

CHAPTER ONE



Step 1: Clarify Values and Expectations

Anna

Anna had just been appointed chair. Walter was a senior member of the faculty with an international reputation for scholarship. He had just acted badly in a department meeting, using ridicule and sarcasm to belittle a colleague who was proposing a modification of the curriculum. No one stood up to him. After the meeting, Anna and two of her close colleagues were gathered in Anna's office. They were angry. Their anger was less with Walter than with themselves. Among their comments were "We let him get away with it again," "He's carried on like this for too many years," and "Anna, you're the chair now; you've got to do something."

What would you think if you were Anna? Wouldn't you feel defensive and wonder, "Why me?" Wouldn't you be frustrated that previous chairs had not stood up to Walter? If Anna did decide to act, what should she do? Should she go to Walter's office and confront him? Maybe she should have confronted him in front of everybody. But how could she have done that and not just made matters worse? Actually, she probably already did make matters worse in that she essentially condoned his behavior by saying nothing. Now all of the rest of the faculty, including her two close colleagues, had been let down.

Because Anna's case is real (she was chair of an English Department), we have the benefit of knowing what she did. After a little more venting, the three colleagues realized that what they needed was a departmental behavioral code. Using the whiteboard for brainstorming, they wrote "cordiality," "no threats or insults," "be respectful," "be supportive," and "no swearing." Encouraged, they brainstormed some more individually and then regrouped, only to find that they were hesitant about bringing their work into the open. A solution came as they decided to expand their efforts to include expectations for all aspects of their work, not just civility, and to involve others, including staff and students. They started with other members of the faculty whom they expected would lend a willing hand. When they had a solid draft, Anna showed it to her dean and the faculty relations director to ensure that the code was in harmony with the university's mission and policies; the dean even asked if he could share it with other departments when it was finished. (The faculty on Anna's campus was not unionized, but if it had been, it would have been essential for her to check out union agreements and to involve a union representative in the development of the departmental code.)

~ An Expectations Document ~

“Early in my tenure, I wrote a department expectations document that was unanimously adopted by the faculty. The adoption was successful because I circulated drafts and revisions electronically among the faculty for weeks before there was any discussion in an open meeting. The document has been very valuable to our faculty and to me as I evaluate performance. I believe that it has also given starting faculty very clear guidelines for their first years in the department.”

—*Survey comment*

Nine months after that first meeting in Anna’s office, a “measures of excellence” document was accepted by near-unanimous vote of the department; Walter was one of only two who abstained. The following represents the major points of the document. Behavior was rated on a five-point scale, ranging from superior (5) to unacceptable (1). Level 4 and 5 performance included and built on level 3 (successful) performance.

Teaching

5. **Superior** teaching, as evidenced by continual reconsideration of course learning outcomes, with valid and transparent measures consistent with program and department goals. Student ratings significantly above department averages. Highly active in mentoring students outside the class (undergraduate theses, special projects, etc.).
4. **Strong** teaching, as evidenced by creative and rigorous course design and delivery, attention to course learning outcomes and measures, attention to students outside of

- class, and above-average student ratings, including narrative comments.
3. **Successful** teaching, as evidenced by efforts to revise and improve with well-considered goals, solid lesson plans, helpful and prompt feedback, and sincere concern for student learning. Student ratings near the department average. Course learning goals consistent with and supportive of program learning outcomes.
 2. **Substandard** teaching, as evidenced by some combination of subpar student ratings, significant student complaints, frequent absences from class or late arrival to class, failure to provide students with prompt feedback, superficial attention to course and program learning outcomes, and/or resistance to department work on assessment.
 1. **Unacceptable** teaching, as evidenced by very low teaching scores (greater than 1.5 points below department average on seven-point scale), consistent student complaints, failure to provide students with helpful and timely feedback, course content that fails to meet disciplinary standards, and/or refusal to accept proportionate share of teaching load.

Scholarship

5. **Superior** scholarship by consistently publishing major monographs, collections, editions, groundbreaking articles or creative works, and the like, in prestigious publications or venues.
4. **Strong** scholarship by producing articles or creative works and presentations at high-profile conferences, with a high level of involvement in the profession (including receiving fellowships or awards, editorial service, book reviews, etc.).

3. **Successful** scholarship by averaging one peer-reviewed article or equivalent per year, with verifiable progress toward a major scholarly project (book, edition, translation). Timely and thoughtful annual reports with well-considered goals.
2. **Substandard** scholarship consisting of a trend of not publishing and with no tangible evidence of work in progress. Submits annual report, though with little thought or commitment to improvement.
1. **Unacceptable** scholarship, with no verifiable work in progress, no recent submissions, and no publications over a multiyear period. Does not willingly develop plans for improvement and shows no enthusiasm for increasing teaching or service contributions to compensate for lack of scholarly work.

Service

5. **Superior**, diligent service to department, college, university, or profession by attending meetings and contributing constructively; includes holding leadership posts. Contributes actively and positively to the morale of the department and campus.
4. **Strong**, faithful service on major assignments or significant department, college, or university committees. Volunteers for assignments. May include national work such as editorial boards, scholarly reviewer, and assignments in national organizations.
3. **Successful** service with consistent attendance and input at most department, college, and university meetings. Available and accessible. Has well-considered goals for continuing growth as a university citizen. Uses university resources appropriately.

2. **Substandard** service including frequent absence from meetings, consistently coming late, and/or inconsistent or unreliable performance on committees. Little evidence of commitment to improvement. Questionable loyalty to unit mission evidenced by nonsupportive behavior or public comments.
1. **Unacceptable** service by failure to participate in meetings and refusal to serve on committees and to fulfill assignments. Frequently away from office and disengaged from formal and informal life of the department. Does not willingly develop plans for improvement and/or shows little or no progress on meeting expectations.

Collegiality

5. **Superior** collegiality as evidenced by contributing actively and positively to the morale of the department and campus. Promotes courtesy and harmony and politely takes a stand against incivility when it occurs. Openly recognizes and promotes contributions of others in achieving department and university goals. Works for the good of the whole rather than for personal gain or credit. Is supportive of others' careers, lives, and families.
4. **Strong** collegiality based on positive interaction with others and having and assuming positive intent with all comments. Supports candid dialogue and disagrees agreeably. Open to new ideas, teachable. Optimistic, and complimentary in conversations and correspondence. Listens attentively.
3. **Successful** collegiality as evidenced by using courtesy and respect when interacting with students, staff, campus offices, administration, visitors, and professional colleagues. Supports unit mission, goals, and behavioral

norms. Keeps sensitive or private information confidential. Has a sense of humor and uses it respectfully.

2. **Substandard** collegiality as shown by minimizing mission, values, behavioral norms, or policy. Arrogant and condescending; treats colleagues, staff, and students as inferiors; ignores or excludes them. Interrupts, tells side jokes, or holds ancillary discussions in meetings. Participates in fabrications and gossip. Uses dirty looks, sarcasm, teasing.
1. **Unacceptable** collegiality as demonstrated by ignoring or violating behavioral norms or policy. Insubordinate, prejudiced, known for inflammatory statements or e-mails. Humiliates, threatens, attacks, degrades, or insults others. Fails to respect personal space; makes uninvited physical contact; uses vulgarity.

~ “A Covenant That Guides Our Core Beliefs” ~

As chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Carol Mullen writes, “Alongside my faculty I have produced a covenant that guides our core beliefs and embeds our group’s conscience, cultural values, and professional aspirations.”¹ Carol clarified that the covenant was not a policy document that came down from administration with “punitive controls.” Rather it was developed in-house and consisted of “an enduring promise” to one another to live by the expressed tenets. Carol and her colleagues involved everyone at all levels in the department. They obtained feedback from their dean, provost, and university attorney to ensure consistency with

university policy. They viewed their covenant as a “lighthouse” which promoted the following, among other ideals:

“Individuals’ continuous growth through improved experimentation with one’s pedagogy and demonstrated articulation of that growth.”

Prioritizing the quality of one’s publications and other contributions over their quantity. “We share Albert Einstein’s view that ‘not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted.’”

Collegiality “as necessary in a community of intellectual peers for the betterment and collective governance of the department.”

Like Anna’s department, Carol and her colleagues agreed on specific performances and behaviors to which they were committed. It is easy to understand why Carol said that their covenant helped them find their way in the academic culture and was particularly useful when deviant behavior arose. I know from talking with Carol that no member of her faculty would claim to be ignorant of their covenant and its contents.

“We renew our commitment to our department values annually, with faculty explaining what the values mean to them and helping our newer faculty become part of our community.”

—*Survey comment*

~ “A Few Rules and Expectations” ~

For twelve years Winn Egan was chair of the Department of Teacher Education at Brigham Young University. He reported that as a new chair, he soon found that the hardest part was

dealing with obnoxious people, especially in meetings.² After he had been on the job for four years, he decided that the department needed a few rules and expectations. “Some thought it was immature to have to do that, but it got us thinking about how we wanted to be when we’re together,” he said. Their rules included the following:

Participation

- Attend meetings.
- Arrive on time.
- Come prepared; follow through with all assignments.
- Be actively involved.

Communication

- Listen; take time for full explanations.
- Work toward equity in hearing all voices.
- Be open to new ideas.
- Assume positive intent with all comments.
- Learn how to disagree agreeably.
- Don’t hold back; say what needs to be said.
- Avoid side discussions.
- Realize that being heard does not always mean acceptance of the ideas.
- Seek to understand differences through dialogue and discussion.

Social Interactions

- Be respectful and courteous.
- Avoid sarcasm.
- Learn the names of all faculty members.

- When you have difficulty with someone, talk to that person.
- Interact with new people and make them feel welcome.

“We still have conflicts,” Winn says, “but now that we have our statement of understanding, they’re almost all healthy ones. It’s been like going from night to day. Problem behaviors have pretty much narrowed down to those that require very special one-on-one attention such as emotional instability, troubles at home, and that sort of thing.”

~ Starting with a Vision or Mission ~

Departments don’t always start where Anna’s did; they develop a vision or mission statement or something like it—a clarification of their contract with society, their duties, and their core purpose. Once discovered and refined through self-examination with no one left out, this document serves as a guiding star that can unify and inspire the department.

Jody Bortone was chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy and Health Sciences at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. Jody and her faculty retreated to a member’s house one summer and began putting up sticky notes with words that came to mind as they discussed what was important to them and what they aspired to be. As they were arranging the words, the acronym PRIDE (for *principled, responsive, innovative, dynamic, and excellent*) emerged.³ What follows is a condensed version of the vision and mission statement Jody’s department developed (only one bulleted point per category is shown here; the complete statement appears in Appendix A).

Sacred Heart University Graduate Program in Occupational Therapy

PROGRAM'S VISION

We are:

PRINCIPLED

- We prioritize service to the local community, especially the uninsured, poor, children, and women.

RESPONSIVE

- The program strives to be readily available and personally attend to the needs of our students, staff, and faculty and operate in a student-centered manner.

INNOVATIVE

- The program is among the first in the University to implement cutting-edge technologies for learning and daily operation.

DYNAMIC

- The program faculty are collaborative and team-oriented and strive for diversity and dynamism in pedagogy, clinical expertise, and educational approach.

EXCELLENT

- The faculty provide service to the community, engage in continual curricular improvements and innovative design, and are committed to quality teaching, scholarship, and leadership in the profession.

(Continued)

**Sacred Heart University Graduate Program in
Occupational Therapy (*Continued*)**

PROGRAM'S MISSION

We are committed to giving personal attention to each student in order to foster in them:

- Active engagement in promoting a just society through professional practice, leadership, and scholarship

We believe that:

- A compassionate heart is essential in all interactions with clients and communities of need

We promote a learning environment that:

- Forms collaborative partnerships between faculty, students, and clinical practitioners

Our approach to learning is to:

- Foster clinical reasoning and evidenced-based practice through self-directed, problem-based learning

Notice that Jody's faculty did not assemble a detailed definition of their territory as different from another department on campus. They did not compose a patronizing proclamation designed to impress. Instead they pinpointed the specific work and behavior that would make them proud of what they did and how they did it.

If people have a clear understanding of their unit's mission and values, they will be slower to pursue their own personal agendas. Wise is the chair who regularly reinforces the agreed priorities of the department and institution and also helps the

faculty document that their work is compliant and supportive. Then with the department's statement of behavioral expectations in hand, it is relatively easy for a chair to deal with individual action or performance that is off target. If the unit's objectives and expected behaviors are unclear or unknown, the chair will likely be hesitant to confront what he feels is aberrant behavior because it will come across as "my opinion versus yours."

"Starting every meeting with an examination of our mission and a reminder of who we are has helped keep us all moving in the same direction."

—*Survey comment*

Some people think that good mission statements should be short enough for everyone to memorize. Years ago I saw a small sign framed on the wall of a Pizza Hut. It said, "The mission of Pizza Hut is to be the first place people think of when they want a pizza." I thought it was effective. One of my colleagues is a Catholic nun; her personal mission is "to improve the welfare of my soul and the souls of others." Many departments use "students first" as their mantra. Then whenever they find themselves bogged in indecision, they can pause and ask, which budgetary allocation, which curriculum adjustment, or which candidate will best serve the needs and interests of our students?

~ Fun ~

Frequently referring to and using mission statements and values can be fun. Jim Kouzes and Barry Posner recommend using celebrations to reinforce dedication to mission and to reinforce acceptable behaviors. They write:

All over the world, in every country, in every culture, people stop working on certain days during the year and take the time to celebrate. . . . Celebrations are among the most significant ways we have to proclaim our respect and gratitude, to renew our sense of community, and to remind ourselves of the values and history that bind us together.⁴

If your department has a document that spells out its mission and clarifies the behavior that people expect and value as they carry it out, you have an excellent resource to draw on as

❁ *Refer to your document often, include it in your celebrations, and most important of all, honor it.*

you interact with a member of the faculty who appears to be off track or out of compliance. If you don't have such a document, consider doing what chairs like Anna, Jody Bortone, Carol Mullen, and Winn Egan have done and put something together. When you're finished,

refer to your document often, include it in your celebrations, and most important of all, honor it.

~ A Word of Caution ~

Sometimes mission statements, vision statements, goal statements, and the like can be a sham—a false store front that serves no purpose than to decorate your office or home page and waste your time. It may even become an item of ridicule as members of your unit realize it is not honored.

The key to a good mission statement is its integrity and the process by which it is created. You will not *compose* a good mission

statement; you will *discover* it. It will not describe or define you; it will guide and inspire you. It will arise out of reflection on what your group identifies as most important to you at your deepest level—what motivates you to come to work early or stay late, for the good of the whole, even when there is no deadline.

~ A Great Department Climate ~

One of the principal fruits of clarifying values and expectations, *and then upholding them*, is a favorable department climate. Irene Hecht and her colleagues write the following:

On most campuses there are in fact dozens of microenvironments with sharply divergent cultures: good-spirited, productive departments coexist alongside dysfunctional ones. As a faculty member once explained to me, “When we go to work in the morning, we go to our department.” And more often than not, the morale—the tone of life in a department—is a mirror of its chair.⁵

Most chairs will likely be reluctant to accept the onus suggested in that paragraph. But if you are determined to sustain the enjoyable climate that now exists in your department, or if you feel inspired to use your term to make a transitional start from dysfunctional to great, consider that among all the suggestions in the chair literature (organize a lot of socials, walk the halls and interact with people, send personal notes, bring chocolates, attend seminars, catch people doing good things, pay compliments, and so on)—all of which are excellent practices—nothing is more foundational to a great climate than the knowledge and assurance that people who come to work in your department understand what is valued, as well as what

sort of performance and behavior are expected of them, and that these expectations are upheld.

Summary for Step 1: Clarify Values and Expectations

- Identify (through group process) your unit's mission and values.
- Clarify (through group process) behavioral norms and expectations.
- Constantly revisit, celebrate, and uphold what you identify.
- Use mission and values as a standard against which you evaluate performance and behavior; the deviant will stand out.

Notes

1. C. A. Mullen. (2010). Promoting departmental community and civility through covenant development. *Department Chair*, 20(4), 13–16.
2. W. Egan. Personal communication, October 20, 2009.
3. J. Bortone. Personal communication, October 21, 2009.
4. J. M. Kouzes & B. Z. Posner. (2003). *The Jossey-Bass academic administrator's guide to exemplary leadership* (p. 89). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
5. I.W.D. Hecht, M. L. Higgerson, W. H. Gmelch, & A. Tucker. (1999). *The department chair as academic leader* (p. vii). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press.