

READINGS

Postdoc Academic Chat #9, June 24, 2011

HOW TO ENJOY YOUR ACADEMIC JOB - AND GET TENURE IN THE BARGAIN

#1 The Ten Commandments of Tenure Success

#2 The Politics of Tenure

#3 Avoid Burnout

#1 The Ten Commandments of Tenure Success

There are hundreds of published articles and many books on the subject of tenure. One of the best sources for beginning faculty is: *Getting Tenure*, by Marcia Whicker, Jennie Kronenfeld, and Ruth Strickland. In it, the authors tell you how to manage your tenure case and then step you carefully through the tenure process in a way that helps you meet your institution's research, teaching, and service criteria.

The book stresses the importance of keeping a record of everything related to tenure criteria. Such a record should not only include teaching evaluations, but also "letters from students about teaching, course syllabi, documents showing participation in service activities, copies of requests for reviews of articles and books, letters commending service activities, publications, and conference papers."

The authors also talk about the process of identifying outside reviewers, whose comments will have a significant impact on your tenure case. They offer this advice:

- * Pick people at equivalent peer or better institutions but be sure they understand the norms of your kind of institution.
- * Use no more than one referee from your doctoral institution.
- * Use only one person from a group with which you have written articles.
- * Referees should be at a higher rank than you.
- * Include full professors along with associate professors.
- * Contact people in advance before putting their name on your list.
- * Do not include someone who indicates they are too busy or unfamiliar with your work.

Many of the key points in the book are summarized in the author's Ten Commandments of Tenure Success. They are:

1. Publish, publish, publish! (Pay attention to what does and doesn't count.).
 2. View tenure as a political process. (It's more like a legislative process than a bureaucratic one).
 3. Find out the tenure norms. (Understand the difference between written standards and operational standards).
 4. Document everything.(As noted above.).
 5. Rely on your record, not on promises of protection. (Remember that administrators come and go.).
 6. Reinforce research with teaching and service. (Leverage each with the other for maximum effectiveness.).
 7. Do not run your department or university until after tenure. (Skip the university policy meetings; go to the computer center, library or advisory meeting with students instead.).
 8. Be a good department citizen. (Determine where, when and how to chip in and pull your weight.).
 9. Manage your own professional image. (Image management is important, but not a substitute for productivity.).
 10. Develop a marketable record. (Seek to develop a record that is tenurable anywhere.)
-

*Adapted from: Getting Tenure, by Marcia Whicker, Jennie Kornfeld, and Ruth Strickland, © copyright 1993, Sage Publications, Inc., reprinted by permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

#2 The Politics of Tenure

(From: Tomorrow's Professor: Preparing for Academic Careers in Science and Engineering, Richard M. Reis, author. IEE Press, 1997

You need to view promotion and tenure as a political process. By doing so you are not ignoring substance, rather you are recognizing that substance alone is not enough, that there is also a human side to the success equation. An excellent discussion of this element appears in Chapter 4, Appreciating the Practical Politics of Getting Promoted, in Mentor In A Manual - Climbing The Academic Ladder To Tenure, by A. Clay Schoenfeld and Robert Magnan.

To the authors, politics is not a dirty word, but rather, "the total complex of relations between persons in society." [9] While recognizing that political situations can differ widely from campus to campus, Schoenfeld and Magnan believe that you need to pay particular attention to; "Situations for which your principal challenge is to understand the going standards or requirements [of your department] and to adapt to them with insight and aplomb."

In learning and adapting to the dynamics of your tenure granting department the authors suggest that you try and determine the following:

- * What is expected of the department by the divisional CEO (usually the dean).
 - * What is expected of you by the department.
 - * The strengths and weaknesses of your compatriots.
 - * Other key people whose willing support is necessary to you and your department.
- Schoenfeld and Magnan then go on to list a dozen essential questions that you need to answer about your department. They are:

- (1) What's the real power structure of the department?
- (2) Who are the informal leaders in the department? What is the source of their power as informal leaders? Are the informal leaders positive or negative forces in terms of my meeting my responsibilities? In other words, who are strategic sources of support? of sabotage?
- (3) Can I assume that my responsibilities, as outlined in my letter of appointment, are consonant with the understanding of the faculty members who will ultimately evaluate me?
- (4) How do my assigned responsibilities fit in with the responsibilities of the department? the college?
- (5) What specific functions am I personally responsible for on my own?
- (6) What standards must I meet in my first year? the second? beyond?
- (7) What policies and standard operating procedures exist to assist me?
- (8) What are the formal norms I'm expected to comply with? Are these formal norms apt to be productive on my terms?
- (9) What informal norms am I expected to follow? Which are likely to be productive? counterproductive?

(10) What are the strengths and weaknesses of department support staff personnel? of my graduate students, particularly any TAs or RAs? of my undergraduates, particularly advisees?

(11) Who are the key people who support activities promoting the department mission? What are their positive and negative attributes?

(12) What are the strengths and weaknesses of the department in terms of each required function - teaching, research, and service?

Obviously answering these questions will take time. Doing so will also test your astuteness and ability to identify and work with the right mentors and role models. The vignettes in this, and previous chapters, should give you assurance that others are indeed willing to help. Now let's take a look at what one university is trying to do in this regard.

3. Avoid Burnout

The posting below has some very good advice on managing burnout . It is by Mary McKinney, Ph.D. of Successful Academic Coaching. Please visit Mary's web site at <http://www.successfulacademic.com> for additional tenure track tips and dissertation writing strategies. email: mckinney@successfulacademic.com. Copyright © 2000-07 Mary McKinney, Ph.D. - All Rights Reserved. Reprinted with permission.
How Long Have You Been Keeping This Pace?

The average amount of time from entering grad school until getting tenure is more than 18 years! Wow!

Remember this daunting figure when you tell yourself that you'll take time off as soon as you jump through the next hoop. Instead, seek to develop a rich and relatively balanced life while you're still a student or junior faculty member.

In order to avoid burnout, it is just as important to make time for relationships, relaxation and recreation as it is to schedule time for your work.

Beware of the fate of Don Quixote:

In short, he so busied himself in his books that he spent the nights reading from twilight till daybreak and the days from dawn till dark; and so from little sleep and much reading his brain dried up and he lost his wits. -Cervantes

Balancing Work and Play

Down Time - Everyone needs regular periods of relaxation to recharge. Getting together with friends, going to movies, listening to your favorite music, or taking a long, steaming bath: I'm sure that you can imagine many excellent ways to rejuvenate and everyone has their own best way to relax. Just remember that zoning out in front of the TV is not true

"down time." To really replenish your creative juices, learn the challenging art of doing absolutely nothing.

Days Off - In my workshops and coaching practice, I strongly recommend that people take at least one day off each week from any form of academic work. It is surprising how difficult this assignment is for most scholars. Yet, again and again, people who follow my suggestion are amazed at how much more productive they are during the other six days. Plus, they revel in sharing the new movies, plays, sports events, concerts and festivals they've attended.

Social Life - As one academic told me: If I get tenure, but no longer have my marriage, what good is tenure? Nourishing close relationships is perhaps the most important aspect of your balancing act. Sometimes, when coaching, I help academics make time to seek romance and new friendships. Many scholars need to schedule social time to make sure that they keep in touch with friends and family. For example, you may want to reserve Sunday evenings for phoning people you've lost touch with or neglected.

Joy Breaks - This term is used by Ann McGee-Cooper in her fun book *Time Management for Unmanageable People*. Joy breaks are mini-activities that will renew you by taking your mind off of work for a few minutes. Often they are tasks that relate to future, larger treats. For example, if you'd like to see a movie later in the day, a joy break during your morning writing session might be to look up movie reviews on the web, check the time a show is playing, or call and invite a friend to join you.

Artist Dates - This term was coined by creativity guru Julia Cameron. She defines an artist date as a pre-planned and scheduled block of time, perhaps two hours a week, devoted to "nurturing your creative consciousness." Artist dates, according to Cameron, must be taken alone rather than with friends or partners, and consist of activities such as visiting a museum, attending a concert, exploring an "ethnic neighborhood" or taking a long walk in the wilderness. An artist date is "quality time with yourself". Yes, her style may be "new age" but her suggestions are still useful.

Vacations - Take vacations, vacations, vacations. In workshops, I always ask participants whether they've ever gone on vacation and taken a heavy backpack filled with their laptop and 20 pounds of books and articles. They nod. Then, I ask them whether they have taken this backbreaking load only to leave the books unopened, the articles unread, and the laptop used only to play solitaire? Inevitably, many in the group get sheepish smiles and blush as they nod. Stop taking work with you on vacations. Resist the urge to open work-related email. Commit yourself to a completely guilt-free break. Have guilt-free fun. I guarantee that you'll work with greater productivity when you return.

Managing Stress

Health - Want to work more productively? Make sure that you are taking care of yourself. This includes: getting enough sleep; eating well; staying in shape; making time for an annual physical; and getting professional treatment if you are suffering from depression

or chronic anxiety. Of course you already know the importance of good health, but are you following through on your knowledge? Eighteen years is a long time for an unhealthy lifestyle.

Exercise - It is essential to make time for exercise. Of course you know you should, but are you balancing those long hours in front of your computer with vigorous daily activity? The endorphins will boost your mood, the blood flow will clear your mind, and the results will boost your self-esteem. Make your body a priority. (Beware, however, of signs and symptoms of eating disorders - a growing epidemic in today's weight-obsessed society. If you are exercising compulsively, dieting obsessively, bingeing or purging, please seek professional help.)

Mindfulness and Meditation - There are so many benefits to a practice of mindfulness that I will soon devote a separate section to the topic. In the meantime, try reading the work of Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Relaxation Techniques - Shallow, chest-level breathing rather than abdominal breathing, is a hallmark of stress. Tight, sore neck muscles, frequent headaches and insomnia are some of the other signs that stress is getting to you. If you are chronically tense, or have ever suffered a panic attack, I highly recommend *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* by Edmund Bourne. This comprehensive book covers the assessment and treatment of anxiety disorders and provides instructions for many relaxation techniques.

Visualization - Close your eyes and try to vividly imagine a soothing outdoor scene. A deserted beach with rhythmic waves stroking the sand. A narrow mountain waterfall wending down a fern-lined pass. See the colors, hear the sounds, smell the scents, and feel the sun. Regular practice of visualization, even for a few moments as a break during a work session, is a revitalizing way to relax.

Crafting a Meaningful Life

What is your definition of a successful academic?

True success is more than passing qualifying exams, finishing your dissertation, publishing in topflight journals, or getting tenure.

Authentic happiness may include the following components:

- * A range of passions rather than an unbalanced obsession with work
- * Attention to personal as well as professional development
- * Intimate and mutually-supportive relationships
- * Dedication to making scholarly and practical contributions to the world
- * The quest for a personal spirituality that includes compassion and curiosity
- * Laughter and playfulness

Are you finding ways to create a meaningful life?

(If not, please remember that improving your general satisfaction with your life is often

an essential component of coaching.)