

Dealing with Difficult Faculty and Staff

A 4-Step Process to Managing Unprofessional, Unproductive and Unwanted Behaviors

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TO WHOM IS THIS WORKSHOP DIRECTED?

1. DEANS AND ASSOCIATE DEANS
2. THE DEPARTMENT CHAIRS
YOU SUPPORT

THE TWO ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS TO SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF DIFFICULT PEOPLE

1. A BRAVE LEADER

2. A SUPERIOR WHO BACKS YOU
UP

MANTRA TO GUIDE YOU

1. Difficult people continue their problematic behavior because *we* let them.*

ASSUMPTIONS



- The “problem” behavior is genuinely unprofessional or inappropriate or damaging
- You have examined your own thoughts and behaviors for bias or unfairness
- You have conducted your research on the problem; not just gossip or hearsay



The Story of Louisa

- Administrative Assistant for 15 years
- Supported two departments

What do we mean by
“difficult”?

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIFFICULT?

BEHAVIORS WE ARE *NOT* DISCUSSING HERE:

- Mental illness
- Addiction
- Issues that require emergency attention
 - Sexual harassment or assault
 - Violence
 - Drunkenness on campus

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY DIFFICULT?

Bullies

Prima Donnas

Privilege abusers

Poor teachers

Non-producers

No-shows

Meeting disrupters

Authority defyers

Those who never
engage or volunteer

Trouble makers

**What behavioral types do you
experience or anticipate?**

Essential elements of
success in every case

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

Identify and address problem behaviors *early*

Engage a *team* (chair, coordinator, dean, HR, university counsel, union leaders)

Know and follow protocols (faculty handbook, collective bargaining agreement, HR protocols)

Employ multiple means of communication

Document all communication and share appropriately

Maintain your professionalism

"When they go low, we go high." Michelle Obama

Step #1 - ENGAGE

STEP #1 ENGAGE



Engagement is the faculty member's *first chance*

Engage *immediately* when the behavior arises

Works best with those who:

- Are new to the institution
- Are unaware of their problematic behavior
- Are trying to get away with problematic behavior
- Have never been asked to change their behavior

STEP #1 ENGAGE

STEP A. NAME THE PROBLEM

“You treat others with disrespect and intimidation.”

“You too frequently cancel class.”

“I have evidence that you are discussing department personnel and business matters with students.”

“Your students report that you are habitually unprepared for and disorganized in class.”

(to a chair): “Your department suffers a reputation of being harsh and unfriendly to students. You have failed to address this as chair.”

NAMING

Write a description of a faculty member's or department chair's problematic behavior in clear and concise language that could be shared in an annual evaluation.

STEP #1 ENGAGE

STEP B. ACTIVELY LISTEN

Ask the individual for thoughts, feedback, comments and questions

- *“I’d like to hear your thoughts about the problem I’ve shared. I’m here to listen and to understand.”*

Pay attention and do not interrupt

Talk less than the offender

Resist judgment

STEP #1 ENGAGE

STEP C. ACKNOWLEDGE - ensure the individual feels *heard*

Ask questions to maximize your understanding

Articulate what you've heard in a sympathetic manner

- *“You’re saying that no one has ever told you what the teaching expectations are here. That’s really important for me to hear.”*
- *“Are you saying that you’re exhausted, and that leads to your rudeness?”*
- *“You’re frustrated with students’ lack of preparation. That’s something we all struggle with.”*
- *“I hear that you agree this is a problem but you feel you don’t have the skills to address it. Let’s work on building those skills for you.”*

STEP #1 ENGAGE

STEP D. SET STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

Be emotion-free and ultra-clear

- *“The standard at our college is to return graded work within 10 days of the assignment’s due date. You will be held to that standard.”*
- *“Scholarly productivity is part of the faculty job description. I expect you to re-engage in an active research program.”*
- *“I expect you to treat your colleagues and me with professionalism and respect.”*

STEP E. SCHEDULE FOLLOW-UP AND OFFER SUPPORT

Detail how you will monitor the behavior

- E.g., class visits, conversations with colleagues, observations of behavior in faculty meetings

Schedule your follow-up meeting

Offer resources for support and assistance

- E.g., a colleague mentor, university resource, employee-assistance program

“I’m here to help you resolve this issue. Let me know what types of support work best for you. In the meantime, I’ll be looking for more collegial behavior from you in faculty meetings. We’ll meet again in a month.”

CASE STUDY/ROLE PLAY– Dean Justina Alvarez

Marcus Grambling has chaired the Modern Languages Department for 15 years. You are in your second year as dean and observe several problems in Modern Languages: 1) the number of majors has declined severely in the last decade, 2) Italian and German habitually enroll fewer than 4 students per course, and 3) the faculty focus on high literature and poetry rather than the conversational skills students prefer. As chair, Marcus oversaw the emergence of these problems. He has shown little willingness to change department culture or to even set goals. Many students are eager to study languages but find the department uninviting, so they give up. You fear that the department's future is in jeopardy if it doesn't adapt soon. In short, you see serious problems in the department's performance and in Marcus's (lack of) leadership.

You have called Marcus to the office for the first step in an Engagement conversation about these problems.

CASE STUDY/ROLE PLAY— Department Chair Marcus Grambling

You are in your 15th year as chair of the Modern Languages Department. You enjoy the position. You love your discipline, and enjoy course releases, a stipend, and a position on the Chair's Council. You worry that the College is moving away from its liberal arts history to a more career-focused future. You've proudly resisted pressure to move your curriculum away from literature and poetry towards conversational skills. You are glad that all your faculty are tenured, because your course enrollments have dropped in recent years. The dean, in her second year, seems to feel more allegiance to the Provost than to the faculty. She's already told you that your department's cost/credit hour is the highest in the College, which is "unsustainable." Previous deans have unsuccessfully tried to get your department to change, so you're not worried.

The Dean has asked you for an appointment. You don't know why.

QUESTIONS?

Step #2 MANAGE

STEP #2 MANAGE



Management is the faculty member's *second chance*.

How is Management different from Engagement?

Focus is no longer on active listening, but on supervisory oversight

To be employed only after engagement has failed to produce results

Demonstrates that the problem is serious and could affect the individual's good standing at the institution

Involves ramped-up Steps D and E from "Engagement"

STEP D. SET STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS FOR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

“You need to revise your syllabus to make the content appropriate for a 100-level course. I expect a substantive revision by December 5.”

“You will refrain from speaking with students about department personnel.”

“You must exercise leadership to address enrollment reductions in Modern Languages. I expect you to set goals and bring your faculty together to develop a strategic plan by the end of this academic year.”

STEP E. SCHEDULE FOLLOW-UP AND OFFER SUPPORT

“Professor Tilly has offered his syllabus as a model and volunteered to meet with you. I recommend you accept his offer. The Center for Teaching is also a great resource. We’ll meet again after I get your draft on March 16.”

“Many junior faculty benefit from having a mentor to help them learn the culture of the institution and navigate the tenure process. I will arrange a mentor for you.”

“I’m here to help and support your leadership in this process. I’ll arrange monthly meetings with you to get updates on your department’s progress on the strategic plan.”

Marcus Grambling

At your first monthly update, you discover Marcus has not yet met with his department to work on the strategic plan to modernize the curriculum and grow enrollments.

QUESTIONS?

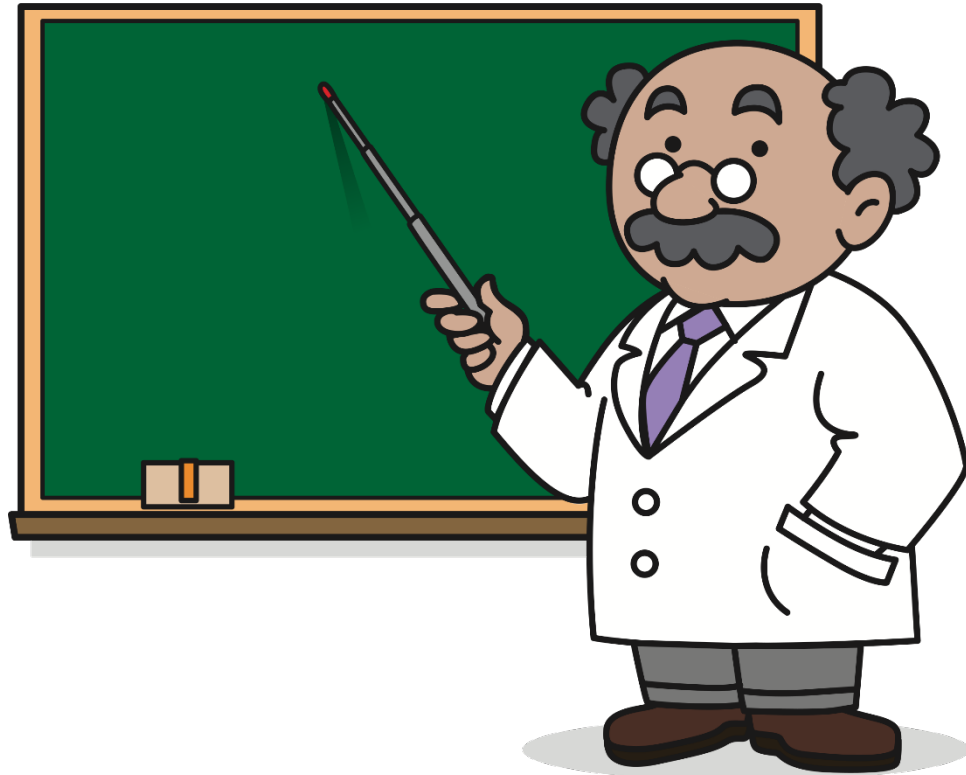


15-Minute Break



Step #3 ENFORCE

THE STORY OF FORMER DEPARTMENT CHAIR MITCHELL



STEP #3 ENFORCE



Enforcement is the faculty member's *last chance*.

How is Enforcement different from Management?

Establishes consequences and makes them real

Required for:

- Repeat offenders
- Those who have resisted engagement and management
- Those who just can't improve

Step A – Develop a behavior modification plan with HR and other supervisors

Step B – Write a memo that details the:

- problem behavior
- many actions you've taken to address the situation, with references to documents and dates
- behavioral changes required
- monitoring and reporting method
- consequences if meaningful change does not happen

Step C – Call the individual to a meeting arranged when he/she has no office hours or courses scheduled.

- Invite anyone else who should be there, e.g., program coordinator, union rep
- Have a Security Officer close by if you feel threatened

Step D – Begin the meeting

- This is an enforcement-plan delivery session, *not* a listening session.
- The setting and tone are qualitatively different and more serious than previous sessions.
- State the meeting's purpose:

“Thank you for coming, Peter. You and I have met multiple times to address your problematic behavior. I will no longer ask your coworkers to tolerate your unprofessional and toxic conduct. Today I will outline a set of standards I expect you to meet. If you do not demonstrate significant improvement, I will work with HR to reassign your duties.”

Step E – Share the memo and detailed outline of behavioral expectations

- Give plenty of time for him/her to read it.
- Read aloud the expectations, e.g.:
 - 1. Arrive prepared and on time to class.*
 - 2. Speak to students, staff and faculty colleagues without raising your voice or offering insults or accusations.*
 - 3. Attend and contribute in a positive manner to department events, Recruitment Saturdays and Student Presentations.*

Step F – Offer to answer final questions and stress the next steps

- *“Do you have any questions about the contents of this plan?”*
- *“I will send you bi-weekly memos in which I report on my assessment of your behavior. I will also collect feedback from the chairs of the two committees on which you serve.”*
- *“Your program coordinator will report to me at the end of the semester on all of these measures.”*

STEP #3 ENFORCE

Step G - Write a follow-up

- Immediately write up a detailed synopsis of the meeting
- Send it to the faculty member and copy it to all appropriate supervisors

What if the individual is belligerent or refuses to listen?

Stay calm and repeat phrases that emphasize the purpose of the meeting.

“We are not here to discuss anyone else’s behavior, only yours.”

“I’m sorry to hear you feel that way, but it doesn’t change what happens here today.”

“If you can’t keep your voice down, I will ask you to leave. This behavior-modification plan will go into effect either way.”

“You may of course speak with HR about this plan. But today’s session is devoted to delivering this set of expectations to you.”

CASE STUDY/ROLE PLAY

Department chair Bruce Swan meets with Professor Karl Linde to discuss Linde's repeated unwillingness to improve his terrible teaching. Swan presents Linde with a list of expectations, including: update syllabi to current standards, return graded work on time, meet with students who request help, and attend Teaching Center workshops to improve lectures. Linde has long successfully resisted attempts to improve his teaching. This time, Swan says, *"Your failure to meet even the most modest standards of good teaching constitutes a breach of contract. Should you fail to respond immediately and effectively, I will work to remove you from the University."* Linde is at once angry and frightened. Outraged, he begins to yell and threaten.

QUESTIONS?



Step #4 MARGINALIZE

How does marginalization differ from enforcement?

Last resort when behavior modification plan fails and faculty member remains

Best suited when:

- University or collective bargaining rules make it impossible for you take effective punitive action
- The individual is truly unable to change behavior
- The behavior is damaging, but insufficient to warrant punitive action
- “You’re stuck with it”

STEP #4

MARGINALIZE

Marginalization:

- Is *not* subtle
- Minimizes the impact of problematic behavior
- Protects others from the behavior
- Isolates the difficult individual
- Removes the difficult individual's power to influence outcomes
- Sends a message: "We will no longer allow you to disrupt us."

STEP #4

MARGINALIZE

EXAMPLE #1 - The Terrible Teacher

Marginalization strategies:

- Assign the faculty member to the courses where he/she does the least damage
- Reassign the faculty member's workload to non-teaching duties

STEP #4

MARGINALIZE

EXAMPLE #2 - The Bully

Marginalization strategies:

- Move offices to limit interpersonal contact
- Offer frequent and abundant support to the victims and potential victims
- Stand up to the bully in public forums
- Remove the bully from the department

STEP #4

MARGINALIZE

EXAMPLE #3 - The Meeting Disrupter

Marginalization strategies:

- Interrupt the disrupter
"You've made your point."
- Hold meetings when the disrupter can't attend
- Establish a time limit for speaking in meetings
- Don't call on the disrupter
- Chastise the disrupter
"You're speaking in an unprofessional manner."
- Ignore the disrupter's comments

STEP #4

MARGINALIZE

EXAMPLE #4 - The Trouble Maker

Marginalization strategies:

- Remove the trouble maker from committees/positions where he/she can do damage
- Take away the trouble maker's advising duties and reassign other tasks
- Advise new and junior faculty to avoid those who engage in gossip

MARGINALIZATION

Imagine a difficult faculty type who resists all attempts at behavior modification. What marginalization strategies can you use for this individual in your institutional context?

QUESTIONS?



TAKEAWAYS

- Change happens when a brave leader is backed up by his/her superior.
- People behave badly because they do not face real consequences.
- Deans should hold their department chairs accountable for managing difficult faculty and staff and must *support* them in doing so.
- Employ the 4-Stages method to manage your difficult colleagues:
 - Engage
 - Manage
 - Enforce
 - Marginalize

WHAT ARE YOUR TAKE-AWAYS?

1.

2.

3.

4.

THANK YOU!!!

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