal search procedures still had to be followed. The way the program worked was to re-assign faculty from their home institution to another institution within the university system where they reported directly to the president of that institution. While there, they got hands-on experience with all aspects of university administration, attended board meetings with the president and were considered a member of the president’s administrative team for that year. Some of us were re-assigned from a Historically Black institution to a predominantly White institution. Minority faculty who were already at a predominantly White institution were reassigned to a different predominantly White institution within the university system. I was reassigned from a Historically Black institution to a predominantly White institution. All the Fellows were supervised by higher education faculty from the University of Georgia.

I had 20 years of experience in higher education which included holding faculty positions at other predominantly White universities in the north and Midwest, at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the south, and at a regional university in Nigeria, giving me international teaching experience at the collegiate level. In addition to teaching, I had designed curricula; I had been the director of different programs at some of these institutions. In my view, my leadership skills were well-honed. I also had public school teaching experience.

One month into my job as a department chair, I went on an administrative retreat and had the opportunity to meet and mingle with other administrators across the campus, all of whom were White, except for one Black male who was the head of an academic department in the College of Business. He and I were the only African American department chairs at the university. He had been promoted to that position from within his department which gave him an automatic connection to his colleagues.
Related Content

Using Learning Analytics to Improve Engagement, Learning, and Design of Massive Open Online Courses
www.igi-global.com/chapter/using-learning-analytics-to-improve-engagement-learning-and-design-of-massive-open-online-courses/220567?camid=4v1a

Realizing Their Potential, Shaping Their Greatness: Using Self-Efficacy in a Graduate Reading Program to Shape K-6 Student Success
www.igi-global.com/chapter/realizing-their-potential-shaping-their-greatness/191948?camid=4v1a
Faculty Videos of Resilience Narratives at Two Institutions: Residency Resilience Skills Program Innovation
www.igi-global.com/article/faculty-videos-of-resilience-narratives-at-two-institutions/245770?camid=4v1a

Evaluation of Multi-Peer and Self-Assessment in Higher Education: A Brunei Case Study
www.igi-global.com/article/evaluation-of-multi-peer-and-self-assessment-in-higher-education/245772?camid=4v1a