

June 26, 2013

U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Defense Subcommittee
Room S128, The Capitol
Washington, D.C., 20510

Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Cochran,

My name is Jason Lane, and I am a former employee of DeVry University Online, a part of the larger DeVry Inc. I was employed as an "Admissions Advisor" with the company from 2007 until 2010 and left the company on my own accord.

The purpose of my letter is to share anecdotes with you, and others, in regards to the recruitment practices that I witnessed during my tenure. In addition, I would like to expound upon the manner in which management handled employee performance issues; namely my own. This letter is not meant to smear the company, nor degrade their reputation, or that of other for-profit education entities. I merely wish to share with you examples of my experiences as a former employee of one of the largest for-profit providers of education today.

When I began as an "Admissions Advisor" in the summer of 2010, I was told that my position was one in which I would be working with students to help them through the college admissions process. What I discovered, after only a couple of days on the job, was that this was, in all reality, a sales position. I placed quotations around the title Admissions Advisor to emphasize that this was merely a title. My training manager, Anton "Paul" Weber, conducted sales training during which the emphasis on "hitting numbers" was quite clear. He told me that I could receive higher annualized increases in my salary based on the number of "students" I enrolled during each class start. At the time, I didn't think much about the implications of possibly not reaching my enrollment goals.

As time progressed, management became increasingly vigilant about my enrollment "target." I had been on the job about two years when I was transferred to a new team, led by Director of Admissions, Derek Smits. Admittedly, I had been struggling to enroll students into the degree programs. DeVry had an unwritten rule that if you missed your "target" two class starts in a row, you were to be placed on a "Performance Improvement Plan" or PIP. This is where the lines between sales and admissions became quite blurred in my eyes. Derek called me into his office one day and sat me down to discuss what would happen to me if I didn't hit my "target." Essentially, and I am paraphrasing the conversation, he told me that if I didn't hit my goal of 17 new enrollments that session that I would be let go and have to find new employment. I had eight weeks to find new students and it didn't matter how I got there. I was now working out of fear. Eight weeks went by and I did not hit my "target." I dreaded being called into the office to receive my pink slip. Well, to my surprise, that didn't happen. Instead, I was told that I came close enough by enrolling 16 new students and that I could retain my employment. As an aside, I had visited my doctor and was prescribed anti-anxiety medication to curb the stress of potentially losing my job. I was summarily transferred to another team following the end of that recruiting cycle.

DeVry held an annual meeting, called PRIDE, in which top employees throughout DeVry Inc. were rewarded with a free company paid trip to an exotic location to celebrate successes in the company. A contingency of DeVry Online admissions advisors would be allowed to attend the PRIDE celebration, but attendance was based upon achieving enrollment targets throughout the year. During my employment, the United States government passed a number of regulations which forbade universities and colleges from compensating their employees based on the number of students they enrolled each year. This is where I saw an issue with the PRIDE meeting. Not only did DeVry pay for employees to travel to PRIDE, they also gave them monetary gifts of cash, among other gifts, as a reward for achieving PRIDE recognition. As I understood the federal rules, the For-Profit school could not reward admissions advisors based on sales performance.

A final piece of anecdotal insight into the practices of management at DeVry has to do with management training of leadership. I mentioned before that I took the position with DeVry as an Admissions Advisor with the assumption that I was helping students throughout the process of starting school. During one of our monthly sales meetings, Paul Weber told the entire admissions team that the company had invested quite a large sum of money into training the Directors and Assistant Directors of Admissions on SPIN selling. SPIN selling is a book by Neil Rackham, but also can be conducted in seminar format. In a nutshell, the entire DeVry Online admissions team was now going to be taught how to SPIN sell prospective students into making a decision to apply and start school at DeVry. The recruiter was to “find the pain” and strongly emphasize the immediate need to enroll. For example, if a student had debt and were concerned whether they could afford to attend school we would “spin them” by asking them “...well how can you afford NOT to go”. The goal was to paint a picture that going to school now was the only way to stop their debt in the future. SPIN selling was about ignoring the concerns about a student’s reservations, identifying what was their pain in life, and showing how enrolling in school was the only way around to cure that pain. In my mind, it was no longer about helping students as it was about selling them why DeVry was the right choice for them. Sales had trumped advising in my mind.

In closing, this letter was not meant to devalue the role in which DeVry University plays in higher education. I gained significant professional experience as an employee of DeVry University Online. However, I found many of their business practices to be unscrupulous for the reasons I outlined in this letter. By sharing this with you today, I hope that I am able to aid in your efforts to clean up the landscape of higher education.

Best Regards,

Jason A. Lane