

New Chairs and Deans:

How to Succeed as an Academic Leader



MAGNA REPORT

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Introduction

Moving into an academic leadership position—either as a department chair or a dean of a school—can, at times, feel overwhelming.

You might even be wondering how your institution could give you a position with so much responsibility and with so little training.

You have so many questions: How do I run a productive academic meeting? How do I manage faculty I used to be a peer of? Am I a competent leader? How will I handle the increased workload?

All of these issues can lead to unnecessary stress as you make the transition to a leadership role. We hope this report can answer some of these questions for you as you embark on your new career.

The articles chosen were originally published in the *Academic Leader* newsletter. This publication examines current trends, challenges, and best practices that help to advance teaching, scholarship, and service on hundreds of campuses across the country.

We won't be able to answer all of your questions, but we hope this report will create a solid starting point and make the transition easier.



A Purposeful Approach to Chair Transition

By Rob Kelly

Given the rate of department chair turnover and the skills and knowledge required to do these jobs well, it makes sense to consider ways to smooth these transitions.

Although each department operates under its own set of conditions, there are lessons to be learned from departments that have taken a purposeful approach to leadership succession. Nancy Buffone, director of communications and special initiatives at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, did an in-depth study of one exemplary chair transition at New England University and proposed an orientation program for new chairs based in part on what she learned from this study. (See below.)

Like many institutions, New England University does not offer formal department chair training, although some members of the administration meet informally with new chairs to talk about the responsibilities and processes of the positions. However, the outgoing chairs in these cases felt obligated to help prepare the incoming chairs and had enough time to do so.

Toward the end of his third three-year term, outgoing chair “Matthew” sought nominations for his replacement. There was only one person, “Maria,” who had the support of her colleagues and was willing to take on this role.

Unlike during his transition to chair, Matthew made it a point to provide adequate time for Maria to learn from his experience and lay the groundwork for success. The following are elements of this transition that Buffone considers worth emulating:

- **Allow adequate time for the transition.**

There was a sense in the department, even during Matthew’s second term as chair, that it was time for a change. But lacking a clear successor, Matthew stayed on. Marie was selected with a full semester to prepare, with Matthew’s help. “I think a semester is a good amount of time. Much more than that would probably be too long. A semester can give an incoming chair a good understanding of personnel and budgetary deadlines that need to be met and just a sense of how things go over the course of a semester,” Buffone says.

- **Negotiate with the dean.**

Being chair is a major sacrifice and service to the department that can distract a faculty member from his or her research and teaching. Like most incoming chairs, Maria was concerned about how being a chair would affect her research, so she negotiated with the dean for a research leave in order to get some research done before becoming chair. “This really gave everybody the opportunity to make sure that the incoming chair would be as prepared as she could be,” Buffone says.

- **Meet regularly with outgoing chair.**

Although Maria had some different ideas about leadership—she planned to delegate more than Matthew had—meetings with Matthew provided essential mentoring and helped maintain continuity throughout the transition.

- **Meet important people who can help.**

As a longtime chair, Matthew was able to provide Maria with insight into how the institution operated. He introduced her to key administrators, which gave her the opportunity to speak with them about how she might change things. “It gave [Maria] the opportunity to think about a lot of the issues before she was responsible for making things happen. It really gave her a lot of opportunity to think and strategize and plan for that first day on the job,” Buffone says.

- **Meet with the faculty.**

“Before she even stepped into the chair’s role, she talked to people in the department and got a sense of what they were looking for and used it as an opportunity to share her thoughts and to lay the groundwork. The outgoing chair had been chair for a long time and had done things his way, and she was going to do things a little differently,” Buffone says.

- **Maintain transparency.**

“Current department chairs are in a unique position where they have a full understanding of what’s going on in the department, but they also have the benefit of knowing what’s going on at the school, college, and institutional levels. They’re in a position where they can look at the faculty in the department and, in light of the full scope of knowledge, say, ‘I think this person might be good.’ But that doesn’t mean that the department is going to agree with that assessment. I don’t think department chairs should be selecting their successors. I think department chairs should be looking across the department—not necessarily looking at one person as a possible heir apparent, but looking at several people and placing them in leadership roles early, which helps with transparency,” Buffone says. This enables these individuals to gauge their interest in leadership and other faculty members to see how they operate as leaders.

Leadership Enrichment for Academic Departments

The University of Massachusetts Amherst recently implemented its Leadership Enrichment for Academic Departments (LEAD) program, a series of monthly panel discussions to help chairs and heads lead their departments.

Each two-and-a-half-hour session focuses on a specific topic— Departmental Leadership: An Overview, Budgets and Financial Planning, Survival Tools for Department Leaders, Personnel Issues, Faculty Development, Academic Planning and Development, and Planning for the Future—and features up to three panelists each.

“When we talk about budgets, I make sure our academic affairs budget officer is in the room ... Part of what I’m trying to do with the program is to make sure that the department chairs know the people who are available on campus to help them. They are meeting these people and know that they have resources all over campus,” says Nancy Buffone, director of communications and special initiatives in the provost’s office.

Another important element of LEAD is peer mentoring. The sessions provide time for chairs to discuss the panel topics among themselves.

Currently, these sessions are open to new department leaders, but Buffone is considering programming for emerging leaders as well. “I think that opening up programs like this to a broader audience is a good idea. How we do that is a bigger question, because I think there would be different questions and different approaches for emerging leaders as opposed to the department chairs,” Buffone says.

In addition to the formal leadership development from programs such as LEAD, Buffone recommends identifying potential leaders by inviting interested faculty members to serve in departmental leadership roles.

“I think that department chairs can provide opportunities for faculty to serve in leadership roles within their departments even if they’re not thinking, ‘I want to be chair in three years.’ If a department chair sees that someone might have some of those skills and traits that would make for a successful chair, I’d really like to see our current chairs encouraging that and helping them by having them serve as assistant chairs, having them run search committees, and having them take on other leadership roles so that they can get a taste of what it means to be in a leadership role and whether or not they like it, but also so the department can see [whether they have leadership abilities],” Buffone says.

This article originally appeared in the newsletter *Academic Leader* 24.12 (2008): 2-3.

Support for New Chairs: Advice for Chairs and Deans

By Rob Kelly

Catherine Ludlum Foos and Margaret Thomas Evans became department chairs at Indiana University East at the same time. They found out in April and took their positions in August with little formal preparation—a fairly common experience in higher education.

Foos, chair of the department of arts and culture, had been teaching 100- and 200-level courses exclusively and welcomed the intellectual challenge and variety of the chair role. Evans, chair of the English department, had been director of the honors program for a couple of years and missed the leadership role when she stepped down before a sabbatical.

In an interview with *Academic Leader*, these two chairs shared what has helped them in their first two years as chair and offered advice to aspiring chairs and those who supervise chairs.

- **Develop a personal board of advisors.**

Evans participated in a yearlong leadership forum that met once a month, and one of the pieces of advice that she had implemented from this experience was the development of a personal board of advisors—a combination of trusted colleagues from inside or outside the institution. “I happen to be located in the same building as the math chair. I see him more than the other chairs in my own school, so he and I have worked together and have had a lot of conversations. I know people at other similar institutions who are department chairs, and I have spent time connecting with them and learning about what they do and how they handle situations. It’s been really helpful,” Evans says.

Build relationships with faculty members and understand yourself as a leader.

- **Don’t get bogged down in logistics.**

The chair’s role demands the ability to take care of logistical tasks such as budgeting and scheduling. But focusing exclusively on logistics is a mistake. “Logistics are only going to get you so far,” Foos says. You also need to build relationships with faculty members and understand yourself as a leader.

- **Meet with faculty one-on-one.**

“One of the things we both tried to do was spend time one-on-one with each faculty member for an open, honest dialogue,” Evans says.

When making the transition from regular faculty member to chair, you need to be careful about how your personal relationships with individual faculty members are perceived. It’s really difficult to make the transition from being a person’s friend to being a person’s chair “because you can’t hang out as much as you used to,” Evans says. “It changes the nature of the relationship.

Maybe in a group setting it's OK to go out; you can be sociable, but you really can't go out after work for a drink because there needs to be a certain degree of separation."

- **Get to know other chairs.**

"I think it's important to establish relationships with other chairs if those relationships aren't automatically built into the way the institution does business," Foos says. If there are not regularly scheduled meetings of chairs from across campus, seek ways to get to know chairs outside your immediate surroundings.

- **Meet with the dean.**

Chairs in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences meet regularly as a group with their dean each week throughout the academic year and every other week in the summer. "That to me has been one of the most useful things that the dean could do for us. We talk about things coming to the dean from the upper administration that we might be called on to be involved with," Evans says. "I also think the dean needs to have a very open-door policy. You have to be able to go to your dean to talk about what's happening or to seek advice."

- **Go to conferences.**

Conferences are great for getting insights from others who are facing or have faced situations similar to your own. "You don't know what you get from a conference until you encounter a situation and you go back to what you learned and really put those ideas into practice," Evans says.

- **Deans, provide a resource.**

"One of the first things our dean did was give us copies of *Time Management for Department Chairs* [by Christian Hansen (Jossey-Bass, 2011)]. I'm not recommending that book specifically, but whenever you have a new chair stepping up, ask yourself, 'What one book could I give this person that would really be valuable?' And simply say, 'Here's a resource to start with.' There are plenty of books out there, and I think deans should choose one they're familiar with and can relate to," Foos says.

- **Professional development should be ongoing.**

While experience helps chairs become better leaders, there are always new skills to learn and refine, so opportunities for continued professional development should be sought by chairs and encouraged by deans.

This article originally appeared in the newsletter [Academic Leader](#) 30.09 (2014): 8.

Why New Department Chairs Need Coaching

By Russ Olwell, PhD

You want me to do what?

For faculty, being asked to step in and consider becoming a chair does not always follow a smooth or particularly well-thought-out process. The request might come during a phone call to an associate dean asking if she needs help while she is out of town for a funeral, or at lunch with a current chair. Most faculty, who have no management or supervisory training, need real support to make this transition, but today's "lean and mean" university structure provides relatively few resources to help them.

Traditionally, new department heads and administrators were hired and then left to sink or swim. Drawn from the ranks of faculty, many new chairs have virtually no training or resources to draw on in their new role. And as the work of chairs has moved beyond schedules and payroll, the new demands of assessments, program reviews, strategic planning, and mentoring make the job a moving target.

Academics have begun to use coaches to increase job performance, focus on personal goals, or achieve efficiency and job satisfaction.

In addition, the institutions in which new chairs and administrators find themselves have changed. Deans, associate deans, and other administrators have crushing demands on their time, including development, grant-writing, and accreditation, leaving less time for answering questions from department chairs, never mind mentoring them.

New chairs can also instantly become cut off from their former colleagues. With few new friends in the administration and faculty members who may believe they have "gone over to the dark side," new chairs may not have anyone they can trust to run ideas past or to process problems with.

These institutional factors lead us to suggest that new chairs require intensive, one-on-one coaching from someone outside the university chain of command in order to survive and thrive. This kind of help should be part of the new chair and administrator "startup package." Universities that have used these programs report high satisfaction, especially as a means of helping administrators work better to create a more equitable work environment.

What a coach can do

Coaches do not have a high profile in the academy. When one thinks of coaching, one often thinks of sports: a figure with a whistle around his neck, barking out orders from the sidelines.

However, academics have begun to use coaches to increase job performance, focus on personal goals, or achieve efficiency and job satisfaction.

As a metaphor, coaching has some advantages over mentoring. Unfortunately, while mentoring is valuable in areas such as education and human services, in the academy as a whole it can be taken as a sign of weakness. New faculty might be seen to need mentoring because they are poorly prepared to take on new roles. Women and members of minority groups may not want to be the target of mentoring “help,” as it can make them look as though they cannot cope on their own.

Coaching does not have this baggage. It has some positive association with sports, since athletes, no matter how accomplished, still seek good coaching. In fact, as athletes rise in status, they need coaching more, as each small increment of improvement yields more powerful results. The image of coaching does not mean that the person being coached is weak or lacks training. Coaching is a future-oriented activity, one that does not dwell on past performance except to improve future possibilities.

Coaches can aid in processing problems

Most coaches specialize in nondirective discussions with clients. This means that clients lay out their goals and values early in the relationship and refer back to them throughout the process. Over time, coaches can zero in on patterns and themes in discussions and can point out when their clients are getting lost in a maze of their own thoughts.

Coaches do not give people answers but focus on getting clients to think through their options and ideas. Coaching focuses on getting clients to the next steps that can initiate action. Having several options in a situation can help leaders avoid feeling trapped and can keep department chairs from “bunkering” in their office, locking the door and avoiding faculty, staff, and students.

Unlike therapists, coaches do not spend an endless amount of time processing issues with clients. Instead, the focus is on generating next steps, some actions that could make a difference today, and on creating a leadership agenda. This kind of help is exactly what many department chairs and academic leaders desperately need. There are too many people in these positions who have good intentions and ideas but little to show for them.

Making the job of department chair flow

In too many places, academic administration has simply become miserable. Budget cuts, layoffs, morale problems, unhappy students, faculty tantrums—all of these take their toll over time. Many chairs and other administrators are simply looking to survive, not to thrive.

When new chairs are not happy, their faculty, staff, and students are virtually guaranteed to suffer as a result. For chairs to be successful, they need their job to “flow.” As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes it, flow is a combination of challenge, interest, and skill. If chairs can confront the challenges they face with a sense of capability and can develop plans to tackle their obstacles, the job can move from overwhelming to simply challenging.

But in order to reach this state of administrative “flow,” chairs need tools, skills, and ideas. Coaching has been a promising strategy in helping new chairs and administrators find their feet, get in the game, and try to make significant changes in their workplaces. This is not to exaggerate what coaches can do—not every coach is going to be Phil Jackson, and not every client is going to become an administrative Michael Jordan. But this should not discourage efforts to improve performance through coaching. Sometimes all a new chair might need is a quick huddle and a firm “Get back in the game.”

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The Balancing Act: Managing the Chair's Role as Teacher, Scholar, and Administrator

By K. Denise Bane, PhD

I have just completed my first year as division chair. To say that it was a “learning experience” filled with “teaching moments” is putting it mildly. I had no idea what I was getting myself into! In addition to the normal duties of chair, my division was moving to a new building, the college was working on its accreditation self-study, we began collective bargaining, we added two new members to the division, we conducted a search for an additional new member, and I taught a fully online course for the first time.

How did I do it all? I'd like to say that I have learned the secret to balancing the teacher, scholar, and administrator roles of my position. I'd like to say that, but it simply is not true. I found, in this first year, that I spent almost all of my time on the “administrator” role. Teaching and scholarship came in a very distant second and third. I'd like to share my thoughts about what I wish I had done and what I plan to do in the future.

Just say “no”

Easier than it sounds, especially when the person asking is a dean, vice president, or president, but sometimes the best thing you can do for yourself and your division is to say “no” to new commitments so that you can focus on the ones you have already made.

Top five

I have learned that I tend to work better when I have a “to do” list; however, I never get through all the items on the list because of meetings, classes, interruptions, and so on. So I have started creating a list of the five most important things that I want to accomplish each day. I feel a much greater sense of accomplishment at the end of the day, and it forces me to prioritize.

Get help

I have been extremely fortunate to be blessed with a secretary sent from the heavens! She has access to my Outlook calendar, and she prints a copy of my schedule each morning and leaves it on my desk. She is also able to schedule appointments for me. She answers my phone when I am out and sends me an email summary of any calls that I have missed. I'm not sure that I would be able to be as effective without her. Not everyone has a terrific secretary, but try to establish a good working relationship with whomever you have.

Delegate

This goes hand-in-hand with having a terrific secretary. Being division chair does not mean that you have to do everything yourself. This is a particularly hard lesson to learn for those of us who are perfectionists and control freaks! What can you ask others to do? In our division, each disci-

pline has a coordinator. I have asked my secretary to reroute all discipline-specific issues to the appropriate coordinator. This frees me up to deal with those issues that truly affect the entire division. Along these same lines, the chair does not have to be the division representative at every meeting. Ask for volunteers among your division colleagues.

Schedule time for scholarship

This is one of those tips that I plan to start implementing next year. I am going to schedule time to write and conduct research. I will actually schedule this time in Outlook. The “trick” is to keep the commitment to myself the same way I would keep it to others. That means that if I say that I will devote 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. each day to scholarship, I need to hold that time sacred. If someone asks to meet during that time, I can say I already have an appointment (rather than “that’s my writing time”). I know that the only way this will work will be to spend this time outside my office, not in it. If I try to work in my office I will inevitably be interrupted.

Revise your teaching

This will be another challenge for me. I simply do not have the same amount of time to devote to my classes that I had in the past. So how can I maintain my integrity in the classroom while maintaining my sanity? First, I will take a course release rather than a course overload as compensation for my work as chair. More money is not as valuable as more time. I will examine the assignments I require so that students are getting the same quality of education but are not generating the same quantity of assignments to be graded. I will consider group projects, oral presentations, and different exam formats. I will try not to schedule brand-new preps for the spring semester, so that I have the summer to prepare for new material.

Schedule “artist’s dates”

This idea comes from *The Artist’s Way*, by Julia Cameron, one of the oft-cited self-help gurus. It truly is important to schedule time for yourself, by yourself, each week. She calls this spending time with your inner “artist.” This is separate from the time you spend on scholarship, teaching, and administrative duties. Do something fun, something that you find interesting. Visit a museum, go for a walk in the park, take a drawing class, practice the violin—it doesn’t matter. Just do something that takes you away from your work and is focused entirely on you. Personally, I practice my ukulele! Research on both stress management and creativity suggest that this time away from work can bring positive results including stress reduction, increased creativity, and increased productivity when you do return to work.

Recognize your limits

Often you have so much on your plate that something is going to fall off. If you have made too many commitments, you can either continue to disappoint yourself and others or you can admit that you took on too much and give up something.

Develop systems

According to another self-help guru, Susan Silver (*Organized to Be Your Best!*), a system is merely tools plus habits. There are several great time management tips, techniques, and tools out there, but they will all be wasted if you do not actually use them regularly. The key is to try something

new, see if it seems like it would work for you, and then make a conscious effort to use that new tool regularly until it becomes a habit. Once you develop new habits, you are on the way to creating a more balanced life.

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Six Steps to a Healthy Department

By Rob Kelly

Ongoing problems within a department can have profound consequences, including difficulty in recruiting and retaining faculty and students, loss of funding, and even program termination. While the health of a department cannot be the responsibility of a single person, the department chair plays a pivotal role in getting departments out of trouble and maintaining a healthy, positive direction.

Marjorie Chan, professor of geology and geophysics at the University of Utah, has seen her share of thriving to struggling departments from multiple disciplines during her seven years as department chair. She reviewed and worked with other departments that she considers dysfunctional—where faculty members were angry at and avoided each other and often skipped department meetings. “I was appalled that departments were operating that way and the fact that faculty could get away with it was astounding to me.”

This experience has given her some useful insights into managing the health of academic departments. She offers the following advice to department chairs:

- **Set strategic goals.**

When faculty members become chairs because it’s their turn, they often come in as caretakers rather than visionary leaders, making it unlikely that the department will make significant progress. “It’s very important that the chair has a vision that is shared with the entire faculty. You

Being a visionary leader means acknowledging problems and setting specific goals and objectives in an open manner.

have to prioritize and focus on a couple of things that you want to accomplish as chair. That will help set you on a path,” Chan says.

Being a visionary leader means acknowledging problems and setting specific goals and objectives in an open manner. “In most departments, it helps to lead by team-building consensus as opposed to a dictatorial approach,” Chan says.

Some decisions a chair makes are inevitably unpopular but necessary. Having open communication about decisions helps faculty understand how the decision was made. They may not agree with the outcome, but they should feel that the process was fair.

- **Encourage faculty contributions.**

“It is extremely valuable to acknowledge the participation of the faculty. Thanking them is a huge part of having a strong department because a lot of times there’s no budget for monetary rewards. But the one thing that we really appreciate and look for is just somebody acknowledging and thanking us for what we did. A lot of [faculty members] go above and beyond the call of duty, and if those efforts are just ignored, faculty members might say [to themselves], ‘Why

should I keep doing this? Nobody cares what I'm doing.' And that's when I think people start going off in their own directions," Chan says.

- **Build on individual faculty members' strengths and minimize their weaknesses.**

Each faculty member has a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. Rather than one size fits all, it's better to consider how each person can contribute in ways that provide the most benefit to the department. "Take time to pay attention to what is going on, and try to be sensitive to how to approach people on their own level. Not everybody is going to be a star who hits the ball out of the park each time. You still need people on the team who can get the base hit or people who can play multiple positions even though they're not the star. Realizing what people's strengths and weaknesses are and trying to maximize those strengths and minimize those weaknesses will be a positive move forward that builds community," Chan says.

Individuals' strengths and interests can change over time, so it may be necessary to renegotiate expectations. Try to accommodate these individual faculty differences so that evaluation of teaching, scholarship, and service are relevant to what each faculty member contributes to the department. "Often in the academic setting, we just expect everybody to excel in all three of those [realms], and it's just not realistic. I think some of the problems develop because there isn't a lot of flexibility in our system, and it's difficult for faculty members to excel at it all," Chan says.

It's also important to pay close attention to the strengths and weaknesses of new faculty because, as Chan says, "Faculty appointments are some of the most important decisions we make. We have to ask ourselves, 'Is this faculty candidate the kind of person who is going to be an excellent team player, or is he or she going to be the kind of person who is going to be a star in only one academic category? Will this person polarize the department?'"

- **Work closely with alumni, friends, and advisory boards.**

Alumni are a valuable asset to a department, and they need to be kept abreast of what is happening in the department through visits, newsletters and annual reports. "When alumni feel positively about the department, they want to give back, and then good things happen," Chan says. "If the department ignores its constituency and lacks communication with alumni, it will be much more difficult to get support to move the department forward."

Because they are familiar with the department and yet are outside of it, advisory boards can provide valuable advice and insights. They can also help build endowments and address particular projects or goals.

- **Engage students.**

Current students are also a source of department vitality. Chan recommends using the student workforce to mutual advantage. "An engaged student body is really the lifeblood of the department," Chan says. "We wouldn't have a department without students. If you can figure out a way to mobilize and engage the students, that can help turn a department around. When the students are involved, they learn responsibility and feel that what they're doing is a contribution

to the department. They feel invested in the department and its goals, and that can help move things forward.”

- **Look beyond the department.**

Chan recommends that departments take an outward and future-oriented view—focusing on where a department and its impact on the community ought to be and how to get there. Different components might include how to raise visibility, extend outreach, bring in more students, and build community. Bringing in guest lecturers, alumni, or others can provide new and different perspectives on research and teaching methods. Strong outside support from alumni and friends can help raise the stature of the department in the eyes of the administration.

Collectively, all these points can help build a strong, healthy department that is vibrant and thriving. A positive work environment builds on itself and will perpetuate long-lasting returns that will help ensure a solid departmental future.

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Temporary Insanity: Deciding to Be a Dean

By Christopher J. Zappe, PhD, and Eugenia P. Gerdes, PhD

Little girls and boys do not dream of becoming academic deans when they grow up. And very few college graduates pursue advanced degrees in order to become deans. Instead, a few perfectly good professors—after obtaining doctorates and spending years refining their disciplinary expertise and skills in teaching and scholarship—deviate onto the administrative pathway for reasons incomprehensible to most of their faculty colleagues.

The reasons underlying the transitions into and out of the deanship were the topic of our presentation at the January 2008 American Congress of Academic Deans (ACAD) meeting. Although we relied heavily on published surveys, we also considered our own experience as well as data that Dean Gerdes had collected; and we collected further data from our ACAD audience. We are coming to see the decision to be a dean as one that is not completely rational, given the stresses of the job, the steep learning curve, and the uncertainties about how long one will last in the position. We comment on those factors below and then address the question we hear all too often: “Why would anyone want to be dean?”

One of us, upon moving from associate dean to acting dean, received a note from a senior faculty leader, stating simply, “But I liked you!” Faculty members joked that we had crossed over to the “dark side”—yet deans do not really have a side as much as straddling the divide between the professoriate of teacher-scholars and the administrative culture. In their 2002 book based on the National Study of Academic Deans, *College Deans: Leading from Within*, Wolverton and Gmelch reported that most deans maintain a faculty identity while adding an administrative identity, with 25 percent intending to return to the faculty. In his 2007 book, *The Essential Academic Dean*, Jeffrey Buller describes deans as leading from the middle: advocate for and supervisor of faculty while simultaneously agent of the upper administration and representing it to faculty. And, we would add, hoping that both cultures accept your allegiance as genuine.

Disciplinary expertise provides little preparation for this delicate balancing act; nor do deans have much preparation for the mundane tasks of administration. We each found that we were somewhat unprepared as new deans—in spite of previous experience as associate deans—for such responsibilities as managing millions of dollars of operating and capital budgets, setting priorities for funding over all departments and programs, coordinating national searches for scores of new faculty members each year, and assuring fair and legal evaluation of scores of other faculty members each year. The necessity of on-the-job development of hugely consequential skills in full view of one’s faculty and superiors adds to the crush of the workload itself.

At our ACAD session, 54 deans (vpaa/provosts, deans, associate and assistant deans) completed a survey before our presentation; 41 percent expect or hope to be faculty members again at some point, and another 39 percent think it is possible. When asked what might cause them to quit, the most common answer was irreconcilable differences with their superior or senior administrators, followed by loss of effectiveness and no longer meeting personal goals.

On average, they rated their current jobs between “moderately” and “very” stressful, citing these major stressors: their superior or other senior administrators, personnel problems or conflict, and workload/time pressure. A smaller group of liberal arts deans and vpaa/provosts who had already left administration gave similar answers to Dean Gerdes in an earlier survey. On average, those 19 ex-chief academic officers described the jobs they left as “very” stressful. The most common sources of stress were relationships with their superior (usually the president), relationships with faculty, and mediating conflict.

They gave one or more of these three reasons for stepping down: the desire to finish this phase of their careers for personal or professional reasons; difficulties reconciling their values and priorities with those of their superior; or stress or exhaustion. Although some moved happily out of these jobs, many expressed regret that they had faced circumstances that made it impossible to continue. What draws academics to these difficult, stressful jobs?

Do some teacher-scholars choose to serve in administrative roles to advance their careers? Do they move from faculty positions to gain financially? Or do they leave faculty roles to seek personal growth? While these are some of the reasons

They chose to become deans because they wanted to make meaningful contributions to the academic institutions they serve.

given by faculty for deciding to serve in academic administration, only a handful of the deans in our ACAD audience told us they became administrators for the self-interested reasons of career advancement or financial gain. In fact, they most often chose to become deans because they wanted to make meaningful contributions to the academic institutions they serve. Specifically, a majority of our

ACAD deans gave such reasons, including the following:

- Create needed change in the institution’s academic programs
- Help resolve institutional problems
- Shape institutional direction and climate
- Deepen collaborations and interactions among personnel across the institution
- Fill a leadership void
- Promote the development of faculty or students

Even though many of these individuals chose to pursue an administrative role to serve as agents of change within their institutions, it is important to add that these deans emphasized their own leadership rather than the relationship with their superiors that played such a large role in their potential reasons for leaving their administrative positions.

It is also interesting to note that a majority of the deans we surveyed told us that they left the faculty because they wanted to grow as leaders and administrators. Many expected that the deanship would afford them opportunities to encounter new challenges, broaden their understanding of higher education and their own particular institutions, exercise creativity, extend their problem-solving abilities, and engage in activities they found fulfilling.

One naturally wonders whether faculty members formulate long-term plans to move into academic administration. Based on the data we collected at the ACAD Annual Meeting, we found that more than one-third of all deans inadvertently “decided” to pursue a deanship due to unexpected circumstances, or because they were asked to apply by another academic administrator or encouraged to do so by their faculty colleagues. This finding is consistent with our own experiences; in fact, each of us was encouraged by another administrator and at least one faculty colleague to pursue service in academic leadership roles. Interestingly, despite having previously served as department chairs or directors of academic programs, a sizable minority of the deans we surveyed indicated that their movement from faculty roles was essentially *unplanned*.

In short, our research reveals that the choice to become a dean is typically not the result of a deliberate planning process undertaken by an accomplished teacher and scholar to advance his or her own career. Furthermore, we have found that most of those who choose to leave the professoriate do so for the sake of their institutions. Some professors may question the rationality of their colleagues who choose to become administrators; and the stress and lack of control over one’s longevity as a dean do make entering the academic administration appear irrational if self-interest is the criterion. However, we have been heartened to learn that many deans selflessly choose to take the road less traveled in order to make important contributions to their institutions.

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Three Things You Need as a New Dean

Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti, MS

My first weeks as a dean were exciting, confusing, and a bit intimidating, as I imagine most people's are. As the dean and director of education at a small, vocationally oriented college, I knew I could draw on my experiences to help me succeed in the job. Deciding what sort of dean I was destined to be, however, was more challenging.

Thinking back about deans I had known in the past—in various schools and departments, at a range of college and university sizes and with differing governance models—I quickly constructed a list of behaviors that worked well and those that did not. Some of these lessons can be distilled down into three things you need to equip yourself with in your first days as the new dean:

1. A lunch bag

I once knew a dean who was a very gifted administrator. He was smart, kind, and willing to deal with a large staff that ranged from experienced faculty to professional administrators to a wide variety of support professionals.

However, this dean had a problem. Often, he would be called on to adjudicate the competing needs of faculty and administration, and he would listen to both sides of an issue. Then, he would grab his coat and go off to lunch with his friends and peers from the faculty. There, the faculty members had ample time in the collegial environment of the faculty dining room to make their case and to draw on years of friendship to explain why decisions should favor them. Even the sight of this kindly dean trooping off to lunch with his friends was damaging to the office environment.

This is why I suggest every new dean use that first paycheck to buy a snazzy new lunch bag and learn to eat alone. Is it a bad idea to socialize with one's faculty friends over a meal? Of course not; I have done so myself. But, especially in those first few months, it is important that the new dean establish zones of objectivity—times when the “dean hat” is on and times when it is not. There will be plenty of time for regular lunches with your friends when you step down from the deanship and perhaps return to the ranks of the faculty.

2. A red pen

One of the best vice presidents I ever knew never met a policy he wasn't willing to edit, especially if the policy was impeding progress or had outlived its usefulness. The most impressive example was his groundbreaking work in...coffee cups.

In our division, the previous leader had established a firm “no food or drink at the desks” policy for the entire office. It made sense. Ours was a public-facing division that presented a first impression of the university to visitors, and allowing the office to look like a lunch room set the wrong tone. Unfortunately, this had the tendency to drive everyone to the break room several times a day, whenever the urge for food or drink struck. Even though most employees were conscientious about their time, this still meant that many people spent a substantial part

of their day going in and out of the basement break room, holding informal meetings there and conducting university business in a less-than-optimum environment.

If I remember no other lessons from this vice president (and there were many to remember), I will always recall the way he rescinded that policy immediately upon taking office. “I want to do everything I can to keep you doing your job,” he said. Soon, employees were back to meeting in their offices and conducting business with the appropriate resources—including a beverage—at hand. The lesson: don’t be afraid to alter policies that no longer work, even if they have achieved the status of “tradition.”

3. A sign that says “the buck stops here”

That same VP had a personal policy that all calls to complain about something the division had done were to be routed straight to his desk. Conversely, any compliment he heard was passed directly to the staff member or members who worked on that particular project. He noted that his job was to absorb the criticism so that it didn’t impact his staff’s ability to work.

Contrast this with a dean who displayed a sign saying “the buck doesn’t even pause here.” His colleagues had given it to him as a joke gift, using a play on Harry Truman’s famous saying, to poke fun at the dean’s ability to delegate the resolution of any problem. While the joke was funny and the ability to delegate an important one, this dean had literally posted a sign reminding everyone not to bring their departmental problems to him. When you’re dean, the thorny problems are often yours; they come with the comfortable chair and the new business cards.

Of course, there are always more lessons to be learned about becoming a dean, and you will certainly learn a few of your own. Perhaps these lessons will help you decide what “parting gifts” you wish to give your successor.

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The New Dean's Toolbox

By Thomas R. McDaniel, PhD

So, you're a new dean, charged with the care and feeding of many faculty and staff (think of all the directors who have become ubiquitous in higher education institutions in recent years!) as well as large numbers of students (and their helicopter parents) now under your "control." The world you now occupy in the Groves of Academe may be a familiar one, whether you have occupied a similar position in another institution or have labored in the very same one you are expected to lead with joy and enthusiasm as you implement your new vision, new policies, and new expectations for those now in your care. Good luck with that, as Dr. Phil often says. You really can succeed, of course, but this might be a good time to review your dean's toolbox to see what instruments are there already—or might be needed—for the tasks ahead.

1. A hammer

Of course, no toolbox is complete without this most essential instrument. Your leadership position requires the ability to come down hard when quick, firm action is essential. Every dean must be able to communicate some decisions forcefully with no room for ambiguity or contrary point of view. Naturally, there will have been much lead-up, in most cases, to provide for debate and contrary arguments, but sometimes you must assert your "police role to ensure final debate

Successful "deaning" often lies in the dean's patience and discretion in using the "administrator's hammer" as a last resort.

resolution. However, as Abraham Maslow famously remarked, "If your only tool is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail." The key to successful "deaning" often lies in the dean's patience and discretion in using the "administrator's hammer" as a last resort. Do you know when, where, and on whom to use this essential tool?

2. A saw

Every dean will face decisions that result in cutting someone or some policy loose from firm moorings in the institution. These painful decisions for all concerned test the ability of the dean to be a good communicator who can articulate why the cut is necessary so that everyone understands. An arbitrary dean—who may also be viewed as a micromanager—may win in the short run, but over time the saw gets dull, and sympathy for the dean dissipates. As with the hammer, one must use the saw sparingly and only when fully justified by logic and reliable information to support one's decision. Can't afford to support a costly faculty trip that has little value for the institution? Have to let an employee go because of poor performance? Need to let a student leave your place for greener pastures where he or she might be more successful? Use the saw, and do not leave any jagged edges if you can help it.

3. Sandpaper

The first two tools can leave rough spots on the academic epidermis. Effective deans know how to administer policies and practices that soften the impact and smooth rough edges, for all concerned, of negative decisions left by hammer and saw. Yes, a dean is sometimes the institutional

police force but is also sometimes the pastor who provides wise counsel and a sympathetic ear. Are you a good listener who can hear the real message in a tirade or lament? Do you listen with what Eastern philosophers call “the third ear”? We sometimes say about teaching that “students don’t care what you know until they know that you care.” The same is true for administrators. How do you “pour oil on troubled waters”? Your ability to be a healer and one who makes the rough spots smooth is a real test of your leadership; no toolbox is complete without sandpaper.

4. A drill

“Drilling down” has been a staple of administrator jargon in recent years and addresses the need to go below the surface of an issue or problem. In the rush of daily duties, deans sometimes just need to take a deep breath and think more deeply about how to deal with a problem student, staff member, or professor. Have you done enough research? Have you talked to enough (and the right) people? Do you have alternative possibilities and options that you have not seriously considered? Get out the drill! Quick decisions and actions might make you seem like an efficient and decisive dean, but at what cost? Perhaps one more day or one more conversation will result in a better decision or action—and will be well worth your patient drilling.

5. Tape

A final item for your dean’s toolbox is a roll of strong tape. You will often encounter broken promises, unhinged personnel, disconnected policies, and practices that need mending. The administrator’s tape can help reconnect those things in your dean’s duties that badly need your skillful application of this essential tool. Are students at odds with their professors? Is a department fractured by rivalries and jealousies? Are two of your directors not on the same page when it comes to handling the disputes or disagreements of other personnel? This is the time to get out the tape and bind the broken parts! How do you do that? It may require you to use some of the other tools above—but always with the goal of unifying where there is disunity and healing where there are broken bones. Part of your role as dean is to do your best to have everyone working harmoniously toward common purposes: help where you can, counsel where you must, take firm action if that is essential to put things back together the way they need to be for the health and wholeness of the enterprise you lead.

There are other tools for your toolbox, of course, and you might consider what else you might want to have ready as you begin dealing with the exciting challenges of a new deanship. Our Leadership in Higher Education Conference in Atlanta on October 6–8, 2016, will be another opportunity to supply your toolbox with useful implements of the trade, and I look forward to sessions to help new deans to consider various strategies for success. Hope to see you there!

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Associate/Assistant Deans: Leading from the Middle

By Rob Kelly

There are many varieties of associate and assistant dean positions. Some specialize in a single area such as assessment or faculty development. Others have broader duties (i.e., associate dean of academic affairs). Those who serve in these roles do so for a variety of reasons. Some become associate dean to determine if a career in administration is a good fit. Some view the role as a part of a progression to higher administrative positions. Some serve temporarily with the intent of returning to a faculty position. And some view it as a long-term position.

While serving as a department chair, as a center director, or in some other faculty leadership role can help develop the necessary skills to succeed as associate dean, there are some important differences. In an interview with *Academic Leader*, James M. Sloat, assistant dean of faculty for academic development at Colby College, talked about the role of associate dean and the important transitions into and out of these positions.

Familiar but different

One of the challenges of becoming an associate dean is managing the transition from being a faculty member to an administrator. “Associate deans and assistant deans often feel more profoundly in between that they have previously,” Sloat says.

Faculty leaders often feel “in between” the faculty and the administration; however, they know departmental colleagues well and understand their disciplinary perspectives. As assistant or associate dean, not only is the person now on the administrative side of issues but also the faculty he or she works with are from a wide variety of disciplinary backgrounds.

If the role is temporary, this feeling of being in the middle can be a bit unsettling. “You’re really neither fish nor fowl. You’re not really in the faculty because you’ve jumped over into administration, but you’re also not really the administration because in many cases people are in these roles on a rotating basis,” Sloat says.

A broader perspective

Serving as an assistant or associate dean opens up one’s perspective beyond that of a single department. “To me it’s incredibly fascinating work because one gets to see the institution as a whole. Over the years I’ve had the great opportunity to work with colleagues from the entire college—faculty in all departments and administrative colleagues are in admissions, development, student life, and athletics. There’s great opportunity for contributing to institutional transformation over time. And these roles are more operational than the

Serving as an assistant or associate dean opens up one’s perspective beyond that of a single department.

dean's role. Deans have bigger questions and don't have the time to get down into the operational details of how a program will run. Associate deans have more of an opportunity to do that, which for long-term institutional change is a great position to be in," Sloat says.

Managing transitions

Sloat offers the following advice for managing the transitions into and out of associate and assistant dean positions:

- **Make the full jump into administration.**

"When one transitions in and tries to hold on to one's faculty identity, one may see oneself as the representative of the faculty to the administration, but that is not the role of the associate dean. The associate dean is not the replacement for the faculty senate or for the faculty executive committee, who are in a sense the advocates on behalf of the faculty. The associate dean works for the dean. The associate dean now has a boss in a way that when you're department chair you don't really think of yourself as having a boss even though there is a hierarchy. I think the people who make this transition most successfully very quickly own the magnitude of the jump and own the shift in position responsibility. They recognize that they're now on the administrative side of that line, and so if the dean says, 'Go and do this,' my job is to go and do this," Sloat says.

However, this does not mean that the associate dean ceases to think like a faculty member and bring that perspective to the dean. "As I raise observations informed by my time as a faculty member, I'm doing so in the service of the dean. And so at the end of the conversation if the dean says, 'I hear what you're saying, but we need to go with this anyway,' then I have my marching orders and that's what I need to do. That doesn't mean that I need to go and attempt to bludgeon my faculty colleagues. I don't think many people have found that to be a successful approach, but it does mean that I'm not torn when it comes to doing my job. I'm the associate dean. I'm the dean's person to help and support the dean in a way that will advance the interests of the college," Sloat says.

- **Be prepared for fast-paced, high-volume work.**

"Obviously faculty members work incredibly hard. They're incredibly productive. I'm so far from being somebody who imagines that faculty have easy lives. They work very hard. But they often are working very hard in ways that they can control and regulate. They're teaching a course that they chose to teach. They're engaged in scholarship of their choosing. They make the decisions that shape the kind of work that they do and when they're going to do it. When you make the jump over to being an associate dean you cede that control. I work on many different projects, and I don't necessarily control when things come up that need responses. As someone who makes that transition it's helpful to realize that you're going to work on lots of different things, and you're going to have to turn things around fairly quickly. The good news is that people who are usually identified for these kinds of roles have already demonstrated an ability to turn things around," Sloat says.

- **Maintain ties to your discipline.**

"For the faculty member who knows that he or she wants to go back to the faculty, my advice in

terms of transition is make sure you keep some ties to your discipline. Three years is not a long time but long enough that if you don't find a way to keep current with the scholarship in your field, when you come back you'll lose a lot of time and you'll feel a bit at sea if you don't find a way to keep in touch. Often associate deans don't have lots of surplus time to read all the journals that are coming out, but often it's possible to read the abstracts. Often it's possible to attend the national meeting of one's discipline if one is not able to go to all the subfield or regional meetings in the field. I think that if you know you're going to back into faculty role, you've got to keep that identity alive. You may not have the chance to do a whole lot of writing while you're in the administrative post, but keeping in touch is really helpful," Sloat says.

- **Do not burn bridges.**

"If you know you're going back to the faculty be careful not burn bridges with the administrative decisions you make. You have a job to do and sometimes the decisions you make will not be favorable to your own department, but it's best to do that as gently and as kindly as one can and to acknowledge when talking with one's colleagues in a department that your role is different: 'We have different constraints that I have to live with and work with, and I was able to make sure that our department's position was clearly understood in the decision-making process.' I think that helps your colleagues back home to know that you were at least able to make that case. There will be some hurt feelings from time to time. But looking to cultivate that relationship with one's home department, continue to meet with and spend time with one's colleagues is a useful thing," Sloat says.

- **Build a new network.**

If you're considering further administrative work, it's important to build a new network. "We all as academics have networks of colleagues often stretching back to our years in graduate school, people who are doing the kind of work we do, people with whom we collaborate. Those networks are really important and should continue to be cultivated. But if you're thinking about an administrative post there's a whole new network to explore. Finding other associate deans is incredibly helpful. Building relationships at one's institution with administrators in other divisions is a helpful, important thing to do. The American Conference of Academic Deans (ACAD) is a wonderful organization. It has a great Listserv that gives you the ability to reach out to other people who are in dean and associate dean kinds of roles," Sloat says.

Building a network also entails going to conferences such as the Association of American Colleges & Universities and ACAD. "That's part of making that jump into administration. You start to go to different conferences, you join different Listservs, read different publications, and pay attention to different kinds of things in ways that give you that broader perspective and help you make an informed decision about whether that's the direction that you want to go," Sloat says.

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Five Newbie Mistakes Made by Academic Leaders

By Jeffrey L. Buller, PhD

The first six months (or even year) of a position is often called an academic leader's "honeymoon period." People are more likely to overlook an administrator's mistakes and to cut the person a little bit of slack about taking the institution or program in a new direction. That's a good thing, because new academic leaders frequently get in their own way by committing five mistakes due to inexperience—at times bringing their honeymoon period to a sudden, inglorious close. Although these five newbie mistakes are most common among academic leaders who are brought in from the outside, a few of them are also committed by those who are new to their jobs within the same institution.

Fixating on your former institution

New academic leaders often develop a bad habit during their interviews: Because candidates are asked question after question about what they've done at their current institutions, they tend to keep talking about that college or university even after they've been hired by another school. While the academic leader may think that "the way we did things back at the old place" or sharing memories of his or her happy times there provides evidence of experience and administrative success, those recollections soon wear thin to those who work at the new school. They come across as indictments that members of the faculty and administration were more creative there or that the academic leader's heart still belongs there.

Effective academic leaders stop talking about their old institutions the moment they arrive for a new job. Not to put it too bluntly, but no one cares anymore what you did there or what made that institution successful. They want you to focus on the current institution and program and to stop talking about where you came from.

Not giving up your old job

First-time deans sometimes want to keep acting as though they are still chairs of their former departments. First-time provosts sometimes act as though they are still deans of their former colleges. And first-time presidents sometimes try to micromanage academic affairs, development, community relations, or whichever part of the institution was under their former supervision. Even worse is when the new academic leader tells the person who is actually in that position, "I know what I'm talking about. I once did your job." The impression that is left is that the new academic leader doesn't really comprehend the full complexity of his or her current job and so keeps trying to do the old one. Newbie academic leaders need to remember that they left that position for a reason. They need to focus on what the challenges are now and let the person who holds your former position apply his or her own creativity to those challenges.

Launching unnecessary new initiatives

New academic leaders want to make a difference in their jobs. They want to solve problems that they've perceived and take advantage of opportunities that they've identified. In and of itself, this desire to take effective action is commendable. But what new academic leaders sometimes forget is that people at the new institution already have full-time jobs. In order to do something new, they either have to let go of a responsibility they already have or perform that task with less time and attention to detail.

Many initiatives from new academic leaders simply distract people from their real work without accomplishing anything of lasting value

Too many initiatives from new academic leaders simply distract people from their real work without accomplishing anything of real or lasting value for the institution. The perception then arises that the new academic leader is more interested in building his or her own résumé than in helping those at the institution do their own jobs better. People become cynical about the new strategic plan

that's supposed to take the institution "to the next level of greatness" because that was the unfulfilled promise about the last strategic plan. Failure to ask themselves whether a new initiative is truly worth the time and resources that will have to be assigned to it (and therefore redirected from somewhere else) is a common newbie mistake.

Hiring your friends

If talking about your previous institution quickly wears thin with colleagues at your new job, that problem becomes even worse when you start hiring your friends from there. It's a natural tendency to want to work with people you can trust who have already proven their abilities. You'll be convinced that they will be able to hit the ground running and make much faster progress than someone would if you have to get to know that person and explain your priorities and operating style. But as tempting as these thoughts may be, they should be resisted at all costs. Few things undermine a new leader's credibility faster than the perception of cronyism.

Talking too much about your previous institution gives the impression that you don't respect those who were already working at your new institution; hiring former colleagues proves it. If you're absolutely convinced that someone you know from your old job is a good fit for your new institution, begin a bona fide search (that you don't chair yourself) and encourage that person to apply. If you start hiring your friends, particularly without conducting a legitimate search, your honeymoon period is likely to be very short indeed.

Overpromising your boss what can be done

Another very natural tendency during interviews is to present yourself as being able to fix all the problems your new boss views as most significant and achieve all the goals that he or she has identified as most desirable. Faculty members do this with chairs. Deans do this with provosts. And presidents do this with governing boards. The problem is, however, that you're then expected to live up to all the promises you've made. Particularly when you're new to a position and

thus don't have a track record of past successes in your current job to compensate for missing a goal or two, and you may then try to get the people who work for you to make good on the blank checks you've written. If all the schools where administrators have promised to get their units into the "top 10" internationally were actually to achieve that goal, it would have to be a very crowded top 10 indeed. The best thing to do, of course, is not to overpromise what you can deliver. But if it's already too late for that, be sure not to create additional problems by trying to force the faculty and staff in your area to fulfill promises that they knew all along were impossible and that they themselves had far too much good sense to make.

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