

SERVICE EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE
Project 100: *100 Days to Better Service*
Final Project Report

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Prepared by:

Katherine McPadden, Management PhD Student
Richard Kopelman, Professor of Management
Ely Weitz, visiting Professor of Management

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We apologize for any omission of names of people who contributed to this project and were not listed due to an inadvertent lapse in memory.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Service Excellence Initiative (SEI) was launched during the 2003-2004 academic year as a means to recognize the contributions of the administrative support staff at Baruch's Zicklin School of Business (ZSB). For years, it has been customary to recognize the outstanding achievements of students and faculty; however, the administrative staff has traditionally been excluded from such accolades. The SEI led to the development of the first ever Service Excellence Awards, which recognize those individuals who work tirelessly to provide quality service to faculty, students and administrators. The Service Excellence Task Force was formed to determine how the recipients would be chosen, how many should be recognized, the form(s) the recognition should take, and to manage the selection process. Four inaugural Service Excellence Awards were granted at the 2004 ZSB Honors and Recognition Ceremony to the following recipients: Ms. Linda Moore, Ms. Noemi Taveras, Mr. Troy Taylor, and Ms. Shelley Watson.

INTRODUCTION

The Service Excellence Initiative originated during the summer of 2003. Dean John Elliott articulated the mission for the Zicklin School of Business as follows: “To provide affordable excellence in business education to the most diverse population of business students in the country.” Consistent with this mission, Dean Elliott emphasized the importance of providing students with a comprehensive service experience, one that best supports learning excellence. Further, he stressed that a culture of service excellence includes both technical and administrative support. SEI, therefore, focused on the administrative support facet, or the “people factor.” Dean Elliott noted that the administrative staff is typically on the “front lines” in responding to students’ and faculty concerns. A primary goal of SEI was to create a service-oriented culture at ZSB by recognizing outstanding achievements by the non-faculty ZSB staff and, thereby, improving the overall quality of service provided to students and faculty.

On July 23, 2003, Associate Dean Rob Ducoffe met with Professor Richard Kopelman and visiting Professor Ely Weitz of the Management Department. The two had been recommended by Professor Harry Rosen. Dean Ducoffe communicated the school’s high priority for improving administrative service and asked for assistance in developing a plan to achieve this aim. Professors Kopelman and Weitz agreed to manage the project, and Prof. Kopelman enlisted the assistance of an outside consultant to help with this task. Orly Ben-Yoav Nobel, PhD, a former vice president of Organizational Development at Morgan Stanley was chosen to work with Professors Kopelman and Weitz.

The team met on these dates during the fall, 2003:

- August 11: O. Nobel, R. Kopelman, E. Weitz
- September 3: O. Nobel, R. Kopelman, E. Weitz, J. Elliott
- September 9: O. Nobel, E. Weitz
- September 11: O. Nobel, E. Weitz, J. Elliott
- September 17: O. Nobel, E. Weitz
- October 10: O. Nobel, E. Weitz, K. McPadden, J. Elliott
- December 17: R. Kopelman, E. Weitz
- December 18: R. Kopelman, E. Weitz, K. McPadden

Initial project goals included performing a job task analysis, identifying support service needs, reinforcing existing strengths, and suggesting and implementing actions to close the service gaps. After much deliberation, it was decided that given the timing and resources available for the project, these goals were too broad in scope. As a result, a streamlined approach was adopted which included the following primary goals:

- Identify support service tasks.
- Recognize and award service excellence.

Professors Kopelman and Weitz enlisted the assistance of Management PhD candidate Kate McPadden, and they, drawing on the vision of Dean Elliott, formulated an initial draft of the “100 Days to Better Service” initiative (code name: *Project 100*) – key pages are presented in Appendix A. During meetings with the deans the draft was modified, enhanced, and eventually approved by Dean Elliott in January 2004:

- January 23: R. Kopelman, E. Weitz, K. McPadden, J. Elliott, R. Ducoffe
- January 30: R. Kopelman, E. Weitz, K. McPadden, J. Elliott, R. Ducoffe

The SEI Task Force was created to manage the project. The Task Force included representation from faculty, administrators, students and administrative staff and consisted of the following members:

- Professor Richard Kopelman
- Professor Ely Weitz
- Ms. Kate McPadden, Doctoral student
- Professor Elliot Axelrod, Chair of Law Department
- Ms. Maria DiBenedetto, Director Graduate Student Services
- Ms. Linda Moore, Administrative Staff
- Ms. Tara Sinclair, Administrative Staff
- Ms. Shirley Bishop, Human Resources
- Ms. Priya Shah, undergraduate student representative
- Mr. Adam Chaim, graduate student representative

All of the members were drawn from ZSB except one; Ms. Shirley Bishop from Baruch College's Human Resource Department agreed to join and help in this effort. Representatives from Baruch College's Weissman School of Arts and Sciences and the School of Public Affairs were also invited to participate.

The task force met on the following dates:

- February 20, 2004
- February 27, 2004
- March 26, 2004
- April 2, 2004 – presentation of findings to Dean Elliott

At the initial “kick-off” meeting of the SEI task force, Dean Elliott presented his vision for this project and communicated his enthusiastic commitment to the project's goals and objectives. The SEI task force participants concurred that the administrative staff were an integral part of ZSB. Further, the task force members were impressed that the leaders of ZSB were strongly committed to the project and to continuous service improvement.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The Task Force identified 36 individuals who met the criteria for ZSB administrative staff as described by Dean Ducoffe. These included 21 salaried CUNY Office Assistants (“Gittelsons”) and 15 Zicklin college assistants who were paid on an hourly basis. Approximately one-third of these individuals worked in academic departments, and two-thirds worked in administrative departments. The Task Force and Deans agreed that student office aids would be excluded from this project. A listing of eligible administrative staff members appears in Appendix B.

Method

Dean Elliott communicated the commitment of ZSB to service excellence and to this project in oral presentations to various constituents of the Zicklin School of Business. To enlist faculty support and cooperation, Dean Elliott described the project at the initial spring term Faculty Meeting (March 11th 2004). He also sent out written communication to ZSB department chairs (see Appendix C), in which he described the project, and his commitment to the administrative staff and to service excellence in the school.

Qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to gather data. First, 33 interviews were conducted during February – March 2003. Two Honors MBA graduate assistants, Ms. Amy Dashoff and Mr. Dan Clark, were enlisted to help conduct interviews with the administrative staff. Attempts were made to contact all 36 eligible participants, and 13 agreed to be interviewed for the project. The purpose of the interviews was to

identify and document the wide variety of tasks that these administrative employees performed on a daily basis.

In addition, Professor Ely Weitz and Ms. Kate McPadden conducted interviews with 13 administrators, including 5 out of 6 department chairs. The purposes of these interviews were three-fold: (a) to communicate the goals and methodology of the SEI project, (b) to gain an understanding of the tasks and functions of department-based administrative staff, and (c) to gather critical incidents, or “Success Stories” about the administrative staff.

Finally, Ms. Dashoff and Mr. Clark interviewed 7 students—3 undergraduates and 4 graduate students—to gather information about their Zicklin service experiences.

An online nomination form was created to gather quantitative data (Appendix D). E-mails were sent to over 8,000 members of the Zicklin community, including undergraduate, graduate and PhD students, faculty, administrators, and staff (Appendix E). The e-mails announced the SEI and encouraged people to log on to the website and nominate up to two individuals for a Service Excellence Award. Nominators were encouraged to provide a brief description as to why that individual deserved recognition for service excellence. The website went live on March 8 and accepted nominations through March 19.

RESULTS

The staff interviews resulted in the identification of 161 separate tasks that comprised 13 domains within two primary job categories: academic departments and administrative departments. Sample tasks included maintaining faculty PAFs, addressing students' questions and concerns, budgeting for supplies, ordering food and planning events. See Appendix F for a complete listing of the various tasks performed by administrative staff personnel.

The nomination web page was viewed by 263 people. Of these, 92 responded and provided 142 nominations (two staff members could be nominated on one form). Three staff members declined to be listed on the website; 23 of the 36 eligible participants received nominations.

The results were consistent with the findings from the interviews. The nominations elicited by the web-based solicitation were remarkably similar to the data collected in the interview process. As a result, the Task Force recommended to Deans Elliott and Ducoffe that four awards be granted. Further, the task force recommended that in order to recognize staff members working in the two primary job categories, two recipients would be selected from academic departments and two from administrative departments. The 2004 Service Excellence Award recipients were:

- Linda Moore, Management Department
- Noemi Taveras, Graduate Academic Services
- Troy Taylor, Dean's Office
- Shelley Watson, Law Department

DISCUSSION

The inaugural Service Excellence Awards were presented at the ZSB Honors and Recognition Ceremony on May 7, 2004. The award recipients were notified of their achievement via a congratulatory letter from Dean Elliott (Appendix G). In addition to a plaque commemorating this distinction, recipients received a check for \$1,000. The awards were well received by the Zicklin community, as evidenced by articles in *The Ticker* (Appendix H) and on the Baruch College website (Appendix I).

The Task Force discussed eligibility requirements for following years and decided that award recipients would be precluded from receiving the award during the subsequent two years after winning.

Dean Elliott formally thanked all members of the Task Force and invited them to participate on the project team again during the 2004-2005 academic year (Appendix J). All Task Force members agreed to rejoin the ranks. Visiting Professor Ely Weitz is returning to Tel Aviv University in Israel, but has agreed to “telecommute” and continue contributing to next year’s project.

Limitations

There were several limitations to the project that should be pointed out. First, not all administrative staff members were interviewed. While 8 individuals specifically

declined, there were 20 staff members with whom Ms. Dashoff and Mr. Clark were unable to meet. This was primarily due to non-response, rather than scheduling conflicts. Despite the fact that great emphasis was placed on stipulating that the purpose of the interviews was to gather data so that staff may be awarded and recognized, apprehension existed. Looming budget cuts and lay-off concerns may have deterred some individuals from agreeing to be interviewed. They may have thought the meetings were a way to assess their performance. We would hope that after having witnessed the first year's outcome – recognition and awards without any negative repercussions – we should see increased participation on both the part of the staff and the various ZSB constituents.

Another limitation was the low response rate to the “nomination” e-mails that were sent. Given that this was the first year of the initiative, and that nominators were only provided a short time frame in which to respond, the 142 nominations were deemed acceptable by the ZSB task force. However, participation by faculty, students, and peers could and should have been higher. Only one wave of e-mails was sent out, and a second “reminder” e-mail would likely have increased the response rate appreciably. In general, with more active participation on the part of key ZSB people – department chairs, managers, the student government and faculty – next year should witness an increase in involvement and response rate.

Finally, staff members who worked in “back office” positions – jobs in which the incumbent does not have the opportunity to interact with students and faculty – were at a

distinct disadvantage when it came to the extant process. While their work is highly valued they were handicapped because their contributions were performed “behind the scenes.” An alternative system should be devised next year to recognize their excellent service efforts. This could include supervisor assessments and perhaps a third job category, for “back office” employees.

RECOMMENDATIONS and CONCLUSIONS

All nominations were weighted equally (i.e., student, faculty, and staff). It might be beneficial to identify nominator categories and perhaps assign each category unique weights. This is something that the SEI task force should consider as it determines the methodology it will use during the 2004-2005 academic year. The nominating process placed back office position at a distinct disadvantage. An alternative system should be devised next year to recognize their excellent service contributions.

This year's group included only the Gittelsons and non-student Zicklin College assistants. Another group of non-faculty personnel who should be considered for recognition of their service excellence are the ZSB Higher Education Officers (HEOs).

There are currently 28 HEOs at ZSB, in the following categories:

- Higher Education Officer - HEO
- Higher Education Associate - HEA
- Higher Education Assistant - HEa
- Assistant to Higher Education Officer - aHEO

We recommend that individuals in the HEa and aHEO categories be included for possible recognition next year. For the members of the administrative staff eligible this past year, the selection process should be improved and refined as indicated below. For the new group, the HEOs, we recommend beginning with the same process introduced during the 2003-2004 academic year. That is, first generating a functional job analysis based primarily on interviews with the focal HEO population and their supervisors. Also, in the web-based process it will be useful to include a procedure by which it is possible to discern – and possibly differentially weigh – different categories of respondents.

Although the informal feedback we have heard about the SEI project has been overwhelmingly favorable, we have also detected some notes of dissatisfaction: (a) that only four people received awards; (b) uncertainty as to whether this is a one shot deal (c) whether other people will realistically have a chance of winning going forward, and (d) why non ZSB personnel were excluded from this process. To address these “whispered” concerns we recommend that the Dean communicate via organs such as the Baruch website, the Ticker, and other means that we have already begun the process of selecting the outstanding service nominees for the school year 2004-5. It might also be noted that winners last year are not eligible during the next two years.

We also recommend that the Dean continue to encourage his counterparts at Baruch to initiate a similar process within the other two schools and various Baruch departments (HR, Library, etc.).

Similarly, we recommend that the “Atta-Boy/Atta-Girl” award first initiated by the late Dean F.J. “Bud” Connolly be reinstated. That is, we recommend recognizing outstanding contributions by non-ZSB members of the CUNY community in their interactions with ZSB. This will not only reward outstanding contributions to ZSB by non-Baruch personnel, but serves as an incentive, i.e., encouraging others to do so in the future. It is in line of Dean Elliott’s vision of excellence in service and will have the effect of furthering excellence in the interaction between ZSB and its Baruch stakeholders.