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# The New Faculty Developer and the Challenge of Change

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*This article describes strategies to help novice faculty developers successfully adjust to their new profession and be effective in what they do. These approaches suggest that new developers may be better informed than they think they are, but will need to be prepared to make choices about what they do; deal with the challenge of limited resources; anticipate the unexpected; and recognize that their office may be perceived by faculty members as a safe place. Differences between the roles of faculty member and faculty developer are indicated. Additional suggested strategies include using publications, making the faculty development office visible, keeping higher administrators informed, building strong relationships within the academic community, and taking advantage of such organizations as the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). The author suggests that effectiveness in faculty development can contribute to the building of community in the academy.*

New faculty developers are entering roles that differ in many ways from those of faculty members whose time is devoted to teaching, research, and service. I entered the faculty development profession two years ago, after twelve years as a faculty member, having done extensive graduate work in administrative, faculty, and instructional development. Despite that strong theoretical background, I have learned many things about faculty development from practical expe-

rience that all my reading had not taught me. Although much of what we do as faculty members provides sound preparation for the faculty development role, other areas of development work require new skills and approaches. Thus, although new faculty developers may perceive themselves to be entering familiar territory, they often find themselves challenged by the changes in roles, relationships, and responsibilities that face them.

As I reflect on what I have learned from my own experiences, I recognize how helpful some guidelines and warnings would have been. Without a certain degree of comfort in the faculty development role, it is difficult to achieve the effectiveness we'd like; and the more effective we are, the more successful we can be at building community within our institutions.

These ideas have been developed within the context of faculty development at a public university with about 700 full-time faculty, 400 part-time faculty, 750 graduate assistants, and 24,000 students. All these strategies and approaches may not be useful for every institution, but they are intended to assist faculty developers in meeting the challenges of a new and different role in the academic community.

### **Strategy 1: Keep in mind that you probably know more than you think you do.**

When entering a faculty development position, new faculty developers may assume that the people they work for (administrators, advisory committees, faculty members) have far greater knowledge than they do about the gamut of faculty and instructional development issues. My own perception starting out was that most administrators and faculty members had read widely in the teaching and learning literature, were well-versed in development theory, and had a clear idea about what faculty development should be.

My predecessors had all served on a temporary two-year basis, and the position I entered had been empty over a year before I stepped in. Although I found some record of past activities by reading annual reports and digging through files, no clear history of goals and strategies existed. It took me months to recognize that I was (and perhaps always would be) the only person at my institution who was focusing

a great deal of attention on these areas. For this reason, one of my jobs is to educate my colleagues in positive, constructive ways about the current knowledge base in faculty development theory and practice. As Christopher Knapper (1984) has noted, a great deal more could be done to disseminate research findings on higher education pedagogy. Generally, faculty developers need to be well-informed and current in their knowledge of a wide range of development issues (Cuseo, 1989).

The corollary to this strategy is, of course, that there is always more to know than one possibly can. Just as in other disciplines, no matter how many publications one reads and conferences one attends, the learning seems to be infinite. Our challenge as faculty developers is to keep up with our profession *and* to share what we know with our faculty colleagues. New faculty developers can make enormous headway in this task if they abandon at the outset any assumptions about what faculty and administrators already know about development issues. Development is, after all, *our* profession, not theirs. Our sharing of this kind of information begins the process of creating community within our institutions.

## **Strategy 2: Remember that you cannot be all things to all people.**

Especially if you work alone as a faculty developer, you may have numerous areas on which to focus your attention. At my institution, for example, I am responsible for new faculty orientation, teaching assistant training, all development workshops and programs, instructional consultation, mid-semester evaluations, promotion of instructional technology, and so on. In addition, like my faculty colleagues, I teach, serve on a variety of university committees, conduct research, and write. This range of responsibilities is certainly not unusual in the profession. Although I have some clerical and student staff, and have successfully recruited graduate student interns to assist me, it is still virtually impossible for any one person to do all these things well or completely.

For this reason, it is essential for new faculty developers to establish priorities early and determine exactly which areas are most important to success. The academic officer or committee which guides

your work will, of course, play an integral part in setting those priorities, which are strongly connected to the goals and values of the academic community. Without such priorities, however, most faculty developers will end up frustrated and burned out.

### **Strategy 3: See limited resources as a challenge to creativity.**

The fact of academic life in the 1990s is that resources are seriously constrained and likely to remain so. Every issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* informs us that almost all higher education institutions are experiencing budget cuts. Faculty development funding in particular seems to have always been relatively limited (Bergquist & Phillips, 1981; Wilkerson, 1984). For this reason faculty developers must be excellent managers of resources, both in spending the money they have wisely and in devising approaches that require few or no additional resources.

Most of us will never have the luxury of wondering how to spend all the money we have in our budgets, and, if we need more than we currently have, we will have to work at increasing our skills as grant seekers and proposal writers. Although this financial constraint is not particularly enjoyable, it provides a challenging opportunity to new faculty developers to become creative and innovative in everything we do (Fideler & Sorcinelli, 1992).

### **Strategy 4: Anticipate the unexpected.**

Although this strategy may seem paradoxical, working in faculty development provides many experiences that remind us of the need to "expect the unexpected." Some unexpected events I have experienced include a high executive officer's using up all the time available on a panel of speakers; glitches in proofreading publications; VCRs that refuse to work properly (but only when an audience is present); confused catering orders; rooms set up improperly; late arrival of featured speakers; video producers arriving 12 hours late to videotape an 8 a.m. program; and many more. Most experienced faculty members become used to such things occasionally happening in the class-

room, but that is an arena in which the teacher not only exercises more control but where the activities are much more private.

The high visibility of faculty development presents one of the most dramatic differences between teaching and working as a faculty developer. By their very nature, most of our activities occur in a public setting. Thus, our mistakes and snafus many of which we have little control over and could not have avoided are revealed to those before whom we would prefer to appear flawless: our constituency of faculty members. Although some mistakes can be avoided by relentless planning, checking, and double-checking, some cannot. For this reason new faculty developers have to learn to become somewhat philosophical about whatever problems and embarrassments do occur; they will never be fun, but at least a few seem to be inevitable. Expecting some to occur—anticipating disaster, as it were—somehow helps them seem less critical when they do happen. It also helps to think ahead—if you can anticipate disaster, you also can anticipate damage control strategies. Become adept at contingency planning.

### **Strategy 5: Keep in mind that your office may be the only safe place for faculty members.**

In my two years in faculty development, I have been surprised by the number of faculty who come to me with problems that have little or no direct connection to my professional responsibilities. Although difficulties within a faculty member's department should logically be discussed within the department, some people often do not feel safe talking to their departmental colleagues. For them, talking with a faculty developer, a person who is perceived as somewhat removed, reasonably neutral, and working in one form of advocacy for faculty in general, appears to feel less threatening.

These kinds of conversations require a high degree of confidentiality, of course, as do instructional consultations and mid-semester evaluations. Often the people who talk to me are not seeking advice or action as much as someone who will simply listen and provide some feedback on whatever issues concern them. Occasionally I can suggest sources of help within the university, but often my time and listening are all that are required. I am often engaged in discussing career issues,

reviewing tenure and promotion papers, or talking about difficult personal or professional issues such as sexual harassment, divorce, loneliness in a new community, or professional burnout. These sensitive issues demand that new faculty developers be prepared to exhibit many of the characteristics identified as required for the profession: credibility, openness, trustworthiness, tact, caring, respect, and empathy (Cuseo, 1989; Lindquist, 1978).

(On a pragmatic note, my office has begun using a relatively inexpensive personal shredder to destroy not only the files created around some of these issues, but also those relating to instructional consultation and evaluation. This may seem paranoid, but recycling bins are not very private depositories for sensitive documents.)

## **Strategy 6: Reach more faculty with publications.**

Development programs are, of course, very important as forums through which to present ideas and to bring the academic community together. However, they have their disadvantages as well. The major flaw is that, relatively speaking, they serve so few. No matter how successful our workshops and seminars, typically only a fraction of the faculty is able—or willing—to attend.

For this reason new faculty developers need to create a strong publication program to reach the entire faculty. Although not all faculty will read everything the faculty development office produces, the probability that they will read is higher than that they will attend a program. In addition, faculty generally tend to be a print-oriented audience. Even if they want to attend programs, often their busy schedules simply do not allow this; publications, however, can wait until the faculty member is ready to read.

Frequent newsletters, with articles about teaching and learning issues, reports about faculty activities funded by my office, and information about our programs, are our most important publications. Newsletters are labor-intensive, as anyone who has edited and written one will tell you, but I believe the time is a good investment for the success of your office. Many suggestions for newsletter editing and publishing can be found in the *POD Handbook for New Practitioners* (1988).

Our office has also published occasional papers, featuring both authors external to our campus (such as Ernest Boyer) and local writers, including teaching excellence award winners. In addition, we have published a collection of essays by a number of our past and present award winners.

For our orientation of new faculty, we created a booklet with short biographical data and photos of each new faculty member and distributed it throughout the university. We also provided new faculty a brochure of photos and titles of all our executive officers and a directory describing faculty services available on campus. These publications are in addition to the typical brochures, pamphlets, and flyers we publish either separately, or in collaboration with other campus offices. We receive positive feedback about these publication efforts on a regular basis, in the form of letters, phone calls, and electronic mail. The President has been particularly positive in this regard, and the Provost asked for our teaching excellence publication to be distributed to all members of the Board of Trustees.

New faculty developers should carefully evaluate the publications that originate in the faculty development office. It is best in the first year of your appointment to concentrate on initiating or improving only one or two publications (preferably including a newsletter). Focusing your attention on a single publication ensures its quality, gives you practice with writing and editing (if previous experience in that area is limited), and allows time for you to assess the need for other means of disseminating information to faculty.

### **Strategy 7: Build credibility through visibility.**

Credibility is important for new faculty developers, because without it they cannot be successful. To build that essential credibility, the faculty development office must become highly visible. Although such visibility can feel uncomfortable for those who prefer to operate in a more private mode, in its absence it is difficult to create a successful program. The more people on campus know about you, your office, and all the services you provide, the greater the contribution you can make to the academic community. Service on committees, program publicity, and publications all help communicate the



message that your role is to help the institution accomplish its mission by promoting the development of faculty.

In addition to the approaches just noted, my office has earned higher visibility through dissemination of reports on research I have conducted. My studies so far have included: (1) a needs assessment of all full-time faculty, using an instrument I designed; (2) a survey of graduate teaching assistants and the departments employing them, using an instrument adapted from work by Lavon Gappa (1988); and (3) a survey of the professional and personal satisfaction of new faculty members, using an instrument adapted from a questionnaire by Mary Deane Sorcinelli (1991). The third study in particular had some controversial findings that caught the attention of our President, and I will replicate it with this year's new faculty group. I have also followed it up with an interview study of new faculty women.

As new faculty developers increase their visibility, however, they need to anticipate the inevitable criticism—sometimes just because people want a target and you are available. Probably all organizations have at least a few individuals whose main joy in life is to attack others, and you may encounter some of those no matter how hard you try to do a good job. As with most things in life, perhaps you can please all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time; but as Texas A & M's Nancy Simpson (private conversation, 1992) wisely notes in regard to faculty development, you can please some of the people *none* of the time! This is one more area in which new faculty developers have to develop a certain philosophical acceptance, because if we do not, we may spend too much time feeling hurt and resentful to be effective in our jobs.

## **Strategy 8: Keep higher administrators in the loop.**

Even though you may not report directly to the chief academic officer of your institution, keeping that person informed of all your activities is critical to your success. In addition, the president, other vice presidents, and all deans should be included in your mailing lists for publications and reports. They may not always read what you send, but if you do *not* continually keep them informed, you can be sure that

at some executive council meeting there will be questions about what's going on in faculty development. New faculty developers should check and update existing mailing lists to ensure that the names of key administrators appear on them.

## **Strategy 9: Build strong relationships for support.**

Because we cannot be effective unless we have the trust and respect of the faculty we serve, new faculty developers need to build positive, supportive relationships with their constituents. Those relationships can be nurtured and developed through advisory committees (the New Faculty Development Advisory Committee I created has been especially helpful in this regard), through research collaborations with faculty who have common interests, and through consultations conducted with empathy, sensitivity, and simple kindness. Cosponsoring programs with other units (like the Center for Women's Studies, Office of the Vice President for Research, and Center for Ethics) can be another useful approach for collaboration.

Although a faculty developer can perhaps operate without good relationships with deans and chairs, your job will be easier if you have them. As opinion leaders, deans and department chairs influence institutional perceptions about both the value of faculty development in general and specifically your effectiveness in the role (Fideler & Sorcinelli, 1992). To help forge stronger relationships, new faculty developers should consider scheduling yearly individual meetings with each academic dean. Such meetings have been helpful for me, and the deans have been candid in sharing their ideas. Another benefit of these meetings is the increased assurance that the deans definitely know you and have an interest in what your office does.

To build relationships with department chairs, new faculty developers should try to schedule several lunches for small groups. At my institution, chairs rarely have the opportunity to meet with one another in this kind of setting, and they seem to appreciate the chance to talk together and ventilate some of their frustrations and concerns.

Another important unit whose support new faculty developers should nurture is the faculty union. The union is a powerful force at my institution; they consider our fall workshop on tenure and promo-

tion of particular importance and are generally supportive of everything we do. Their invitations to present activity reports at meetings and write articles for their newsletters have been very welcome, and I also try to meet with their president occasionally.

Good relationships with institutional staff members also help a faculty development office function effectively. Good relations are especially important with offices providing services to students. Campus offices that provide catering, program facilities, and other services are also important, and an effort should be made to maintain cordial, cooperative relationships with them.

Establishing and maintaining these kinds of positive relationships require the new faculty developer to have good interpersonal skills (Sell & Chism, 1991). These interactions provide feedback about how you are doing and serve as a continual source of new ideas, both of which contribute to effectiveness. Finally, full-time faculty developers may experience some degree of loneliness as they miss the everyday contacts they used to have with departmental colleagues. Building strong relationships throughout the institution is an excellent antidote for this occurrence.

## **Strategy 10: Take advantage of organizations.**

The Professional and Organizational Development (POD) Network in Higher Education is the single most important source of information and support for faculty developers in the United States. This talented and creative group of professionals is both a resource and an inspiration to new faculty developers. POD members are almost always generous and helpful with their ideas and resources. POD's annual conference is held in October and brings together developers from the United States, Canada, and other countries. You can also engage in frequent informal dialogue with POD members through their electronic list service (see below). The annual POD publication *To Improve the Academy* and the *Journal of Staff, Program, & Organization Development* are key print resources for new faculty developers.

Other excellent sources of information and support are found in several organizations. The Society for Teaching and Learning in

Higher Education (STLHE) is predominantly Canadian but has many American members as well. STLHE members also engage in lively dialogue about numerous education issues both at the annual conference in June and on their electronic list service. The American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) is a third important source of professional information. Joining these organizations of competent, thoughtful, and experienced professionals is one of the best steps new faculty developers can take in achieving the success that will enable them to contribute to the building of academic community.

## Conclusion

I hope these suggestions will contribute to new faculty developers' awareness of both hazards that may lie ahead and possible approaches for effectiveness. Our success in furthering the development of our faculty colleagues ultimately will affect our institutions as a whole, influencing teaching, research, and student learning. Thus, the faculty development profession provides us the opportunity to become instrumental in building community throughout the academy.

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## **Resources**

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