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IT'S ABOUT TIME

The Highly Effective Department Chair

> There are no great limits to growth because there are no limits of human intelligence, imagination, and wonder.
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> —*Ronald Reagan*

Writing this book took me about 567 hours, including many hours during my sabbatical in the fall of 2009 studying the literature on time management and department chair leadership and writing many pages of content that did not make it into the final version of the book. Prior to that I spent eight years as chair of the Department of Mathematics at Eastern Washington University, during which time I spent an estimated 2,147 hours reading and replying to e-mails, writing memos, and doing other routine office tasks, 954 hours preparing and revising course schedules, and 221 hours dealing with student complaints, all of which gave inspiration for many anecdotes and case studies presented in this book. I don't have an accurate count of the number of times my colleagues or students interrupted me in the middle of an important task or the number of hours I wasted completing tasks that turned out to have no meaningful payoff. Yet if you read at the same rate as I do, you will be able to read this book and learn what I learned during this time in less than three hours.

Like most department chairs, I spent most of my professional career prior to accepting this position teaching college classes, writing research articles in my field of specialization, and serving

in numerous service functions, none of which had any relevance to the skills needed to be a successful department chair. Among those skills, I found time management to be the most crucial one. A few years into my first term as chair, as a recovering workaholic and urgency addict, I became a self-professed student of time management. Through studying, presenting workshops on the topic at professional meetings, and writing this book and several articles (Hansen, 2007, 2008, 2009b), I have remained a student of this subject rather than an expert.

From this perspective, this book is different from any other time management book available. Nearly all such books are written by experts in the field, authors who have given workshops and seminars to thousands of professionals around the world and appeared frequently on prime-time network television. With the exception of one time management book (Whisenhunt, 1987), all books on time management referenced in this book are written by someone who has never served in an academic leadership position. Authors like Alan Lakein, Alec MacKenzie, and Stephen Covey have all made significant contributions to the foundation of time management, but their books are written with the private business professional in mind. This is not a coincidence, for this audience makes up the vast majority of today's workforce. My book is written for a much smaller audience, the audience of department chairs. With respect to articles on time management specifically written for department chairs, only a handful are cited in this book, including Crandell (2005), Hecht (2005), and Hedges (2003). Here are some of the ways in which department chairs' time management problems differ from those of business professionals:

- More complex reporting structures (spider web organization rather than tree organization)
- Different measures of productivity (student preparation for careers, intellectual property, and service to the community rather than revenue generation)

- More complex hiring structures and reduced mobility among employees
- Workloads defined by functions rather than time commitments
- More focus on people than on things (85 to 90 percent of university budgets are allocated to people)

This book offers no new fundamental theory of time management. It does not attempt to introduce a fifth generation of time management or a ninth habit of effectiveness. It offers practical advice on how to effectively lead an academic unit and manage its resources, with a focus on making the most effective use of time for the department chair and everyone with whom he or she interacts.

The Need for Balance

Everyone knows that if we had more time, we could do more. But we cannot get more time because we already have all the time there is. Time management is not about creating more time but rather about making the best use of the time we have. Much of what is discussed in this book is about creating balance: balancing chair and faculty workload, balancing time spent on the various duties of the chair position, balancing productivity with product capability, balancing work and family, and so on. Vilfredo Pareto's 80/20 principle (Koch, 1998) indicates that imbalance rather than balance is the natural state of affairs. Thus with time management, we seek to create balance by working against our natural tendency to create imbalance.

You Are Already Doing a Great Job

In spite of the complex nature of the job, new department chairs usually receive inadequate training, if any at all, before stepping into the position (Chu, 2006; Gmelch and Miskin, 2004). Many new chairs are overwhelmed with the number of demands placed

on their time and get buried in paperwork, faculty evaluations, and meetings. My impression from talking to many department chairs and to researchers who have studied the chair profession itself is that in spite of the lack of preparation, the vast majority of chairs are perceived as being successful in their job. This view of the department chair may be biased because most of the ones I have met actively seek to improve themselves by studying the literature and attending conferences for people in their profession. Certainly anyone reading this book would fall within this limited scope. So if you are like most of the department chairs I have met, chances are that you are already doing a great job.

Effective time management skills represent only a small subset of the skills needed to be a successful department chair, including those discussed in the general leadership books for department chairs, such as Buller (2006), Chu (2006), Conway (1996), Gmelch and Miskin (2004), Hecht and colleagues (1999), Leamyng (2007), Lees (2006), and Tucker (1992). It is certainly possible for someone to have good time management skills and yet do a poor job as department chair. More commonly, I have seen department chairs who are doing well in the job *in spite of* poor time management skills. Consider the following comment made by rock legend Alice Cooper in his 2007 book *Alice Cooper, Golf Monster*: "When I think about all the time I wasted drunk, it makes me cringe. There are four albums that I don't even remember writing or recording! I look back at those albums and there are some good songs on them. I would love to rerecord some of those tunes now that I am sober and make them into really great songs. They may have turned out okay, but I know they could have been so much better" (p. 202). Similarly, many department chairs are doing a great job but could be doing an even greater job by overcoming their addiction to urgency, personal disorganization, and stress, and their lack of ability to prioritize. Many department chairs work 50, 60, or more hours a week, sacrificing their personal lives, shortchanging their families, and putting their health at serious risk.

Mastering time management does not imply that hard work can be avoided, and in most cases the job of department chair will require a workweek of more than 40 hours, at least during busy periods. The 80/20 principle suggests that 80 percent of our results are accomplished through only 20 percent of our efforts, but to propose that 80 percent of what a department chair does in a week could be done in one day's hard work is absurd. Nevertheless, the 80/20 principle can be very useful in determining areas where department chairs can improve in their use of time.

Like Alice Cooper, who traded his dangerous addiction to alcohol for healthier addictions to golf and music, you, by learning time management, can trade your addiction to urgency for healthier addictions to results and effectiveness. Applying the methods discussed in this book, you should be able to identify areas in which your use of time is not very effective and make changes that will result in spending more time on the aspects of your job that really matter and eliminating many that don't. You may already be doing a great job, but with effective time management you could be doing even better and make your job more enjoyable.

Personal Time Versus Department Time

Most time management books are written with the individual person in mind. However, considering "personal" time management in isolation leads to the false belief that each individual's time is worth more than everyone else's. A department chair is not only responsible for managing his or her own personal time (at work and at home) but is also responsible for managing "department" time from a more global perspective. Seeing that most tasks are assigned to a department through the department chair, the chair is ultimately responsible for setting priorities not just at the personal level but at the department level as well, especially in light of the fact that the collective department time of all faculty and staff is limited.

Whereas the total sum of individual time is a constant, the total sum of department time varies with the size and composition of the department in terms of faculty and staff. In a small department with only a few faculty and little or no support staff, managing department time is highly correlated with how well a chair manages his or her own personal time. In a large department with perhaps over one hundred faculty members and a large support staff, there is more department time available but also a larger volume of workload to be managed. Managing a large volume of department time can be both easier and more difficult than managing a small volume. It may be easier because the chair has more options to delegate work and thus ease the impact on personal time but more difficult because there is a much higher potential for disaster and magnitude of impact on the chair's personal time if the chair is not effective in delegating tasks and in prioritizing tasks assigned to the department.

Differences in the Department Chair Role

Although many of the examples presented in this book are based on my own environment, I am well aware that the department chair position varies from institution to institution, from discipline to discipline, and with the size and complexity of each department. Consequently, what constitutes priority "chair work" varies a great deal from position to position.

At a two-year institution where most faculty are hired just to teach, the chair is often solely responsible for major administrative tasks, including hiring and evaluating faculty. With often a heavy workload in both teaching and administrative tasks, chairs in two-year institutions have little or no time to devote to strategic planning, curriculum development, or external affairs. At comprehensive universities with a strong emphasis on research, the chair may be far more concerned with the pursuit of external funding for research than at institutions that focus primarily on teaching. The role of the chair also varies between public and

private institutions. At private institutions where all funding comes from tuition and investments, the chair may have a stronger role in student recruitment and alumni relationships than at public institutions where a large portion of the budget is provided by the government. Likewise, as public institutions exist at the mercy of taxpayers and hence are more vulnerable to variations in the economy, political lobbying is becoming more and more important for public institutions, perhaps even affecting the role of the department chair.

What appears to be a common factor among institutions of all types is that colleges and universities around the world have adopted much stricter measures of accountability for faculty performance than what was the case even just a decade ago. Department chairs serving as the main intermediaries between faculty and the administration face increasingly harder challenges in their multiple and sometimes conflicting roles as leaders, managers, and scholars. Ironically, as demands for leadership preparation of department chairs have increased, the time and resources available for chairs to pursue the necessary leadership preparation have decreased.

Organization of This Book

The department chair position requires both management skills and leadership skills. Recognizing that both types of skills are crucial to time management, the chapters in Part One are focused on *managing resources* and chapters in Part Two on *working with people* (faculty, students, staff, administrators, and external constituents). Chapter Ten is intended as the capstone of the book, discussing the important topic of achieving overall work-life balance.

Because time is a limited resource for department chairs, the size of this book was kept to a minimum, making the book ideal as an introduction to the subject on time management for this unique audience. Each of the remaining nine chapters concludes

with a list of questions and practical tips intended to provide the reader with tools for self-reflection and suggestions for immediate implementation. Each chapter is written in a casual rather than scholarly tone, with the focus on the chair as a practitioner and with case studies and personal reflections incorporated into the text. The intention of the book is to go beyond anecdotal evidence to provide a solid research-based theoretical foundation on which department chairs in virtually all academic environments can rely.