Chair Leaders-Strategies for Effectiveness and Success

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Abstract

Successful and effective Department Chairs can positively impact faculty, staff, and students through enacting specific and practical strategies in the essential areas of personnel, communication, budget, instruction, culture, and change and to help them further develop their leadership abilities. This work is based on a review of the literature and conversations among mentors and mentees participating in one institution's group mentoring program. This review and qualitative process reaffirms that most Chairs are inexperienced and ill-prepared for the myriad roles and responsibilities Chairs are expected to fulfill and need professional mentoring and guidance in enhancing their leadership skills. Chairs need to understand the essential character traits they must demonstrate and the actions they should take to be effective and successful. These include modeling integrity, building trust, ensuring transparency, listening to understand, delegating tasks, emphasizing student learning, being an advocate, pursuing personal learning opportunities, being fair and equitable, exhibiting courage, facilitating change, and ensuring everyone feels they belong. In addition to managing financial, space, and human resources, Chairs need to realize the pivotal importance of consistently strengthening relationships. Chairs should emphasize nurturing a positive departmental culture to increase job satisfaction for faculty and staff. Chairs need to maintain personal teaching, research, and service contributions while never losing focus on their primary role of serving others.

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Educated as disciplinary experts from art to zoology, typically faculty do not begin their careers or seek career advancement by taking on the challenging and stressful responsibility of managing and leading an academic department (Perlmutter, 2017). Department Chairs (Chairs) as leaders have a challenging job, which could be the toughest job in higher education (Buller, 2012). The importance of Chairs is especially critical if, as Gmelch (2015) claims, 80% of higher education decisions are made at the departmental level.

Chairs receive little leadership training, have limited or no prior administrative experience, and may not understand the scope of their responsibilities. They realize their dearth of educational preparation (Gardner & Ward, 2018; Gmelch & Buller, 2015; Munger, 2010), experience (Gmelch & Miskin, 2004), or understanding of the scope of what serving as a Chair entails (Gmelch, 2015). They can likely expect to receive minimum assistance and mentoring before or after assuming this role, with most learning occurring on the job (Leaming, 2006). Despite these realities, in institutions in which the role of the Chair rotates, it may simply be their turn to serve whether they want to or not, even though they are unprepared (Jochum, 2022).

Looking at this more positively, serving as a Chair may be attractive as an opportunity to break out of an unfulfilling teaching-research-service career cycle, enliven an in-a-rut academic career with new challenges, or provide leadership in making a difference and advancing one’s department (Cipriano & Riccardi, 2017; Zahneis, 2022). It can be professionally rewarding (Jochum, 2022), especially for those who desire to help others grow and succeed (Liden et al., 2008). Since faculty considering serving as a Chair want to learn more about the expectations and nuances of this challenging role (Perlmutter, 2017), they may have sought out on-the-job programmatic or assistant Chair responsibilities to gain knowledge and skills or professional development in management and leadership (Morris & Laipple, 2015).

The role of the Chair entails dozens of tasks and responsibilities (Buller, 2012; Dettmar, 2022; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Jochum, 2022). Yet, these associated tasks and responsibilities continue to expand (Leaming, 2006) and typically require working harder (Vaillancourt, 2017). These tasks and responsibilities were also confirmed through the authors’ work through one institution’s Chair Mentoring Program (CMP), which was established through funding from a National Science Foundation ADVANCE award. Through a review of the literature, multiple conversations among Chair mentors, an inventory from the CMP mentors and mentees of their tasks and responsibilities, and a survey completed by Chairs, the authors identified 7 categories and 62 tasks for which Chairs are responsible. The following sections describe the seven most critical functional responsibilities of Chairs matched with the most important criterion for success for each:

1. Personnel Management—nurturing value-based relationships with the people they serve.
2. Internal and External Communications—building trust through listening and advocacy.
3. Budget and Resource Management—allocating people, time, space, and money to meet desired outcomes.

4. Instruction—ensuring faculty commitment to increased learning for all students.

5. Department Culture and Climate—developing a cohesive, respectful, and equitable workplace supporting a sense of belonging for everyone.

6. Change and Advancement—embracing change by winning the hearts of colleagues while seeking increased resources to support change efforts.

7. Fulfilling Faculty Responsibilities—serving as a role model as an effective teacher, productive scholar, and willing servant.

Using these topical areas and responsibilities of Chairs from this work and as described by others (e.g., Buller, 2012; Dettmar, 2022; Gmelch & Miskin, 2004; Jochum, 2022; Leaming, 2006), as a framework, one purpose of this work is to provide guidance and specific approaches to help Chairs succeed and positively impact their colleagues. While Chairs operationally manage their departments, they must also be change agents and strategic leaders to meet the ever-changing expectations of institutions of higher education (Leaming, 2006). The primary role of Chairs is to lead faculty and staff, and secondarily, students, and provide leadership to their institutions (Jenkins, 2016). Maxwell (2022), in his irrefutable laws of leadership, includes the importance of influencing and serving others, building trust, touching the hearts of others before asking for their hands, and empowering others. Chairs must align the needs and aspirations of faculty, staff, and students within the department with the institution’s strategic goals and changes in their disciplines, while implementing advancement strategies through effective communication and a supportive, positive departmental culture.

This leads to a second purpose of this work, which is to provide guidance and specific strategies for serving effectively and successfully as Chairs, which we perceive requires leaders who want to support the growth and success of others. Servant leadership is a leadership style, philosophy, or approach that may reflect innate personal characteristics, such as humility, authenticity, trust, and fairness (van Dierendonck, 2011). Greenleaf (1977) stated, servant leadership:

…begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead….The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. (p. 13)

While Greenleaf (1977) advocated that good leaders must become good servants, as such, they can be more effective Chairs as they put faculty, staff, and students first while doing what is right and ethically sound with competence and by fulfilling obligations (Frick & Spears, 1996).

In academic units, there is a paradigm shift from autocratic, hierarchical, and transactional leadership to a model characterized by shared governance and delegation with empowerment. As servant leaders, Chairs fulfill the myriad responsibilities described
herein by behaving in ethical ways based on their values resulting in enhanced personal growth of others and increased feelings of success. Chairs who are servant leaders act on behalf of others, take responsibilities seriously, treat everyone with respect, and seek the greatest good for others.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Personnel Management**

Effective and successful Chairs focus on building strong relationships with people founded on shared values. Before Chairs can lead successfully, they must identify and model their core values, such as mutual trust and respect (Nelson, 2022). The pinnacle of these values, and an often-mentioned trait of leaders (Covey, 2020) and organizations (Welch & Byrne, 2001), is integrity, characterized as doing the right thing in fulfilling one’s moral obligations to self and others. Chairs are role models judged more by what they do than what they say (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). They are dependable, responsible, and transparent with their decisions and actions, lead others in meeting expectations, and help build strong relationships. Chairs tap into the energy of people by connecting through their values and unlocking each person’s potential to increase their likelihood of success. The importance of people to the success of organizations is stressed by Collins (2001), who said that not only should organizations hire the right people, but they also must get them in the right seats, which means helping each person achieve their potential in alignment with their strengths and interests.

An initial strategy for building value-based relationships with faculty and staff is to ask them what they want and need, about their aspirations, and what they perceive could help improve their job satisfaction. A personal and effective approach for building strong relationships is holding individual meetings with each faculty or staff member. This is an opportunity for a Chair to demonstrate they are interested in and eager to get to know each person on a personal basis as well as to show they value them as unique individuals. These individual meetings, preferably in their offices, provide opportunities for Chairs to learn more about the day-to-day experiences of faculty and staff as well as learn about and potentially address issues that are easy fixes or low-hanging fruit. Monthly department meetings provide opportunities to strengthen relationships with faculty by asking for their input and seeking their advice before making decisions (Vaillancourt, 2019). A way to ensure faculty voice is for Chairs to ask faculty for agenda items so topics and issues important to them are discussed (Leaming, 2006).

Extremely important to Chairs in personnel management is transparency in actions and decisions relative to hiring, promotion and tenure, and distribution of workload, merit pay, and resources. Transparency improves departmental climate (Hult et al., 2005; Hurtado et al., 2008; O’Meara et al., 2019) as it helps to ensure equity. For transparency to contribute to equity, departmental processes and sound decisions should be open and defensible (van den Brink et al., 2010).
A transparent hiring practice helps ensure fair and equitable consideration of all applicants. Asking for faculty input about what type of faculty is most needed can help inform position announcements or descriptions while ensuring compliance with institutional policies. Effective Chairs facilitate a welcoming interview process for candidates while ensuring faculty, staff, and students have opportunities to participate as appropriate. Chairs should smooth the onboarding, orienting, mentoring, and supervising processes for new departmental employees while serving as an ongoing resource for answers to routine and individualized questions. Onboarding for new faculty and staff should include access to and training to use institutional systems and procedures and receipt of a list of key stakeholders and their contact information for the key offices on campus.

Effective Chairs set and communicate appropriate standards and expectations linked with mentoring and support needed to help each person within the department succeed. They need to articulate a vision, facilitate commitment toward the achievement of shared goals, support the collaborations and consensus among departmental members, and reinforce and reward efforts, contributions, and successes (Jenkins, 2016; Nelson, 2022). They should always give credit to others for their ideas and achievements (Collins, 2001; Vaillancourt, 2017). Chairs’ behaviors contribute to a negative or a positive and cohesive working environment. They control whether departmental colleagues feel a sense of belonging and empowerment to use their talents and achieve their potential.

One of the most difficult challenges of personnel management for Chairs is to differentiate between the number and complexity of tasks associated with this role. Chairs must differentiate between what is important and seems urgent (Munger, 2010) as well as what can be delegated to others within the department. Chairs need to prioritize their time based on what is most important, such as mentoring pre-tenured faculty and helping colleagues deal with real-world, negative events or challenges. Chairs need to realize that they do not have to do everything themselves, and they can ask for help from faculty and staff within the department. When Chairs delegate operational tasks to others, periodic check-ins on progress may be needed. Those to whom the Chair has delegated tasks should always be personally, and maybe publicly, thanked verbally or in writing through a formal letter of commendation to express appreciation to them for helping not only the Chair but also serving the needs of the department.

To be effective and successful in personnel management, the Chair’s values and what they do to build and strengthen relationships with people must be a priority – it is worth the time and effort. As reinforced by Blanchard and Johnson (1983), “The best minute I spend is the one I invest in people” (p. 63). By focusing on personal relationships, empowerment of colleagues, and transparency in actions and decisions, Chairs become more effective and successful in advancing their departments. Leadership requires maintaining and strengthening value-based interpersonal relationships and makes serving as a Chair more rewarding (Jochum, 2022).
Leading Internal and External Communications

Effective internal and external communications are important to the success of Chairs in building trust. This is accomplished by asking questions instead of making statements, listening first to understand, and consulting with others before making decisions. How Chairs allocate resources is an example of internal communication as it sends the message of what is valued and rewarded among activities and events related to teaching, research, and service. Internal communication can also be Chairs sending weekly or periodic email messages that contain essential information or highlight the achievements of others. To be effective, Chairs need to communicate what they are going to do, and then do what they say they will do.

Using multiple approaches strengthens internal communications within a department. An example occurs when Chairs improve internal communication by developing and distributing a master calendar for the department that includes faculty meeting dates, deadlines for award nomination submissions, key institutional academic calendar dates, and departmental events and deadlines, such as those associated with committees or delegated assignments. They might distribute a weekly email such as a Monday Morning Memo (Leaming, 2006), which summarizes key information instead of frequently forwarding institutional or college/school messages, which often are ignored. Chairs can establish an open-door policy during set times and communicate to faculty, staff, and students their availability in their office. This creates an environment where these individuals can feel invited to come unannounced to talk, discuss to help resolve an issue, ask questions, or seek assistance. A closed door can signal Chairs are in meetings or prefer no interruptions, except in an emergency. With email being a predominant form of communication within organizations, responses must be timely. For example, Chairs might set expectations for the time (e.g., such as within 24 hours) when faculty, staff, and students can expect a response to an email message.

Chairs need to maintain work-life balance while realizing they will have to work harder as a role model and because they are responsible for everything associated with their department. They need to allocate time to self-care, which communicates to others that they should as well. For example, a Chair may decide to take a 20-minute break in the middle of the day to meditate or take a short nap to re-energize. Other Chairs may take a daily break to engage in physical activity or share lunch and conversation with another Chair inside or outside the institution to vent or seek mentoring advice. These could be communicated to the department so that others see these as acceptable options for them as well.

Chairs serve in a tenuous in-between administrative role as advocates or champions for their faculty and leaders of people, curricula, and finances in a department while balancing these duties with building relationships with their deans and other administrators. Chairs are conduits of information and decisions from and to deans and other administrators (Olson, 2008; Zahneis, 2022). Thriving in these two worlds requires
developing and maintaining trusting relationships, open communication, and transparency.

Chairs are advocates (Jenkins, 2016) for their departments, which means communicating directly to their deans about the expertise and ideas faculty, staff, and students can contribute to campus committees or initiatives and how their involvement could contribute to achieving desired outcomes. This also entails communicating with deans about the need for additional faculty positions based on increased enrollments, financial resources, facility space, and service opportunities for faculty, staff, and students. Effective Chairs advocate using data and evidence during negotiations and meetings when making requests. They build trust by being dependable in meeting deadlines and providing data with descriptive and informative narratives.

Advocacy also requires that Chairs communicate and build relationships with key stakeholders on campus as well as externally to elevate the status of their academic units. Chairs are oral and written ambassadors (Zahneis, 2022) for their academic units externally to alumni, such as by connecting students with them for internships, observations, or shadowing opportunities. They can also invite alumni to campus to engage with students, make guest presentations, and join advisory councils to reconnect them with their former departments and to learn from them how to improve the preparation of graduates.

Chairs are the most visible spokesperson to publicize their departments’ achievements, which can be done through a departmental website as well as other media. Communications can occur through pictures and stories about awards, honors, and other recognitions received that can be displayed on departmental websites, in newsletters, in digital displays in buildings, and through dedicated events, such as announcements about scholarship banquets and speaker series. Chairs need to ensure departmental websites are up-to-date and include faculty interests and accomplishments, research labs and opportunities, student testimonials about their collegiate experiences, personal stories about internships, and videos, which can contribute to the recruitment of undergraduate and graduate students. Using high-quality marketing materials, such as newsletters, flyers, banners, and virtual and printed items, helps highlight the achievements of faculty and students and recruit students. Social media posts are an effective way to communicate information to prospective students, their parents, alumni, and potential donors.

Effective oral and written communication helps build trust, especially when Chairs are transparent transmitters of information within departments among faculty, staff, and students. Chairs are conduits between administrators upward on the organizational chart and their faculty and advocate on behalf of their departments to deans and other personnel throughout campus. Chairs connect with alumni, donors, and others about achievements and help market their department whenever possible.
Managing Budget and Resource Management

Management of budgets can maintain the status quo, or Chairs can strategically examine what their departments have accomplished while envisioning a more productive future by describing what it excels at, the stakeholders it serves, and how to implement a sustainable future. Chairs need to ensure alignment of resource management with their department’s vision – where it seeks to go and how it defines success. Similarly, this requires that a department has an identified mission and areas or ways in which it wants to excel. In combination, the vision and mission should align with the needs of the stakeholders served including students, employers, and graduate institutions, among others. It is only through strategic communications and actions that a department will experience a successful and sustainable future.

Effective Chairs are knowledgeable of the resources they have available and how to successfully allocate these as they lead their departments. Resources are seldom in abundance so they must be managed effectively. Resources include people, time, space, and money connected with desired outcomes. Aligned with the department’s vision and mission, Chairs need to encourage departmental faculty and staff to challenge what they have been doing, stop doing some things, and start working on new priorities to achieve more visionary outcomes, and then reallocate resources accordingly. Effective Chairs guide their faculty and staff in adopting new resource-management approaches linked with strategic goals, reallocated and increased revenues, time dedicated to the achievement of these goals, and decentralized decision-making, executed with accountability and transparency, and supported by the analysis of data to support the decisions made.

Chairs are seldom prepared to manage budgets and other tangible resources, especially those directly affecting the productivity of their colleagues and the operational success of their departments (Dettmar, 2022). This is due to Chairs often arriving in their roles via the faculty pathway where they are disciplinary experts. Chairs may prepare for their roles after they have the job through training on campus, participation in professional development workshops, and online webinars. This training could help to develop and expand skills and knowledge to help Chairs make informed decisions in budgetary and resource management. Realizing what they do not know, new Chairs may need help and guidance about how to allocate limited discretionary funds in fair and equitable ways to help achieve shared strategic goals (Leaming, 2006).

An increasingly costly area of instructional, research, and operational needs for departments is technology. Faculty, staff, and students expect to have technologies in classrooms, research labs, and offices so they can successfully fulfill their responsibilities. Chairs need to develop and implement a technology plan for scheduled replacements of outdated technologies while communicating a process for routine maintenance as an effective strategy to proactively prevent reactive and more costly purchases. Departmental processes for requesting routine technology, facility maintenance, and needed renovations to improve instructional or research capacity and
productivity need to be communicated. In addition, Chairs must work effectively with faculty directing research labs to ensure processes for paying for maintenance and repair of equipment and allocation of indirect cost returns are understood.

Other areas of budget and resource management that are the responsibility of Chairs include the allocation of offices, other workspaces, classrooms, research labs, and department-funded research assistants and teaching assistants, which should be done fairly. Effective Chairs understand that these decisions are perceived as personal and involve interpersonal sensitivity associated with resource allocations. They must seek input to help in establishing priorities for making decisions to best serve the department and institution and use open communication and transparency to ensure all involved have input and understand the process. This transparency can lead to positive perceptions and respect for the Chair making equitable decisions.

Effective Chairs manage personnel, financial, space, and time resources wisely in ways to advance the department and help ensure its success. Faculty are more motivated whenever Chairs meet their technological, instructional, and space needs, with transparency, so everyone perceives equity for all. When Chairs align faculty interests and strengths with expectations and outcomes for using these resources, job productivity and job satisfaction are likely to follow.

**Leading Instruction**

Institutions of higher education focus on the instruction of students with billions of dollars invested annually to achieve the goal of learning for all students. Educating students requires hiring, retaining, supporting, and helping develop competent disciplinary faculty supported with instructional materials, up-to-date technologies, and adequate space, aided by other administrators and staff within the institution.

Chairs need to ensure that teaching assignments are equitable. When faculty are allowed to request the courses they prefer to teach and the days of the week and times, their job satisfaction is positively affected because they were asked their preferences. While each course schedule is unlikely to please everyone all the time, transparency in the scheduling process along with sensitivity to family-related issues, research data collection times, and personal preferences, making regular accommodations to faculty requests contributes positively to the departmental culture.

Chairs must advocate for increased student learning and align resource allocations with the mission of the department as the priority. Working with faculty, Chairs are responsible for ensuring curricula are up-to-date and taught using effective instructional delivery modalities. Multiple strategies can be used to accomplish this. The first is having the department faculty conduct a course audit or complete a curriculum mapping process, which can provide opportunities for faculty to review their courses in each degree and make enhancements, reduce curricular overlap, and add new courses to better prepare graduates for changes in employment options. This process could include reviewing each
course content outline along with the content from similar courses at peer institutions, student learning outcomes, assessments, assignments, textbooks, and grading scales. Chairs can motivate faculty to develop new courses through financial incentives, initially offering a course as a special topics course, and teaching an innovative course during a short term, such as during an intersession. Encouraging faculty to develop and team-teach an interdisciplinary course is a way to facilitate collaboration and energize faculty who are in an instructional rut while expanding learning opportunities for students (Leaming, 2007).

Effective Chairs ensure that the instruction offered through their departments is high quality and meets the needs of students while ensuring fair and equitable treatment of all learners. To ensure instructional quality, Chairs can implement a departmental process for teaching observations of faculty, and they can facilitate faculty providing assessment data to verify student learning. Data can be gathered through assessment of each student’s attainment of course learning outcomes and student focus groups where students discuss their wants, needs, and aspirations.

Chairs might help establish a student majors’ organization or communicate with an existing one to obtain more information about students’ perceptions of their courses and instruction while asking for suggestions for improvements. Inviting anonymous comments from students in suggestion boxes is an option. Another strategy is for Chairs to work with departmental faculty to add specific questions to Student Evaluation of Teaching instruments about any curricular barriers to student success, course redundancies, and instructional issues. This initiative-taking data collection strategy could result in the resolution of any problems and potentially lead to greater student satisfaction and learning. It is important for Chairs, working with their faculty, to utilize any data gathered and analyzed from all these activities to make informed curricular or operational improvements, which can positively affect student satisfaction and increase retention and graduation rates.

Internal and external graduate program reviews and program accreditation reports are ongoing requirements requiring Chair leadership that can contribute to improved instructional content. Chairs may delegate the collection of information and data for these reviews and reports and should ensure their departments meet review standards and implement plans for advancement.

Curricula that remain stagnant cheat students. Chairs need to challenge faculty to examine the courses they teach and make enhancements to advance the learning of students in preparation for new careers and changes in existing careers. They seek, listen attentively to, and implement appropriate changes recommended by students. Chairs facilitate course audits to ensure courses in all degrees are more relevant to and enhance the preparation of graduates. Up-to-date and high-quality degrees lead to greater retention, higher graduation rates, and praise and reaffirmation following program reviews.
Leading Department Culture and Climate

Departmental culture matters (Nelson, 2022). A positive departmental culture is characterized by each person feeling a sense of belonging and the development of meaningful interpersonal relationships. Effective Chairs build a cohesive team and thriving departmental culture by listening first, finding someone else to champion a desired outcome, supporting others while valuing their input in decisions, and giving credit to others for their achievements. Chairs empower through delegating tasks and helping everyone accept accountability within their sphere of influence (Covey, 2020). They show humility by knowing that no one succeeds alone and needs contributions from most if not everyone in the department (Jochum, 2022). Chairs can build and strengthen interpersonal relationships and collaborations with their faculty and staff and are more likely to achieve consensus by validating everyone’s voice and affirming everyone’s value and importance (Vaillancourt, 2019). Faculty and staff want transparent communication, appreciation, involvement in departmental governance, cooperation, clear policies consistently applied, fair and equitable treatment, respect, professional treatment, and support (Leaming, 2007), all of which contribute to a more positive departmental culture.

Chairs must ensure equitable treatment and respect for each unique individual within the department by ensuring they feel welcomed, valued, and respected. Effective Chairs model the respectful, fair, and equitable treatment of others and reinforce these expectations in others. They serve as role models for nurturing a caring, positive working and learning community in which everyone feels they belong. Listening to understand, asking for input about decisions and actions, inviting everyone’s input, and facilitating feelings of empowerment can contribute to a positive departmental culture and a sense of belonging.

To maintain a positive departmental culture and sense of belonging, Chairs must ensure compliance by all members of the department with federal, state, and institutional rules. It is the responsibility of the Chair to prevent or, if existing, eliminate any illegal and harmful actions, such as bullying, sexual harassment, racism, and discriminatory and biased behaviors experienced by faculty, staff, and students. When made aware of discriminatory behaviors, Chairs must immediately collaborate with appropriate individuals on campus to identify the facts of the incidents and remediate problems.

The role of the Chairs will include conflict, crises, as well as difficult people (Jochum, 2022). To be effective, they need to keep their emotions under control, model professionalism and collegiality, listen to understand, engage in situationally appropriate communication, show they care, and facilitate change to help manage and mitigate these situations and circumstances. Chairs must adhere to institutional and departmental policies and procedures and keep focused on the issue (not on the person or their personality). Chairs must try to identify the source of any conflict and understand that conflict may be symptomatic of the underlying real issue.
One challenge to departmental culture that Chairs may face is unproductive faculty. This is an issue that can create both morale issues as well as conflict. One intervention Chairs can take to address unproductive faculty is to identify why a faculty member has become unproductive as well as the resources or incentives that may be needed to reengage them while aligning action steps with their strengths and interests. The desired outcome of this interaction is to create a win-win outcome for the faculty member and the department.

Chairs must document the entire process of addressing any conflict. They can deal with disengagement through more regular check-ins with faculty, staff, and students to re-energize active participation within the department. However, a word of caution is to be cautious and choose your battles because it is not possible to resolve everything specifically when dealing with people.

Chairs need to facilitate faculty and staff working collaboratively as a team to achieve a shared vision and goals. They need to celebrate individual faculty members for their outstanding teaching, research, or service and their departments for receiving recognition and awards. When everyone in the department feels a sense of belonging, celebrates their contributions collectively, and perceives fairness and equity exist, the departmental culture facilitates a better working environment for everyone.

**Leading Change and Advancement Efforts**

While change is inevitable for departments to progress, people often resist change because it disrupts the status quo and requires moving out of one’s comfort zone. Instead, people tend to prioritize self-interest with a low tolerance for change. With the pace of change accelerating in higher education institutions, Chairs must realize that understanding and using emotional intelligence is essential to winning the hearts and minds of others (Lai, 2015). That is, winning hearts encompasses explaining why something is important, why now, and how it benefits people, the department, and the institution, while winning minds requires a logical, clearly articulated, and persuasive analysis supporting the idea or action (Lai, 2015). Goleman (2005) describes emotional intelligence as having personal competence in managing ourselves and social competence in managing relationships effectively. One’s emotional intelligence has a powerful impact on how one manages emotions and achieves success. It is important for their success for Chairs to enhance their knowledge of emotional intelligence and their ability to use it (Goleman, 2005).

Leadership for change requires using emotional intelligence, communicating clearly, and demonstrating transparency throughout the process, with confidence, a willingness to take risks, the moral courage to change, and committed collaborators focused on a shared vision (Burnes & By, 2012; Jenkins, 2016). Chairs can implement Kotter’s (1995) eight-step model for change through faculty involvement in strategic planning, shared governance, development of new degrees and certificates, increasing enrollments, and departmental advancement as described in annual reports. When dealing with resistance
to change, Chairs can empower faculty by providing them opportunities to do things differently and better through ways aligned with their abilities and outcomes they value. A previous section described making curricular changes despite having to overcome resistance.

Chairs will need to overcome the inertia of faculty, lack of trust in the change process, and an unwillingness to accept any disruption in the status quo, by patiently and strategically shaping conversations or debates through strategic actions that refuse to avoid change and jeopardize the future. Chairs can encourage taking risks and embracing innovation. Strategies to accomplish these can include easing into change, planning carefully, envisioning clear goals, communicating effectively, dealing openly with individuals having opposing ideas, recognizing contributions to the change process, and celebrating success (Leaming, 2007).

In addition to leading change, Chairs often are responsible for advancement efforts within their department. Institutions often expect Chairs to increase their department’s resources through fundraising in collaboration with development officers. As with other responsibilities, seldom do Chairs have experience asking people for money. Fundraising is much less about asking for money and much more about building relationships. Put into that context, fundraising becomes less threatening and more appealing to Chairs, who enjoy talking about the achievements and advancements of their faculty, students, and departments. During the getting-to-know-people process, Chairs need to learn what these individuals’ interests are, such as student scholarships, endowed professorships to support faculty, needed research equipment, renovated buildings or labs, or a new initiative about which they are enthusiastic. It is when the potential donor perceives they will receive a personally positive or meaningful return on their investment that the department will receive an actual donation.

Fundraising has also become a task of Chairs. The game-changer in fundraising for one of the authors remembered years after learning it while an American Council on Education Fellow is the realization that asking someone for money is a compliment. This exists because the Chair as the leader knows that the person asked is financially able to donate. The Chair compliments the potential donor by taking the time to listen to what is important to them, affirms their interest in what the department is doing and achieving, and pledges to use the gift to accomplish the desired outcome of their investment. The donor is happy, the Chair is pleased, and the department and its students benefit. Ideally, this win-win-win situation leads to additional donations in the future.

Maintaining Chairs’ Faculty Responsibilities

Chairs remain faculty members. They teach courses, often every semester, continue as scholars with peer-reviewed publications and external grants, may direct a lab along with mentoring graduate students, and serve on and lead institutional committees (Leaming, 2006). With the fulfillment of faculty expectations, especially essential when associate professors serve as Chairs, institutions must provide funds for greater faculty or
staff support for them and support the appointment of assistant or associate Chairs or program coordinators to whom Chairs can delegate selected management responsibilities they are expected to fulfill or oversee. With assistance from colleagues and better preparation and support, Chairs can focus more on leadership and will be more likely to be successful and continue to serve faculty, students, and the institution (Jenkins, 2016) and advance their departments.

**CONCLUSION**

Given how challenging the job of serving as a Chair is, the initial prerequisite should be to request a written job description and detailed expectations (Leaming, 2006). The agreement or contract to serve as a Chair also should include information about appointment length in year and annual term—with or without a summer appointment—, annual review process, reappointment process, if any, and compensation. In addition to written job expectations and a contract, Zahneis (2022) suggests that one way to make this role more attractive would be to provide “greater appreciation and recognition of the chair’s duties, which are often largely invisible” (p. 10). Dettmar (2022) suggests that serving as a Chair is a calling and rewarding way to pay it forward to those who move into this role in the future. That is, as faculty members they benefited from others’ letters of recommendation, promotion and tenure reviews, manuscript reviews, and professional organization service, so now it is the faculty member serving as a Chair who does this important work on behalf of their colleagues.

Chairs are expected to provide leadership through the completion of seven critical responsibilities. First, they nurture value-based relationships with the people they serve. Second, they strengthen these relationships as effective communicators who build trust through listening and advocacy. Third, they are strong managers of fiscal and other resources. Fourth, they ensure faculty commitment to quality instruction leading to increased learning for all students. Fifth, they develop a cohesive, respectful, and equitable departmental culture featuring a sense of belonging. Sixth, as leaders they embrace change by winning the hearts and minds of colleagues while seeking increased resources to support visionary change efforts. Seventh, they serve as role models for effective teaching, being productive scholars, and serving willingly.

Effective Chairs exemplify servant leadership by valuing others first, providing growth and development opportunities for others, and sharing leadership. Successful Chairs are good listeners, empathetic, and authentic. They prioritize building and nurturing relationships and working collaboratively with others to address issues and solve problems. Their values include integrity, honesty, trust, and respect. They are visionaries with the initiative to diligently work with others while empowering them to achieve their potential.

The significance of this work includes detailed explanations about the scope of responsibilities of Chairs and descriptions of how to fulfill these expectations effectively and successfully. Effective Chairs will nurture value-based relationships with the people
they serve. They will build trust and earn respect through listening and advocacy. They will allocate people, time, space, and resources to meet desired outcomes fairly and equitably. They will ensure the faculty's commitment to increased learning for all students. They will develop a cohesive, respectful, and equitable workplace supporting a sense of belonging for everyone. They will embrace change by winning the hearts of colleagues while seeking increased resources to support change efforts to achieve a shared vision. They will serve as a role model as an effective teacher, productive scholar, and willing servant.

Institutions of higher education need to do a significantly better job preparing Chairs for this critical position. Examples of educational opportunities for Chairs include attending professional development webinars such as those offered by Academic Impressions, The Chronicle of Higher Education, or disciplinary or national conferences for leading academic departments, such as the Academic Chairpersons Conference and Council of Colleges of Arts and Sciences Seminars for Department Chairs. It also includes participating in onboarding and professional development sessions, especially throughout their first year in this role, and thereafter as needed, provided by institutions, or participating in a formal or informal chair mentoring program.
REFERENCES


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