

### Guarding Your Personal Time and Saying “No”

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As Summer is winding down and the Fall semester is upon us, Chairs and Program Directors are likely observing and feeling the pace and rhythm in their department and the university changing. Increased email requests from students, last minute course (re)assignments, new faculty coming on board and more, signal "it" is about to begin--the excitement of a new semester. What had been scheduled 12-18 months ago on paper, is now becoming a reality. Your mindset is already on the 17-18 schedule which is due soon! Your faculty personnel review schedules and other department committee assignments important for governance have been set—with the usual "negotiations" and soft/hard persuasion undertaken with your faculty colleagues.

You are likely anticipating the flow of "normal troubles" you will face (e.g., closed classes, low-enrolled classes, student concerns) along-side faculty concerns about their recent merit announcement from UHR, or how the new copier isn't functioning. It is here. A new academic year. The problem is this: you may not feel you have a distinct "time off" between terms because in fact, you don't. Many people around you operate on the assumption that Chairs and Program Directors are there for them on a no-time-out basis. So, this month I want to put forward the idea that you must build in your "time outs" away from your chair and program director role. It is important and necessary to do so for your personal and professional well-being.

**Tip 1: Schedule your personal time now and guard it carefully.** The calendar is getting filled--the doodle requests, department and college/school activities, weekly/monthly meetings and your own teaching schedule are blocking out your time. And remember, these activities don't account for the "fire-fighting" you do every day that will really consume your time. The question is: where is your time? Have you built something in for you on a daily, weekly and monthly basis? "Your" time can be dedicated to personal development (e.g., exercise, meditation), or connecting with friends and family where "work stuff" is relegated to the back burner, or better yet, off the stove completely. For example, for this semester, I have already scheduled weekend getaways way with my spouse for each month. I have created weekly slots dedicated to visiting our two grandchildren. Exercise and meditation is "built into" each day working around my teaching schedule. You get the idea.

Your time can be staying home and working on your research or taking time to maintain your connection to your discipline. I tried closing my door at the office—doesn't seem to work. If necessary, find a fellow chair (or former chair) and support each other by forming a research writing support group which sets some goals so you don't become disconnected from or feel out of touch with your professional identity. Have you scheduled a professional conference (or two) this year? Even if you are not presenting your research—attend conferences to stay connected to your professional interests. Remember, you won't (and should not) be chair for the rest of your professional career. And check to see if your discipline has panels or workshops on chairing departments. I know my field does and I found it useful to participate in these events when I first became a chair.

The point is—schedule your time now—and stick to it! I say this from experience as I would more often than not give up my time for others. Don't make that mistake. In the end, you are less effective and you pay the price for not taking care of yourself.

**Tip 2: It is okay to say no (politely of course).** In the last week I was asked to participate on a university committee. I agreed. Then, I received another email about another committee. I said no, thank you. For some (myself included), saying no is hard. The fact is this. You are a chair or program director because you have earned the professional respect of your colleagues and you have "people skills." Chairs and program directors form a critical part of the formal

and informal leadership structure at Oakland and you are constantly being tapped for your advice and time. It makes sense. So, opportunities are always going to come your way.

So don't be hesitant or afraid to say no-thank you. Typically these requests present an opportunity for you, as a leader, to have a greater impact on the university community. Choose wisely. How do you do this? Ask yourself how important any initiative is for your department/program and unit and whether you are indeed the "best fit." It is often good to suggest other people who you think could do the job. If you have doubts about it, consult a former chair, a person who has served on that committee to discern the time commitment, your own chair network, or me—your chair fellow. If you accept every request for your leadership skills, you will get burned out quickly.

In short—schedule your time now. Make it your time. And most importantly, enjoy your time!

The department's demographics can definitely constrain the pool of candidates. Your department may be young and have more un-tenured and newly tenured faculty, and a pool of older tenured faculty who have either "taken their turn" or who cannot or should never be in a leadership role. I have heard chairs and program directors say (BTW, that includes me) that they remained or are remaining in their position because the next crop of faculty aren't ready yet. Don't fall into that trap!