

Case Study

You are a newly tenured associate professor. You are stressed out, sleep-deprived and over-committed. You do not have much time, have a lot on your mind and are very busy.

Today you have an appointment with your problem graduate student. You want to keep the appointment short and focused – you just need the data the student has discussed with you. Since this student joined your group the relationship has not gone smoothly. When you were a grad student and as a post-doc, independence was prized. You prefer to ask questions to let students figure things out rather than to give specific directions. This student, in contrast, seems to want your approval for every single step and wants to be personal friends. You see this as a solely professional relationship.

This student has missed a few deadlines and seems to have an excuse for every misstep. Nothing is done quite as you ask and the student ropes in other students and a post-doc to help complete projects. This student is working on a project that has unexpectedly become much more important to your lab. You have already incorporated the preliminary results into a manuscript that you plan to submit to a very prestigious journal. You are very excited about this work that builds on your previous work and moves it forward in a significant way. You think it could give you and your group some visibility in your field.

At this meeting today, you expect to hear about the student's most recent results so you can write the next draft of the manuscript. You plan to circulate this draft to your closest colleagues for comment.

Questions to Consider

1. What might the student need from this meeting?
2. How would you prepare for this meeting to make sure you get what you need and it stays on track?
3. How will you respond if the student presents additional problems?
4. Other things to consider?