

Leadership Development During Challenging Times

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January 14, 2021

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Outline

In These Unprecedented Times...

HELP!

A Path Forward



In These Unprecedented Times...

Survival

Let's be honest. The last few months have been about keeping the ship afloat. The tasks of scraping off barnacles and applying a fresh coat of paint have been pushed aside.

Remember: It is ok that you focused on this. If bigger projects got put on hold you should not feel bad about it.

The Chair as Therapist

Maxim. A chair's primary responsibility is to ensure the department's faculty have the proper resources to perform their jobs.

This has never been more evident than during the last year. I found myself recording how-to videos for lecturing in Zoom. Ordering dozens of webcams (just in time!) so faculty could hold office hours. My email stream turned into a flood. I had to coach faculty in all sorts of technologies they had never used before.

But I also had to manage personalities in new ways. This was probably the most challenging aspect of all.

HELP!

Dammit, Jim! I'm a Mathematician, Not an Administrator

Just as most of us received little training in how to teach, chairs receive little training in how to be a chair. Within the first few months you realize just how much responsibility (and how little authority) chairs actually have. You develop sympathy for your predecessor.

But where can you turn for help?

Resources

- Attend workshops like this. ✓
- Books exist (e.g., *The Essential Department Chair*, by Jeffrey Buller)
- Does your university offer a leadership development course? These often cost money, but perhaps your dean will agree to pay.
- Attend external leadership programs (e.g., Harvard has some:
[https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/
higher-education-leadership-programs](https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ppe/higher-education-leadership-programs))

A Path Forward

There's A Light...

We have vaccines and while there is a long way yet to go I think we can begin to envision a return to something approximating “normal.”

This term will likely still feel like you’re in survival mode, but I suggest viewing it as an opportunity for planning and growth.

Personal Development

The first step is to take some time to really evaluate where you want to lead your department in the coming year (or two). Presumably your colleagues supported your appointment as chair because they thought you could do this; now is the time to show them they were right.

This may not be something you're used to doing. It may be uncomfortable. But you need to do it.

An Exercise

To launch you into the breakout session, here is an activity called the *Immunity to Change* exercise. You may have colleagues who don't want to change anything. But I bet *you* are also reluctant to change something (or things). This might help you focus your attention on a task or two you wish to accomplish in the coming months.

Immunity to Change Instructions

I will put a pdf in the chat. You don't need to print it; it is merely a template that you can duplicate on a piece of paper. I will also put an article from the Harvard Business Review detailing the process. Here are the instructions:

- In the first column, write down what you would like to see changed at work. This could be something you're doing, or some process that needs to change (or something else).
- In the second column, what are you doing or not doing instead of what you want to happen?
- Column 3: What is your “competing commitment?” That is, imagine doing the opposite of the undermining behavior in Column 2; do you detect any worry or discomfort? Write that in the smaller box in Column 3.
- In Column 4: By engaging in this undermining behavior, what worrisome outcome are you committing to preventing?

The last thing may feel embarrassing or uncomfortable to admit. But now you can focus on overcoming that underlying fear (that may not be a real concern).