

**ECEDHA New Chairs Workshop Survey:
Five Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me When I Started this Job
February 2010**

Response 1:

1. It will be harder to accomplish things than you thought.
2. Not everyone in the department will be as cooperative as you would like. The number of "special needs" faculty will surprise you.
3. In working with the administration there will be things that should be done because the need for them is "obvious". However, to actually accomplish these things you will need to become politically savvy in order to convince them of the value these projects.
4. You will be amazed at how much of your time is taken up by mundane administrative tasks and how little time remains to accomplish the really important work.
5. You cannot do the job alone. You will need for your faculty to buy into the department's goals and offer to assist you in accomplishing them.

Response 2:

Decisions are better accepted when there is a clear process.
Perhaps the best tip that I got was that leading faculty is like herding cats...

Response 3:

- 1) There is no objective way of evaluating faculty performance. None.
- 2) Become good friends with the person who understands where the money goes in your University, and have them teach you all they know.
- 3) If you can avoid it, never tenure a Professor you have even the slightest doubt about.
- 4) Try to remain friendly with every faculty member; this job will not last forever, but the friendship can.
- 5) Declare victory and move on.

Response 4:

1. No matter how transparent you are, faculty will form their opinions on your actions/decisions. You will need to grow a thicker skin.
2. You cannot do everything; learn to delegate.
3. Getting the faculty to volunteer for dept. activities and follow new ideas cannot be done by a fiat. Learn the art of gentle persuasion.
4. You will hear unpleasant things you wish you didn't have to. That's life (as a dept. head)!
5. Emails exist for ever and can even show up on the front page of the newspaper. Reread before hitting the SEND button.

Response 5:

I'm in my second year as a chair. I have become quite cynical about some things, but I have also become more convinced that good deeds bring rewards. I learned four very important things already: you can't do everything, leading by example usually means that you will have no followers, money can change the attitudes of faculty, treat people with respect and kindness.

Everyone wants the chair's time for something. You have to choose what you are willing to do, what you are going to delegate, and what you will let slip through the cracks. One of the first things a new chair should do is figure out who in the department is willing to work and who isn't. Usually you can get that sort of information from previous chairs (they are a wealth of information but they may not volunteer it until you ask). When you get to something you don't want to do (or don't have time for) but you think is important you delegate that to one of the worker faculty. When you have a task that you don't want to do and you don't care about, you delegate that task to the faculty who don't ever seem to contribute much to the department. I appoint heads of department committees. I make sure that the chairs of the curriculum committee and the assessment committee are workers. I let the slackers be the people in charge of doling out scholarships.

The related revelation is that you can't lead by example. If you chose to do more work so that others will follow your example, they won't. They will simply let you do the work and they will do less.

Money is an important motivating factor. For example, we have recently begun offering our degree via streaming video to people at other colleges in our system (a decision made above my pay grade). The faculty were divided by this and many didn't think it was an appropriate way to deliver the degree and were worried about the added workload. The former chair and I got a grant to study distance education. Included in the grant was a three week workshop for 8 people where we would have speakers from around the university who had expertise in distance education (DE) come and teach us about the

technology and techniques that were working in DE. We paid the faculty to attend. Now we have all but two of our faculty teaching classes via streaming video and they get an increase in their paycheck for the added workload. Some are even seeking to teach the DE courses regularly. Many of these faculty made good arguments against DE in EE. Now they are part of it.

I do not always see eye to eye with the administrators in the Chancellor's office, Dean's office, registrar's office, admission's office, etc. I rarely speak with any of them on a day-to-day basis. There are a few that I would not choose to see in a social way. However, I have great relationships with all of their support staff. I joke with them on the phone and ask about their families before we get down to business. I fill their candy jars regularly and bring flowers on special occasions (and sometimes just because my garden is blooming). I cut out pictures of their kids from the newspaper and send them to them. I have friends in all sorts of student services capacities and I actively cultivate friendships with faculty across the whole campus (I play banjo in a bluegrass band that has people from four departments and two student services offices). I treat the janitors as human beings. Their kids go to school with my kids. At many school functions I may sit with them instead of the other faculty's families. It all depends on who is there and who I am friends with. It is amazing what you can accomplish when you have the ear of a person who is actually doing the administrative and physical work of the university. Of course, it is in my personality to be friendly and to treat people with dignity, but I have noticed how much further you can get with honey than you can with vinegar.

Other quickies: Treat even the worst students with respect (they are human beings with feelings). Always look for common ground and compromise but be prepared for an argument (do your homework). Sitting on university-level committees is very important for you and for your faculty (you learn a lot and you have influence). Don't raise your voice in a discussion (only people who desperately believe you are already right will be impressed). Be careful what you write (anything can come back to bite you). Seek out people who will constructively criticize you and pay attention to what they say.

I'm still trying to figure out how to motivate the slackers to get more done and I still have problems with keeping organized and staying on time.

Response 6:

I wish someone had told me how much time I would spend meeting with alumni and other donors trying to raise money for the department. Perhaps I was naive, but this was a surprise to me.

Response 7:

1. For senior hires check references thoroughly and seek colleagues' opinions; a faculty hire gone wrong can last for 40 years.
2. Keep priorities clear: students and academic programs first, then faculty, then staff, and lastly higher level administrators and fundraisers.
3. A surprising number of faculty have some form of mental illness; seek help from campus counselors as needed.

Response 8:

- 1) I wish I knew how much time answering e-mails and attending various meetings would take, or that someone had told me the level of effort needed to keep up with all of these events;
- 2) Time goes by very fast, and so I wish I knew that it is very important to start working on the most important items on my list as quickly as possible.
- 3) Faculty seem to interpret the actions and words of the chair very differently than those of other faculty. Therefore, it is important to really think hard about statements, actions, and messages that are conveyed to faculty, making sure that those statements that could be interpreted differently by faculty are stated precisely, leaving no room for misunderstanding.

Response 9:

"It's better to be very direct and honest during annual evaluations than trying to be a nice guy. In the long run everyone benefits more from this approach."

Response 10:

1. Don't make personnel decisions in a hurry, or in the heat of a moment. Decide in haste, regret in leisure.
2. Conflict is normal, and isn't necessarily bad. Too much conflict is bad, but a little conflict can be helpful if it leads to a resolution.
3. Follow through is important. If you make a decision, or a commitment, see it through.
4. When you have a meeting, keep a record of decisions or promises made. Put the burden on the student/staff/faculty member to write things down, but keep your own notes in case there's a discrepancy. If it's not in writing, there's no deal.
5. Use your position to build relationships, with the Dean to whom you report, and everybody else in authority at your institution. If you disagree with policy made higher up, disagree privately, but not in front of your department. If you're seen as a team player, your opinion will carry more weight with the higher-ups.