NSS Open Meeting

with Bernie Hurwitz

November 15, 2019

Tabitha Jacques introduces the NTID Staff Senate

NSS

Thank you to Bernie Hurwitz.

Cathy Clarke is in attendance from staff Council, as well as two of our staff council reps from Block 5. (Laurie Conrad and Barb Fagenbaum)

Original list of questions from the survey was not all encompassing.

**Ground Rules for Open Forum:**

* Questions need to be general but not specific to a department.
* HR concerns specific to positions and department should be addressed with management but you can move onto HR

Cliff is our main point person for HR

**Ombudsman Office**

You can meet with Bernie or the Ombudsman Office if you have a confidential issues. The Ombudsman office is neutral.

Ashley, a CODA, is part of the Ombudsman office. Their role is to remain neutral and listen, even if there is a group complaint involved.

There is an entire list of what they are capable of doing.

Ashley has an office in LBJ, but there is an office in the SAU as well.

If you have a general HR question about salaries or career ladder, work with staff Council. The chair is Cathy Clarke.

Cathy will explain what our representatives are and how to reach out to them.

**Cathy:**

NSS and Staff Council difference.

Jennifer Taylor and Gina Coyne were unable to make it.

If you have a question that is HR related, general to your role as an employee at RIT, those are for staff Council or your HR rep.

If it's specific contact HR yourself. If you have an NTID specific question, that would either be brought to the NTID staff senate, Bernie or Cliff.

Does it affect you as an employee of NTID or RIT? But anyone will be happy to help or point you in the right direction.

Question: If there were a group of people from NTID that have a general HR complaint or concern, who do we bring it to?

Cathy: First step is to contact your staff Council rep. Then they would bring that to the general staff Council for discussion.

Bernie: Many times we have HR representatives, Judy Bender, the head of HR for RIT, she will go to staff Council to present issues that relate to employee benefits or things that effect all employees. It's important to remember that we are all RIT employees and NTID employees. If an issue affects you as an NTID or RIT employee, Bernie is happy to discuss it.

Judy Bender will be at the Staff Council meeting on December 19, 2019 meeting to discuss the market analysis and merit increases for this past year.

**Question: Can you give us an example of an HR concern that has been brought through Staff Council and the result? Just one example of what it looks like?**

Cathy: The most recent example is related to employees who are typically in that first tier for benefits deduction, sometimes they are close to the edge of that tier for deductions. Then they get their merit increase and get bumped just into tier 2.

Occasionally that results in, when the health insurance increases come through, they walk away with less money. It's rare but there were some staff members that dealt with this. But staff Council worked on putting a system in place to educate managers about this and realizing it may occur. Going forward it may be addressed so the manager can offer an increase that will cover the increase in cost.

**Question: Cathy explained the general impact on the whole community. What issues or concerns can you address that we should only approach NSS with? What can NSS address instead of staff Council so we save our time?**

Tabitha: We know that up until this past year there was no staff Senate. We are here to facilitate the process to explain things clearly so you can feel more empowered to take things into their own hands. We have people who sign, we have deaf employees, and we have a diverse population of employees. It's our job to make sure that there is an understanding that NTID is not like other departments. We are here to help with things Staff Council can't address.

Skip is developing a mentoring program just for NTID. We are here for NTID only. If it's HR, parking, smoking on campus, those are RIT concerns that should go to staff Council.

Enrollment is down, how will that impact NTID with the number of employees and how it will impact individual employees. That's a good example that focuses on NTID itself and not the rest of RIT.

RIT itself is seeing some decline in enrollment too. Many of the people on campus might have the same question.

600 employees 9/10 years ago. Today we have 580.

The enrollment 9 years ago was 1400, now 1000. We have dropped 20 employees in nine years but more with enrollment. Enrollment is not the primary driver of how we staff NTID. There are other factors involved. Funding is a major factor. We have gone to DC and gotten adequate funding for NTID over the last ten years. That has allowed to look at our priorities. Maybe we are not focusing on the areas we should have.

We are still hiring, but not in some areas, maybe in others.

Enrollment is not the primary factor in why we would make a decision to reduce staffing. If you look also at Career Zone posting, we are still advertising faculty and staff positions. We are always looking. We are creating new positions.

**Question: We are going to have some new academic programs opening. With those programs will we bring in new faculty and staff? Or will you train and redeploy other faculty to the new programs?**

Bernie: If we are looking at reducing the number of staff, I'm not focused really on faculty, if we decide to look at decreasing staff, we will not fill empty positions first. Removing people will be a last resort. That only happens if we have a serious cut in funding.

Enrollment going down is not going to create that.

The general principle is to keep the people that we have here now. Before cutting people we are always willing to offer them training in another area. If we have technology that goes away or positions we don't need to fill any longer, we might need, one example was we have a word processing department, but we don't have that anymore. We are allies going to be looking for a way to preserve the people that we have.

We are not at a point now where we are considering reducing the number of people that we have. We have enrollment challenges but that creates opportunities in other areas for us. We have some ideas of how to address that. It might require us to shift resources from one area to another.

**Question: There is no opportunity for offering an upward appraisal in some departments. Is there a plan for upward appraisal instead of just staff being evaluated by the supervisor?**

Bernie: I have been thinking some time about having an upward appraisal in maybe all areas. Not just upward appraisal but 360 reviews. Where you are reviewed by peers. To get a sense of what your colleagues think. We get a better sense of what we need to do to improve. Strengths, weaknesses. I think it's a great idea. We have not done that. There was a practice of this ten years ago. But this is a good suggestion.

**Question: If you did that in the past, what happened? Why did we stop?**

Bernie: I wasn't here then. But in my experience we didn't have it here. But I know we did have it. Maybe not in all areas. But now we can handle a couple of areas where we have done upward appraisals in areas where there is some concern in that department that have popped up.

We need to do that before the problems arise, though.

One issue with that is that it takes time. It's hard to find the balance.

**Question: Are managers evaluated by their upper management?**

Bernie: Everyone gets evaluated. I get evaluated, my boss gets evaluated. Evaluating upward is a good practice. It's not required here at RIT. But maybe it's not a priority to some. But you can get with HR and the administration make that a priority.

**Question: In the past there was someone in HR that was deaf, familiar with Deaf Culture. But now, everyone in HR is hearing. We don't have a deaf HR rep. Interpreters are fine, but where is the opportunity to have someone in your language that gets you, understands your language and culture?**

Bernie: I don't remember that. In my time here we have not had a deaf person in HR.

If you've met Cliff, he gets an interpreter when needed, he is great. We have learned a lot from each other. We are lucky to have Cliff. Eventually he is going to retire or have enough of this place and I will miss him.

**Question: Who do we go to for professional development funding concerns?**

If not satisfied with supervisor, go to the next level. Assignment go you get to the head of your department, then feel free to make an appointment to talk to Bernie. Talk with HR.

For all of you here, how many of you people know what I do here?

Bernie: When I started here, my title was executive assistant to the president of NTID. I didn't have any responsibilities for other departments. He works with student and academic services and college operations and information technology. He has operational responsibility for that, as well as employee relations. Most of Bernie's time is consumed with HR issues.

If you have a question related to your department problems that need to be resolved and you have gone through supervisors and not satisfied, feel free to make an appointment to talk with Bernie, he can reach out to Cliff. If not satisfied with issues, there are different ways to approach it. One way is to reach out to Bernie, HR, or the Ombudsman.

**Question: This spring we sent out a survey, and most of the comments had to do with HR. Employment, signing in public spaces, nepotism. Can all of those concerns be addressed by you? Where should they go?**

Those comments have been shared with Bernie. Which is why the format of the meeting shifted.

**Question: The space in NTID is often limited, many people share offices and they become crowded. Will there be any additional spaces in NTID or LBJ? Some staff need to have their own offices.**

Bernie: We have been doing a space study at NTID. Consultant was hired to do a comprehensive analysis of the space in LBJ. That question about space still comes up. We don't have a lotto of space. But we want to figure out why that is. The result is, we got the report back with some surprising things.

One is that we have plenty of space in LBJ but it's not being used efficiently. For example maybe we have too many classrooms. Maybe some of the offices are a bit bigger than necessary. The biggest issue is the classrooms not being used as often as they used to be. Maybe we don't need them as often.

If we renovate some classrooms or move them, and get away from the idea now that these each department owns the classroom. Most of the classrooms that we have can be general purpose and used in different ways.

If we can get to that point, that will free up a lot of space. Probably looking at 1/2 of the third floor changed.

**Question: Why do people have more than one office, can we find out?**

Bernie: I have heard that before, but I don't know if that's accurate. Maybe it was in the past, but there are ways to solve the problem. We know that office space is very political. If you get an office, especially faculty feel that it's their office, they are keeping it.

It takes a while to get to where we want to go. But we know we have plenty of space in LBJ. But right now it feels tight. I think we need to move some things around, do some renovation and get to the point where we can change things.

**Question: Department chairs don't have a lot of control over our salaries. Staff assistants, is that correct? They have more control over faculty salaries?**

Bernie: If you have a concern about that, maybe meet with me one on one. Department chairs have control over both faculty and staff salaries. The issue comes up when we have departments that have one or two staff members. The merit pool needs to be divided, but there is not a lot of flexibility. That's not the same thing.

Merit increases are looked at and examined by Bernie, Gerry and HR to make sure that things are fair.

Bernie does not make the decisions about who makes what. He makes suggestions but there are a number of people involved in that decision.

**Question: Staff attending Graduate school here. What are the rules about that? If you are doing something related to your job or not? Do I just contact HR at RIT and bypass NTID?**

Bernie: That's an all RIT benefit available to all NTID staff. I think you get $750 credit for a course? I don't remember the numbers.

You pay a lot up front and get it back at tax time.

There is a tuition waiver. Employees of RIT have a tuition waiver.

Bernie: I would prefer you go to HR so they can give you the correct information and the process for that.

**Question: Enrollment is going down. If we can go back to that for a second, you mentioned that sometimes positions would be cut as a last resort. If that were to happen, and you had to cut, what would that look like? Would that be communicated with the community or would that be more direct with the impacted employees? What is the process?**

**If we had to do layoffs, how would seniority come into play?**

Bernie: I would feel awkward explaining the process right now. But the process changes depending on what we are dealing with. We had one time where we closed a department. That was 7 or 8 years ago. We had to move some of the people in that department to another department. We decided that the functions of those people were needed.

We worked closely with HR on that. Making sure that we did it the right way. We offered support for everyone involved. Generally we have to have a good reason why we eliminate a position. You can't just eliminate it.

Seniority is one reasonable way to determine who stays or goes. In other cases we may base it on skills. But this is theoretical. If it is done, it's a last resort.

**Question: If there is a staff member within a department that knows their supervisor or chair is doing something incorrectly, they are being micromanaged or bullied, or the same thing happens outside of the department and there are multiple witnesses to the behavior of the supervisor, who would they talk to? Cliff? Bernie?**

Bernie: You can go to a few different places. We have an anonymous ethics hotline you can call. Sometimes those things don't result in resolution.

It's harder to investigate that.

I think the thing that I want to emphasize about filing a complaint, we don't tolerate that. If things like that happen, you are gone. There are laws against that. So you should feel free to report that. Go to the Ombudsman person.

As a last resort, come to me. We all know about Title IX. We have a Title IX representative here. If you feel discriminated based on gender, race, religion or other categories you are required to report that.

**Question: Can that be a bystander too? They have witnessed or heard of?**

Bernie: right. If you observed it, report it.

Katie: I thought we were mandated to report it.

Bernie: It's a pretty complicated situation. But if. You see discrimination or harassment, you will be protected if you bring it forward. We don't tolerate it.