

Monday Motivator

NATIONAL CENTER FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT & DIVERSITY

Monday, March 25, 2019

The Art of Delegation

It's always perplexing to me that new faculty who describe themselves as physically, emotionally, and intellectually exhausted are often so resistant to trying a little delegation. I've attended lots of large conferences and met lots of new faculty, most of whom told me how tired and frazzled they felt each week. Every time I asked someone *why* they felt so fatigued, I heard lists of work a mile long! But when I gently suggested delegating some of that work, hiring help, or seeking assistance, these ideas were met with scoffs, gasps, glares, and defensiveness. That made me realize it's definitely time to discuss Common New Faculty Mistake #12: **Believing You Must Do EVERYTHING Yourself.**

For a variety of reasons, new faculty members often believe they must do everything on their own. This may be because they did so as graduate students, are unaware of the support services available to them, don't trust others, feel uncomfortable asking for help, and/or simply have no experience

delegating tasks. No matter what causes people to feel that they must do everything themselves, it results in the same problems: exhaustion, inefficiency, and lower productivity. You have only a finite number of hours in each workday, and they need to be aligned with your promotion and tenure criteria in order for you to be successful. If non-essential tasks are keeping you from research and writing, it's time to rethink the *do-everything-yourself* strategy in order to focus your energy on the things that really matter.

Evaluate Your Tasks and Delegate

If you are feeling exhausted, stop for a moment and examine your workload. Then gently ask yourself the following questions:

Which tasks must be done by ME, and which tasks can be completed by SOMEONE ELSE?

Every aspect of your job is comprised of a series of tasks. Some of the tasks can only be done by you, so you should continue to invest your energy in them. But there are many tasks that do not require your personal attention to get done. In other words, they can, and possibly should, be completed by someone else.

Where Can I Get Help?

Some of you are fortunate enough to have research, professional development, and/or start-up funds, access to motivated graduate and/or undergraduate students, and competent office staff. These supportive resources and people are in place to assist you in becoming successful and productive in your research, so utilize them! Once you have identified what tasks can be done by someone other than you, imagine who else could complete them. Below are some ways that the new faculty I've worked with started to identify non-essential tasks and delegate them:

- One person realized she was spending an hour printing and making copies before each class. She decided to post half the material on her

class's Blackboard site and ask her department staff person to copy the remaining items.

- Another person needed assistance grading exams -- she created a [rubric](#) and hired a grader on an hourly basis for the end of the semester.
- Another couldn't find the time to get a manuscript that was 90% complete out the door -- he sent it to a [professional editor](#).
- Another still had not unpacked the boxes in her office from last summer's move and was losing too much time each week searching for things. She hired a highly organized undergraduate student on an hourly basis to read [Organizing From The Inside Out](#), design a system for her office, and help unpack those boxes.
- Another person assumed she would have to index her own book (after learning that the press publishing her manuscript would not pay for the indexing) -- instead she asked her chair for ideas and found out that her college has a "book subvention fund" for new faculty and all she had to do was apply and hire an indexer recommended by the press.
- Finally, one needed to fill in the holes of a bibliography -- she asked her RA to complete this task (it was the first task she had delegated to him all year because she "didn't want to impose" on his time).

Once new faculty members realize that they don't have to do everything themselves, the next layer of resistance to delegation is often some form of the following: *"You don't understand! I don't have any money, and my institution is broke!"* Whenever I hear this, I know to ask: *"Have you actually requested assistance, or are you just assuming it doesn't exist?"* Nine out of ten times, the defensive and dismissive resister had been constantly hearing about budget cuts, shrinking endowments, and various predictions of institutional apocalypse. They then assumed that there were no funds available to support anything beyond basic necessities at their college. But when they *actually* asked for help, they were often surprised and delighted to find that people helped them get their needs met.

Sometimes it's through internal funding that the new faculty member may not have known existed (like that book subvention fund). Sometimes it's through creative use of existing resources that the new faculty member simply wasn't utilizing properly (like asking departmental staff to make copies for you). My main point is simply this: You do NOT have to be rich or work for a well-funded private institution to delegate tasks on your to-do list. You DO have to understand that doing everything yourself can lower your overall productivity on the things that matter to your long-term success. So, if you're feeling overwhelmed and not making progress on your research agenda, it makes sense to determine what tasks can be done by someone else and find innovative ways to delegate those non-essential tasks.

I don't know what your individual needs and/or resources are, but it's worth taking 15 minutes during this week's [Sunday Meeting](#) to review your commitments for the remainder of the term, consider what non-essential tasks are on your to-do list, decide how they can be delegated and who (besides you) can get them done. In other words, if you have more work than hours in a day, it's time to take a fresh look around and ask: *How can I delegate?* Get creative and do some brainstorming with mentors in your department, your professional network, or on the NCFDD [discussion forum](#).

The Weekly Challenge

This week I challenge each of you to do the following:

- Analyze your to-do list for this week.
- Determine what tasks must be done by you and what can be delegated to someone else.
- Think creatively about how to use your existing resources to move some non-essential tasks off your plate.
- If you are afraid to ask departmental staff members to do their job and/or "don't want to impose" on graduate assistants, stop and ask yourself: *What's up with that?*

- If you don't have funds under your control for supportive services, ask your department chair what resources exist on campus to support your professional development and productivity.
- If you're still resistant to delegation, gently ask yourself: *Why do I feel that I must* do everything myself? What high-priority work isn't getting done while I am doing low-priority busy work?
- (Re)commit yourself to at least 30 minutes of writing every day. That's definitely something that only YOU can do!

I hope that this week brings you extraordinary clarity when analyzing your tasks, unlimited creativity as you delegate the non-essential ones, and the deep joy that comes from investing your best energy into your intellectual projects!

Warmly,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore, PhD
Founder, [National Center for Faculty
Development & Diversity](#)



Upcoming Training

Multi-Week Course: How to Craft and Submit a Winning Book Proposal in 4 Weeks

3/19 - 4/9 (Tuesdays) 2:00-3:30pm ET

Facilitator: Badia Ahad, PhD, Associate Professor