#1 LESSONS LEARNED AS A DEPARTMENT CHAIR

The posting below is a valuable "lessons learned" list from a former department chair, Matthew Lombard, of the Department of Broadcasting, Telecommunications and Mass Media at Temple University in Philadelphia,(lombard@temple.edu). The comments should be of interest to both regular faculty and other department chairs.

For whatever it may or may not be worth, before I end this last message as chair I want to tell you some of the things I've learned or had reinforced while in the job (apologies to those who suffered as I learned!):

* Administration is critically important to a successful department, school and university and involves a lot more than most of those who aren't administrators think.

* Effective, regular communication at all levels is critically important for successful administration.

* Too many administrators (as too many faculty and people generally of course) aren't effective communicators.

* Policies and procedures, and the interests of the department and institution, are very important, but people - and treating them with fairness, honesty, respect and compassion - are more important.

* High faculty and staff morale, which depends on effective communication and valuing people over policy among other things, is critically important for successful administration and makes life a lot more pleasant.

* Many meetings are of limited value - too often they're scheduled because they've always been scheduled, they last too long, they feature announcements that are more suited to e-mail or other formats, the distributed agendas are too general and/or not
followed, the agenda tasks could be accomplished in focused discussions among smaller
groups of people, etc.

* A seemingly limitless number of formal and informal barriers and challenges often
make trying to accomplish administrative goals incredibly frustrating, but finally
accomplishing them can be very satisfying.

* Nearly all academic administrators both impose decisions (top down administration)
and determine and implement the decisions of their colleagues (bottom up
administration); finding the right balance between the two is essential to success; I think
the most effective administrators lead not by imposing or following but by
whenever possible guiding discussions to build reasonable and practical consensus.

* There's only so much time and energy, so administrators can choose to do more things
less carefully and thus less well, or fewer things more carefully and thus more
effectively; again, finding the right balance is essential to success (if I err, I prefer to err
on the side of doing fewer things better).

* Successful administrators (as others) invest great amounts of time and physical and
emotional energy into their job but they always remember it's just a job (we all may feel
indispensable at times but our institution will carry on with or without us - it's more
important to enjoy our life).

* Effective administrators at all levels seek to make incremental and infrequent but
regular, scheduled changes rather than shock-to-the-system, constant and unpredictable
changes.

* The best administrators always remember that faculty are peers and not subordinates,
and treat them accordingly.

* Effective administrators keep organized records for their own and their successors' use,
and know that statements and promises are nice but having and keeping them in writing
is better (though still not always a guarantee).

* The vast majority of faculty (and administrators for that matter) are hardworking,
cooperative, and collegial; unfortunately administrators have to spend too much time
thinking about and dealing with the others.

* Administrators (and the rest of us) have to find the right balance between short, terse,
bullet-pointed communications (reports, e-mail messages, etc.) and long, detailed,
elaborate communications; I tend to favor the latter too much but I'm working on it (so
that's my last bullet point here!)."

#2 SEVEN HABITS OF SUCCESSFUL CHAIRPERSONS
One of the biggest complaints I hear against administrators is that they don't give faculty members straight answers.

Successful chairpersons are always easy to identify. They and their departments are viewed on and off campus as somehow special. Indeed, an air of energy usually surrounds a department headed by such a person; it is evident in the behavior and attitude of the faculty and students. Pride seems to emanate from the department itself.

So what is it that these chairpersons have in common? Is it something others can acquire? I will try to answer the first question; you can answer the second.

1. Successful chairpersons have goals.

Their goals are no secret. They are well articulated, shared with the faculty, and pursued until accomplished.

I learned something recently about developing goals, and I don't know why it took me so long to discover it. When our provost and vice president for academic affairs asked each dean to submit goals for the year, she said to limit them to not more than four or five. "I don't think you can focus sufficiently on too many more than that," she explained. She's right, I think. Four or five important goals are sufficient for any year. Obviously each may have many parts, so it's not as if you are accomplishing only a few things annually.

No matter how many goals you settle on, it is important that you define and develop them fully. You then must commit the department to carrying them out, and you must see that sufficient time and resources are made available to satisfy the goals.

2. Successful chairpersons get to know their colleagues and fellow administrators.

They know the interests of faculty members, both professional and personal. They know something about their personal lives. They come to know the potential of each person in the department, and they give them room to grow and develop—even to make mistakes.

Have you ever noticed how much harder you are willing to work for someone who seems to understand you, who inquires from time to time about your family, who remembers
your favorite baseball team, and who does not get angry and hold it against you forever if you make a mistake? As chairpersons we need to be sensitive to the needs of the faculty, and we cannot do that unless we get to know them.

3. Successful chairpersons are agents of change.

He or she understands that the status quo—even if comfortable—often may stunt progress or fail to meet the needs of students.

We must look as far into the future as our best lights permit. What's out there? And what does it mean to students who will be in the workforce 10, 15, 20 years from now? What are the scientific, technological, social, and economic forces that are shaping society? Are we helping our students to understand these forces? With the world changing so fast, we must be knowledgeable about directions and tendencies. We must be avid readers and observers of new professional developments, and we must be persuasive enough to engage the faculty in this pursuit.

4. Successful chairpersons understand and appreciate teaching, research, and public service.

While most chairpersons have heavy administrative burdens, they must try to find time to keep their hands in each of these areas. Faculty members respect chairpersons who are active in areas in which they are evaluated. They resent administrators finding fault when the administrators themselves have not proved themselves in teaching, research, and public service.

I remember how faculty members at another school resented a dean who often rejected applications for promotion because the applicant supposedly "had not done enough research." They resented his assessment because the dean himself had never done any research. The point here is that as a chairperson, you are expected to serve as a good role model when it comes to fulfilling basic responsibilities that you expect of others.

Successful chairpersons must provide leadership for the assessment of teaching, scholarship, and service. Chapter Sixteen deals directly with these matters.

5. Successful chairpersons are honest, forthright, decent people.

They make tough calls and are decisive even when the decision goes against those whom they would most like to please. Also, they make clear that they cannot respond favorably to all requests. One of the biggest complaints I hear against administrators is that they don't give faculty members straight answers. They say what others want to hear rather than what must be said.

I've worked with many different kinds of administrators, many honest ones, and some
who were less than honest. There were some I always had to play games with. I am fortunate that the person I report is not like that at all. She is honest. There's no game playing. As a consequence, I like my job all the more, and I will do all I can to meet her expectations.

6. Successful chairpersons are fair and evenhanded.

No matter how principled we are, it is difficult not to want to show favoritism toward those we get along with best.

For your own good and for the good of the department, you must learn that everyone profits from fairness and evenhandedness. Many of the faculty members in your department will be resentful and unsupportive if there are lapses.

7. Successful chairpersons are consensus builders and good communicators.

Their leadership style is to develop ideas and persuade others to support them. They are good, and they also are good at communicating their ideas.

I've watched and evaluated many different chairpersons. I have seen them fail, even when they had good ideas. Faculty members need to be involved in the department and its changes. Failure to involve them generally means that new ideas are not going to be accepted. Successful chairpersons understand this and work carefully to keep faculty members informed and to get their support.

There undoubtedly are other character traits that successful chairpersons have in common. Those enumerated here seem to stand out above all others. I know that if you have these qualities, you are likely to succeed. Faculty-members will give you their support, and you will find that your dean and provost will provide support as well.

Of course when you are successful, the job is more enjoyable. Others notice and praise your work, and, above all, your students are the big winners. They are studying in a stronger, more vital department, and they are being taught by people who are happier with their jobs.

At the beginning of this chapter, I raised two questions: 1) What do successful chairpersons have in common? 2) Can these traits be acquired? I indicated I would try to answer the first question and leave the second to you. However, I can't resist trying to answer the second as well. I strongly believe that these successful habits can be acquired. With hard work and practice, we can all learn to develop goals, get to know people who make up the department, and become agents of change. Likewise, we can develop an understanding and appreciation for teaching, research, and public service. Furthermore, we can be honest and fair, and we can work to be consensus builders. In short, it seems to me that all of us have a chance to be successful if we acquire these habits.
#3 MANAGING THE CHAIR'S PARADOXICAL ROLE

The posting below looks at conflicting leadership roles that department chairs must balance. It is by by Frank Fletcher and Charles Roberts. The article appeared in The Department Chair: A Resource for Academic Administrators, Spring 2008, Vol. 19, No. 2. For further information on how to subscribe, as well as pricing and discount information, please contact, Sandy Quade, Account Manager, John Wiley & Sons, Phone: (203) 643-8066 (squadepe@wiley.com). or see: http://www.josseybass.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-DCH.html Reprinted with permission.

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Research supports that the academic chair's position is multifaceted and often includes the roles of academic leader, administrator, scholar, faculty developer, and, in some instances, mediator. Two obvious chair roles that most will agree on are serving as department leaders and as effective liaisons between their departments and their institution's administration. Despite these pressing responsibilities, academic chairs are, paradoxically, rarely given a clear line of authority. They also have to work through the other paradox of simultaneously being a member of the faculty and being viewed as a member of the administration.

To effectively discern their role, academic chairs should look outside their institutions to organizations that successfully manage knowledge workers. The term knowledge worker was coined by Peter Drucker almost 50 years ago to describe anyone who works for a living at the tasks of developing or using knowledge. The work of a faculty member is most definitely the work of a knowledge worker.

Organizations designed to accommodate and maximize the performance of the knowledge worker effectively integrate the best elements of self-organization and networking with different styles of communication and leadership. They address the knowledge worker's desire for challenging assignments, effective leadership, and ample feedback. Key attributes of these kinds of organizations center on leadership, relationship building, creating an environment for clever people to thrive, authenticity, integrative thinking, and effective change management.

Leadership

According to Hill (2007), the process of becoming a leader is arduous and by anyone's definition is a "stretch assignment." Often many new chairs believe that power is based on authority and quickly find that when they give direct reports an assignment it doesn't necessarily happen. They learn that most faculty usually cannot tolerate direct orders.

Previously, as a faculty member or a professional working outside the academy, the chair's success was based mostly on his or her personal knowledge and experience. Today, chairs often find themselves "responsible for setting and implementing an agenda
for a whole group, something for which often their careers as individual performers have not prepared them" (Hill, 2007, p. 50). Leaders, according to Hill, must demonstrate the following qualities:

* Character: the intention to do the right thing
* Competence: knowing how to do the right thing
* Influence: the ability to deliver and execute the right thing
* Relationship building: on a one-to-one basis

**Relationship Building**

Good relationships between the chair and the faculty are an essential element to the success of the department. The academic chair has to inspire and support the unit's collective responsibility to create a better future. Hamm (2006) explains that effective leaders understand their role in doing so and of bringing out the solution in others, not falling into the trap that they are the person with all the answers. Successful leaders, according to Hamm, actively seek out contributions, challenges, and collaborations from their colleagues.

Chairs need to be able to listen, collaborate, delegate, and develop new leaders as they develop in their own leadership role. From their faculty, chairs should expect that they stay current in their field, drive their own growth, and be team players through the department's highs and lows. In exchange chairs should provide faculty with clarity, realistic goals, and feedback that is specific, timely, and immediate.

**Clever People**

Chairs must also create an environment for their faculty to survive as "clever people." Clever people, according to Goffee and Jones (2007), "have one defining characteristic; it is that they do not want to be led"(p. 74). They also seek a high degree of organizational protection, recognition that their ideas are important, the freedom to explore and fail, and they "expect their leaders to be intellectually on their plane-but they do not want a leader's talent and skill to outshine their own"(p.74).

**Authenticity**

Authenticity is largely defined by what other people see in the leader, and, as such, can be controlled by the leader. Establishing your authenticity as a leader is a two-part challenge. First, you have to ensure that your words are consistent with your deeds. Second, you need to find common ground with the people who you seek to recruit as followers.

**Integrative Thinking**

Leaders also need to develop the capacity for integrative thinking. As opposed to conventional thinking, which accepts the world as it is, integrative thinking welcomes the
challenge of shaping a better future. According to Martin (2007), integrative thinkers have the capacity to hold opposing ideas in their head without settling for one. They resolve the tension of this situation by formulating a solution that is superior to one that contains either or both. Martin explains that an integrative thinker goes through four related but distinct stages when looking for a solution to a problem. First, they must discover which factors must be taken into account. They especially need to seek out less obvious but potentially relevant factors. Next, they need to understand the cause(s) and examine these links, especially from a multidirectional and even a nonlinear perspective.

Change Management

Change management is the ultimate test of leadership as fundamental change is most resisted by the people most affected by it. To bring about change, educational leaders need to create a sense of urgency and assemble the players who can get it done. They must have a vision of how the change will happen and why it is good for the organization and the people involved. Most of all they must communicate it and make sure people understand it.

Accomplishing change requires that leaders empower others to act on the vision and support them by helping them to overcome obstacles. Educational leaders must also spotlight initial victories in the process and help those involved appreciate the milestone. Consolidating the change helps to produce more change, and finally the change is institutionalized.

Before starting the change process chairs need to understand precisely what type of change their department is capable of or incapable of (Christensen & Overdorf, 2000). To understand the department's inclination to change, educational leaders must assess three factors: resources, processes, and values. Inventorying and understanding their tangible and intangible resources is a vital first step. Processes—"patterns of interaction, coordination, communication, and decision making processes" (Christensen & Overdorf, p. 68)—must also be understood. Finally the leader must examine the organization's values, "standards by which employees set priorities" (p. 69).

Conclusion

Knowledge workers are the primary force that determines the success of an organization. As noted earlier knowledge workers, like faculty members, don't like to be told what to do. They also enjoy more autonomy than other workers, and much of their work is invisible and hard to measure because it goes on inside their heads. The similarity between the profile of knowledge workers and faculty is striking.

Managing human intellect is as vital to the success of any academic unit or institution as it is to an organization that employs knowledge workers. Organizations designed to maximize the performance of the knowledge worker integrate the best elements of self-organization and net-working and are effective in leading, relationship building, allowing clever people to thrive, authenticity, using integrative thinking, and, most of all,
managing constant change effectively. They offer an organizational frame for academic leaders to consider and model.

This article is based on a presentation at the 25th annual Academic Chairpersons Conference, February 6-8, Florida.

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References


