

# Conflict management for Department Chairs

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# Introductions

- ❖ Your name
- ❖ Department/Program
- ❖ Types of faculty conflict you worry about

# Agenda

- Introductions
- Brown Bag Objectives
- The Unique Nature of Academic Conflict
- Prevention and Intervention Strategies
- Scripting and Documentation
- Testing the Waters
- Review of Resources

# Brown Bag Objectives

- Provide strategies to proactively address issues
- Review intervention scripts and documentation
- Practice intervention through case scenarios
- Reinforce using your resources to support your role as department chair

Video clip

# Unique Factors in Academia that impact conflict management

- Faculty autonomy & independence
- Team-oriented decision-making on Department issues/changes
- Pre-tenure vs. post-tenure dynamics
- Lengthy Faculty careers
- Rotational nature of leadership
- Differing philosophies
- Competition for limited resources within the College or discipline
- Other factors?

*Source: Mending the Cracks in the Ivory Tower: Strategies for Conflict Management in Higher Education by Cynthia Berryman-Fink*

# Prevention Strategies

- Create multiple avenues for feedback
- Convene meetings that allow for faculty input with ground rules developed by the faculty
- Encourage all faculty to engage in discussing *how* we address conflict here? What are the boundaries?
- Encourage parties to engage with each other directly
- Inquire if you sense something is wrong
- Utilize active listening

# Active Listening Techniques

- Minimize distractions
- Listen for the main issue, point or concern and how the issue is impacting the person
- Non-verbally acknowledge that you are hearing the speaker
- Do not agree or disagree
- Ensure you understand by asking questions, restating what you think you heard and summarizing what the speaker said



# Intervention Strategies

- Plan and if necessary buy time
- Engage instead of avoiding
- Dispel misperceptions
- Gain better understanding of needs/expectations/interests
- Interrupt problem interactions
- Leverage your knowledge of the individuals in conflict to benefit resolution
- Intervene immediately if you observe dysfunctional conflict

# Scripting and Documentation

## Purpose

### Scripting Benefits

1. Stays on track
2. Provides a process
3. Promotes consistency with future issues

### Sample Scripts

#### Document - to confirm what was discussed

1. To yourself (note to file)
2. Back to the individual
3. Don't keep unnecessary documents (drafts, your rough notes, etc.)

# Conflict Scenario

Peter Plant, senior faculty member, is difficult in his interactions with others. He believes he is always right and often speaks negatively of those who disagree with him. He is very outspoken in faculty meetings and often says things others find offensive. You are the recently appointed chair who is very concerned about the climate during faculty meetings where you have observed other faculty visibly shaken and uncomfortable by this faculty member's diatribes. You will be convening your first faculty meeting next week as chair and you decide to speak with him prior to the meeting to try to mitigate the negative behaviors.

# The Faculty Meeting

During the faculty meeting, the discussion begins regarding the active open search. The search committee has advanced four candidates to invite to interview: one assistant professor, two associate professors and one full professor. Almost immediately after the search committee makes its recommendations, Professor Plant states there is no reason to invite the assistant professor for an interview because the department already has too many junior faculty and the department needs seasoned faculty who can help him move the department in the right direction.

# The Aftermath

Two days after the faculty meeting, a junior faculty member has requested to meet with you at a location away from the department to discuss the faculty meeting. She is concerned about the negative sentiments expressed by Professor Plant and she is also irritated that you didn't do more to contain the issue during the faculty meeting.

# Resources

Your Dean's Office is a great place to start - they may be familiar with the issue and have insights/strategies to address the problem

## Use your resources:

- To help deal with conflict early to reduce potential for escalation
- To spread the liability by keeping others with a need to know in the loop
- As a good starting point; conflict stems from a lot of different situations, your resources list helps eliminate the need to pinpoint the best place to start

Questions?