

Leading an Academic Unit: A Chair/Director's Guide

Welcome to the deep dive. Today we're uh tackling something many of us face in university life. Stepping up as a new chair or director.

Right. And we're drawing our insights directly from colleagues actually from the level up a mid-career guide for faculty.

Exactly. That great resource you can find on the center for faculty excellence website. It's written by faculty for faculty which I think is key here.

Definitely. It's a big role change, isn't it? Suddenly you're managing people, programs, all those procedures. It can feel well complex.

It really can. So our mission today, let's say, is to pull out some really practical advice from Level Up. Stuff that experienced faculty shared to help new chairs and directors, you know, succeed.

Sounds good. Where should we start?

Well, one of the first things Level Up hits on is leading by persuasion and example.

Yeah, this is crucial because, as the guide points out, you don't really have much command and control power as a chair,

right? You can't just order faculty around. It doesn't work like that.

Not at all. Influence comes from from um showing you're acting in the best interest of the department of everyone in it. Transparency matters.

Absolutely. And that really gets down to integrity, doesn't it?

Yeah.

Building trust. Level up is pretty clear on this.

Uh-huh. When faculty trust your judgment, trust you're being fair and competent, well, they're much more willing to go along with things to collaborate.

And if you lose that trust,

then you're kind of sunk really. The guide basically says your success hinges on people believing in you and your bird lose that integrity and it all crumbles.

Okay, so trust is fundamental. What else did our colleagues highlight in level up?

Another big one was focusing on solving problems, not just you know winning battles.

Ah yes, avoid creating winners and losers within the faculty.

Exactly. The advice is to really look for those win-win outcomes when conflicts arise. Think collaboration, not competition.

And I like the reminder in the guy that you don't have to have all the answers yourself,

right? You're not supposed to be the lone genius solving everything. thing. Tap into the ideas of your colleagues.

Get the faculty involved in finding solutions.

Yeah, it leads to better outcomes and frankly more buyin from everyone. Makes the unit stronger.

That leads nicely into another point from Level Up, the importance of giving credit.

Oh, definitely. This is huge. A big part of your role is being an advocate, right, for your unit, for the people in it.

So, you need to be actively promoting their successes.

Absolutely. Shine the spotlight on them. And the guide warns pretty strongly against the opposite, like withholding credit or even worse,

taking credit for someone else's work. That's just toxic. It kills morale, destroys that trust we were just talking about.

Yeah, you can see how that would be incredibly damaging. Okay, what about the day-to-day practicalities?

Level Up definitely touches on that. One common challenge it points out is just the sheer amount of information flowing your way.

Emails, memos, requests, it's a lot.

It is. So, the advice from experienced chairs is get organized. Develop a system early on. How are you going to capture info, keep track of it, find it later, share it?

Having a system is key. And related to that, um, meetings.

Oh, meetings. Yes. Learn how to run them effectively. Make them productive, not just, you know, time syncs. Nobody wants more pointless meetings, right? And again, level up suggests you don't need to reinvent the wheel here. Talk to other chairs. Use resources like the Center for Faculty Excellence. Get ideas.

Good advice. Okay, one last crucial point from the guide.

Maybe the most crucial. Honestly, taking care of yourself.

Ah, self-care. Easy to say, harder to do in these demanding roles.

It really is. But level up stresses how vital it is. Your physical, emotional, even spiritual well-being. You have to prioritize it to sustain yourself and lead effectively. You can't pour from an empty cup, right?

So true. Okay, let's recap the key takeaways from our colleagues and level up. We've got lead with integrity, persuade, don't command.

Focus on solving problems. Collect collaboratively seek win-wins.

Give credit freely. Promote your faculty's successes.

Get organized. Manage that information flow. Run good meetings.

And importantly, take care of yourself through it all.

Yeah, I think the overall message from faculty who've been there is about building a supportive, trusting, collaborative environment where people can thrive.

A great summary. So for those of you listening who are new chairs or directors, maybe reflect on these principles. How can this wisdom from your peers in level up help you navigate the role.

And definitely check out the full level up guide on the Center for Faculty Excellence website. There's a lot more practical advice in there from people who really understand the challenges and rewards.