

## Commentary: Becoming a Valued Faculty Member

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At a recent academic conference, we were beseeched by some junior colleagues for advice on managing their careers. This encounter led us to believe that a sharing of what we have learned from decades of involvement in the hiring, promotion and tenure process, our personal experience with moving up the ranks in different universities, and interacting with wide circles of colleagues could be of use to others in developing their careers. Some of what we have to share are admittedly obvious, but we believe there also are aspects that often are overlooked.

To start, all of us would acknowledge that the pressures for publications, especially in highly ranked journals, have significantly increased worldwide. How to succeed in research and publications is a big topic and we only mention it in passing. Suffice it to say that success in this arena requires having worthwhile topics, competent execution, and effective presentation. Even then, persistence, perseverance and patience still are indispensable ingredients. In the teaching area, being willing and able to effectively teach a wide range of courses and interacting well with students generally are considered necessary attributes of a valuable colleague. Yet a third area is service, which many, especially junior faculty, tend to view as an area to avoid. While we have never seen someone gaining tenure based solely or mostly on outstanding service, our advice to junior faculty is not to leave a total

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void in this area. Seek service assignments that have relatively lighter time demands. Once granted tenure, expectations are that you will carry a heavier share of the service load. Indeed, our advice is that once past the settling in phase of your employment, demonstrate your initiative by volunteering for some service or leadership functions from time to time. People do appreciate having colleagues who are willing to help lead and build the institution and not just being interested in building up their personal resumes.

The points above can hardly be a revelation to any of our colleagues. Below, we turn to some points that may get overlooked, or at least given less attention than we believe they require.

First, an accounting department is a social as well as a professional entity. To be positively viewed by your colleagues, it is not enough to be a solid researcher and teacher who also carries a reasonable share of the service load. It is every bit as important to be seen as “one of us” rather than as a distant, indifferent character. We have seen a strong tendency among some of our young colleagues to spend long hours behind closed doors working away at research or preparing their coursework. With time, the distance between the faculty member and other colleagues will get bigger and bigger. How much would colleagues come to the aid and defense of someone with whom they hardly have a relationship?

We certainly would not discourage our colleagues from working hard on research and teaching. However, we believe that unless they also INVEST in the building of interpersonal relationships with colleagues, they will be viewed as outsiders, and all of us know how much consideration and support outsiders would get as compared to people who are “one of us.” In particular, we recommend a number of avenues for developing closer relationships with colleagues and becoming visible instead of invisible:

- (1) Be proactive in seeking out colleagues for casual interactions. For example, take a break from the practice of “lunch in office while working” from time to time. Periodically go and invite selected colleagues to coffee or lunch (you could rotate among them). Beyond building relationships with colleagues and laying the foundation for collaboration, it is amazing how much you may learn about what is going on in the department and university. (Along the same vein, it is important to attend workshops and seminars put on by colleagues, even if the topics are outside of your immediate areas of interest. Beyond providing moral support, your constructive comments will be appreciated as efforts to assist colleagues in their research.)
- (2) Be sure to attend department and college social functions for faculty, students and/or members of the professional community. Because of different backgrounds and upbringing, often it is difficult to find common ground for small talk. This discomfort could

deter some of us from attending such functions, or they go and just talk to people they already know. Our advice is to force yourself to go beyond your comfort zone. Develop some skills at casual conversation and a repertoire of materials (e.g., sports, music or movies) to engage others in conversation.

(3) Image/perception management is crucial to a faculty member's career success. Manage others' perception of you as a responsible and professional person by promptly responding to emails and other communications. And always respect others by being prepared and on time for meetings. In addition, your professional image is affected by how you are dressed. While current norms do not require us to be in business attire on a day-to-day basis, being neat and at least in business casual semi-formal would be considered appropriate for a member of the business faculty.

(4) Some of us, especially those in the early stages of their careers, often try to "play it safe" or show their respect for colleagues by remaining silent in meetings. This would be a mistake, and over time will lead colleagues to take you for granted or view you as irrelevant. What people value are colleagues who have ideas, initiative, leadership and teamwork. We strongly encourage our colleagues to actively participate in department discussions and policy deliberations. Beyond being thoughtful in what you say, carefully craft how you present your views. Your point should be clear, but also non-offensive to your colleagues. For example, instead of saying something like "I think this is wrong," or worse yet, "I think you are wrong," consider saying something like "I see what you're concerned about, but I wonder if there is an additional way we can look at this." Make the issue the focus, not the person stating a given point of view.

(5) Finally, in our increasingly globalized work environment, there are some cultural differences which often manifest themselves in expectations about social etiquette, table manners and personal/oral hygiene. While some may be minor and peripheral details, lack of attention to them could undo much of what you may achieve through your hard work on research, teaching, and service. We suggest that you consider taking a business etiquette training class, participating in a local professional society, or reading some books on personal relationships in the business world.

In closing, we wish all of our colleagues a successful career, and we hope that our sharing can offer some assistance to your success.

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