Accepting and sharing responsibility for creating a productive work setting within the department and institution result, at least to a great extent, from how well each member of the community carries his or her own fair share of the common workload. The challenges faced by higher education institutions in the 21st century cannot be successfully mastered, nor can the efforts of dedicated professionals be sustained when the actions of a faculty member are divisive, uncompromising, and inflexible. In a similar way, it is destructive to a department’s morale and effectiveness when one or more of its members accept a significantly lower degree of responsibility for achieving a shared purpose. These elements lie at the heart of that salient, fundamental hallmark of successful interactions in academic life that is commonly called collegiality.

Collegiality is reflected in the relationships that emerge within departments. It is often evidenced in the manner in which members of the department interact with and show respect to one another, work collaboratively in order to achieve a common purpose, and assume equitable responsibilities for the good of the discipline as a whole. It is not an exaggeration to say that in higher education, collegiality is the cornerstone of professional work.

There are many departments that suffer from non-collegial, disrespectful, uncivil, and nasty encounters among faculty members, chair and faculty members, faculty members and staff, and faculty members and students. And, by a process of elimination, the chair must deal with all of them on a regular basis. Department chairs are often led to believe that that is merely the way it is—that they must struggle on their own to deal with a non-collegial and downright nasty faculty member or a department culture in which civility is seriously compromised. However, a chair can take proactive steps to stem the tide of non-collegiality by recognizing its telltale signs in the department:

- Low morale in the department
- Lack of collaboration between and among faculty members
- Poor student advisement
- Lack of department celebrations or social alliances
- More classes being cancelled—faculty not showing up to teach their classes
- Faculty office hours not being kept
- Increased absenteeism and tardiness
- Diminished work quality of once-productive faculty
- New faculty struggling to survive in a hostile work environment
- Older, more seasoned faculty worn down and becoming disengaged in the department and the institution
- Communication within the department described as inchoate
- Increased illness and health issues

• Working from home more than usual or more than necessary
• Increasing faculty isolation and alienation
• Poor teaching evaluations from students and peers
• Refusal to serve on department, school, or university committees
• Lack of or minimal attendance at scheduled faculty meetings

What can department chairs do to facilitate a collegial department?

At a department meeting, openly and transparently discuss:

1. What collegiality is…and what it is not
2. Why collegiality is important, and how non-collegial behavior can ruin a department
3. Why the department may need a code of conduct, whereby faculty members buy into the concept that “we agree to disagree without being disagreeable”

This reflects the concept that every person pledges to treat colleagues with dignity, respect, and civility and to do their fair share of the workload tantamount to running a viable department.

Author Tim Gould once commented, “I’ve been promoted to middle management. I never thought I’d sink so low.” In fact, department chairs truly are the quintessential managers “in the middle,” required to balance the needs of their departments (ever-increasing in size and scope) while satisfying the desires of deans and provosts (ever-decreasing in resource allocation).

In an environment of uncertainty and unpredictability, the wise chair recognizes that the most valuable assets in a university are its people and the intellectual capital they possess and the culture they create.

— Robert E. Cipriano, EdD in Academic Leadership

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