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Promotion to Dean: 7 Best Ways to Guarantee Failure

by Amy Dee on 10/18/2017 in 2017, Academics, Fall



How would your colleagues feel about your promotion to dean?

Solid faculty members with longevity at a Christian college often find themselves in new roles. This can be the result of their own choice or sometimes even coercion, such as when failed searches or limited financial resources “force” faculty into these new roles.

While many may agree that faculty status easily supersedes a seat in the executive dining room, some professors see the promotion to dean as a natural career trajectory. Either way, when the advancement occurs within one’s own institution, navigating the transition can pose hazards to relationship, leadership, and goal attainment at the personal and departmental levels.

Avoiding the following hazards can help those in new roles of leadership propel programs forward and maintain a positive teaching and learning culture.

Seven Ways to Sabotage Faculty Advancement to Dean

Stop Listening

Not listening to others indicates a certain amount of conceit that places barriers between faculty and leadership. It happens more than we want to admit in our institutions, where we pride ourselves on Christian behavior.

Inexplicably, new leaders often ignore or disregard the contributions of established faculty members, silencing voices and forging new directions without wide support. Believing and behaving in such a way (as if they know more about a topic or practice than others) halts communication and rescinds trust, which can leave a leader in isolation.

Instead, a bit of humility, seeking others’ input while elevating them will lead to insight, support, and increased productivity.

Forget Your Word

“Remember when you said, yes?”

Leaders who often change their minds from yes to no tend to stall a climate of creativity, community, advancement, and learning.

Permission to pilot procedures, develop programs, change a course structure, or incorporate technology requires time and energy and represents high-level work on the part of faculty, so rejecting their efforts and ideas often leads

to discouragement and lack of confidence in leadership, especially when the rejection comes second or third hand.

The active practice of advancing programs through creativity by saying “yes,” sticking to that word as often as possible, and then supporting those on the team, will help faculty to develop personally and professionally.

Pinch the Purse

The one who holds the money holds the power.

Keeping the purse closed or denying funding requests adds to the power differential in the department and can cause some animosity and frustration on the part of faculty trying to advance skills, enrich teaching or foster scholarship. It also adds needless barriers between leadership and faculty.

When financial resources are offered to support individual interests without being asked for it, loyalty and work ethic increase. Therefore, leaders should announce and publish transparent methods for distributing available funds.

Ignore Conflict

Conflict distresses many people, especially for those in Christian institutions who prefer “nice” over disagreement. Internal struggles can unintentionally turn personal quickly when the one holding power was once an equal in the department.

Healthy conflict happens when leaders sincerely listen and when solutions include faculty input and options. Those in leadership must also monitor their own frustration and the ways in which they express displeasure.

Building the dignity of faculty members rather than constructing a culture of reprimand during conflict leads to a positive working environment. Leaders can do this by asking *why* faculty and support personnel respond as they do, rather than focusing on *what* they do.

Forgetting rapport

The once irritating habits of a colleague may seem magnified in a new dean-faculty relationship.

Concentrating on pre-conceived impressions of a faculty member removes opportunities for improved community and perpetuates unhealthy connections with others. Additionally, maintaining a tight inner circle leaves others to question the motives of those in power.

Instead, look for the positive characteristics of all people, and find ways to elevate others when possible.

Charging Ahead

The desire to change or make a mark on a program right away might seem like the approach to take in order to establish presence and control, but people want a chance to ponder and to speak into change.

Slow down.

First, discuss and publish processes that lead to change. And don't forget to provide training and rationale for new

procedures or expectations. This will lead to more effective transformation.

Disregard History

Every department and every person has a story.

Ignoring history in an attempt to “start fresh” can hold negative consequences for anyone who has had a personal investment in the past. Moving people to the present requires not only closure but optimism that those in leadership respect the plot and offer opportunities to “choose your own adventure” by opening doors for others.

Building that optimism happens when leadership demonstrates solid listening skills, honesty and forthrightness in all things, generosity, care, and a willingness to see the good in others.

About Amy Dee

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