

PLANNING BEYOND PROMOTION

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ABSTRACT

Obtaining tenure and receiving one level of promotion often seem to be the overriding concern for new and/or untenured faculty. Administrators and tenured faculty generally encourage this viewpoint, based on the knowledge that, at many campuses, tenure is a requirement for continued employment. While continued employment is certainly desired by most faculty, satisfaction with professional and personal accomplishments and the opportunity to pursue one's interests within the constraints of university, family, society, and available time are much more significant.

In order to achieve tenure and promotion, maintain an acceptable level of professional and personal satisfaction, and allow time to pursue some of the activities enjoyed outside of the workplace, each faculty member should develop a comprehensive strategic plan. Based on the escalating workload which is imposed on faculty (either by external or internal sources), the plan must encompass all aspects of life. The level, quantity, and quality of work produced by any one faculty member can be limited by many factors outside of the university, and a realistic strategic plan will reflect these considerations (i.e., aging parents, young children, involvement in religious or charitable organizations, funding agencies, consulting work, etc.), since these same factors may offer the faculty member immeasurable personal satisfaction.

This paper discusses establishing an appropriate plan to meet those obligations needed to achieve tenure and promotion; facilitate pursuit of personal and professional interests which fall outside the reward system at a given university; and prepare for academic success following the first promotion. Adaptation of the plan to accommodate changing university and personal goals is considered.

THE PLAN

Planning to meet some future goal is not a new or particularly unusual activity for the average person. In a general sense, planning our future has been in place throughout our lives. For example; from birth, our parents typically plan for us to be completely independent of their care within approximately twenty years. Beginning with the essential activities of eating and sleeping, they gradually guide us toward that end. After a few years under the direction of parents alone (or their designated representatives), the government becomes involved in the process by requiring formal education up to age sixteen which also contributes to our eventual independence. At some variable point in our maturation, we make the plan our own so that we determine such things as future career direction and preparation, make choices regarding employment, residence, spouse (if any) and children (if any), select friends and hobbies; and all other aspects of our life. Thus, we achieve the intended completion of our parents' plan for our independence eventually. The time frame for reaching the



endpoint and the quality of life experienced by all parties depends upon numerous factors, especially the practice of setting appropriate priorities and goals, and adjusting for whatever circumstances arise.

Strategic planning is defined by Bryson¹ to be a disciplined effort to shape who we are and what we do, at an organizational level. It is a conscious effort to assess internal conditions, then establish priorities and behave accordingly.² This same effort can be adapted to the individual or family. By applying strategic planning to the totality of our lives, it becomes the tool by which we can exercise some control over how we deal with the circumstances in which we find ourselves. This control results from acknowledging your own responsibility for your life, and acting on that knowledge to strive to obtain your desired level of satisfaction and success on both the personal and professional levels.

Dr. Carolyn Woo³ tells us that success in our endeavors involves two aspects, “do the right things” and “do things right.” This offers a personal version of the statements of both Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis, “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things,”⁴ and serving as our own life’s manager and leader provides us the power to take control of our success and satisfaction. Strategic planning entails the identification of “the right things” and preparation for their accomplishment. For the plan to be useful, it must accurately reflect our current situation, our intended personal and professional achievements, and the many factors which affect the transition from the present to the desired future. Some priorities, goals, and constraints will be determined by your employer; many will be based on your life outside the university.

WHERE ARE YOU NOW AND WHERE ARE YOU HEADING?

Thinking about your strategic plan should first be done in terms of your life long ambitions or values. The Franklin Quest Company,⁵ developer of successful planning materials, encourages people to “get control of the events of your life that matter” by first identifying your governing values. It is essential to understand that these are your *life* priorities and not weekly goals. In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*,⁴ Stephen Covey recommends “beginning with the end in mind.” Look at yourself in terms of how you want family members, friends, work associates, and other associates to feel about you at the end of your life. Consider how you want to be viewed in your profession. Will you strive for excellence in teaching or perhaps improve the quality of life for others through research endeavors? What is important outside of the professional world? It could be that a civil leadership role is in store, or, maybe, volunteering time and support to others. What will be accomplished for the family? This view of “begin with the end” will identify your governing values. Once these values have been identified, work can begin to establish goals which will eventually become the structure of a strategic plan.

PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERATIONS:

For a typical untenured faculty member, a list of professional priorities will be topped by tenure and promotion within five or six years of starting. Assuming the department or university is relatively consistent in its expectations, this priority can be met by a combination of very long hours, short term planning, and luck instead of strategic planning. Long hours are needed to perform the innumerable tasks that might be beneficial, and short term planning and luck are required to either obtain sufficient funding to demonstrate one’s usefulness to the school or gain the favor of influential colleagues who can serve as your advocate throughout the promotion process. Unfortunately, a high level of job satisfaction is unlikely to result from this practice, and faculty burnout is nearly guaranteed. A better approach is to develop a strategic plan based on your true priorities, where obtaining tenure and promotion is a major goal to be accomplished in pursuit of priorities. Review your beliefs, values, and underlying principles, then set priorities. Any priority which is anticipated to remain for the foreseeable future should be included. Covey recommends a modified version of what many



organizations have attempted as part of their Total Quality Management and/or Continuous Improvement efforts: develop a personal mission statement based on the principles which govern our values, actions, and desires; identify and devote most efforts toward important but not urgent matters; and base each day and week's priorities on these items.⁴

As part of establishing your strategic plan, recognition that you are functioning within a department, school, university, et cetera, is essential for achieving professional growth and success at your current institution. Particularly before tenure, your goals must reflect the objectives of your institution. Since you were offered and chose to accept a position in your department, significant common ground presumably exists between your intended activities and your department's expectations. If commonality of purpose is not present, finding a more compatible position may be the most appropriate first goal of your strategic plan. Otherwise, your departmental and institutional missions and their most important priorities need to be included when formulating your plan.

Special consideration is warranted when setting major milestones other than tenure and promotion (due to their fixed time period). Do you wish to write a nationally accepted textbook within three years after your promotion? Is receiving another promotion within five years of tenure important? Have you set your sights on an administrative position within the next ten years? Would serving as principal investigator for a multidisciplinary, multi-campus project within six years satisfy your desires? Is being recognized as the best engineering educator at your campus within eight years the goal you are striving for? Achieving any of these milestones requires long-term preparation and accomplishment of specific actions in a carefully considered, continuously pursued fashion which must be incorporated into your strategic plan. Preferably these milestones should be established before the granting of tenure and promotion, since many of the corresponding actions needed will also assist in that endeavor. For example, you have determined that a textbook is needed in your area of specialization, and you decide to accept the challenge. Writing a textbook before achieving tenure is not recommended, but some of the preparatory tasks such as developing a set of excellent, well-documented published course notes and original laboratory exercises could assist you in establishing a case for promotion on the basis of teaching contributions while aiding in the creation of your future textbook. This is one example of how short term goals can serve "double duty" for more than one milestone or long term goal.

PERSONAL CONSIDERATIONS

"No man is an island"⁶ applies to university faculty as well as the rest of the population. Many faculty try to balance some combination of the professional goals and personal lifestyles of two adults, the wants and needs of dependent children, and provision of physical and emotional support for aging parents. In addition, we have other interests which we choose to pursue. These may be based on our personal belief system, a wish to maintain good health, or because we simply derive pleasure from the activity. During the years before tenure and promotion, some interests may have to be postponed or enjoyed only sporadically in order to free up time for those additional seemingly mandatory professional tasks which are likely to produce promotion. Similar adjustment may be needed for young children, parents suffering from an extended illness, or many of the other situations that arise in personal life. An appropriate personal strategic plan will attempt to accommodate all of the above.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PLAN

As discussed earlier, your personal strategic plan must reflect your understanding of yourself and your situation. In order to translate that knowledge into a viable course of action, start with a list of all your normal activities and the time each regularly requires. Add on "emergencies" that frequently occur, and that need to be



anticipated. Based on your established values and knowledge of your circumstances, develop a general timetable for accomplishment of appropriate milestones. Focus first on those which will lead to tenure and promotion, while facilitating future professional growth. Allow sufficient leeway in time allotment so that personal milestones can be established and your spouse/partner, your children, your parents, and your friends can continue to play significant roles in your life. Review the general timetable with your spouse, your department head/chair, and any other individuals who will be significantly affected by or interested in your progress. Based on their input, revise your list into a more formal plan or outline which will serve as a tool for monitoring your progress. Typical project planning approaches such as Gantt⁷ or Pert⁸ can be applied to your life, or other time management-based techniques like those outlined by Covey⁴ or the Franklin Quest Company⁵ may be utilized, whatever will aid you most in keeping you aware of and acting on accordance with your strategic plan.

There are a couple of side notes. First, the details of non-professional aspects of the plan may be confidential, but your department head/chair is likely to be aware of the detrimental effect on your job performance and thus, on your department, if you fail to account for this part of your life. This is particularly true for dual-career couples, where job satisfaction of both partners greatly determines the level of return on the department's investment in developing each untenured faculty member. Second, when planning any engineering project, various company guidelines exist for estimating the time required to complete each milestone established. In the authors' experience, this requires estimating the actual time which "should" be needed, then multiplying by a factor ranging from two to five, depending on the complexity of the milestone and the number of people who affect the outcome. Milestones in engineering education appear to be completely analogous.

EVALUATION OF YOUR PROGRESS

Part of implementing any plan or project must be regular review of effort and progress. As an individual, this should be done frequently, on perhaps a daily or weekly basis. As a minimum, track your accomplishments on a monthly basis to ensure that you are truly progressing toward tenure and promotion on a nearly continuous basis. This should allow accommodation of the unexpected yet necessary and time-consuming tasks that all untenured (and nearly all tenured) faculty face.

At the departmental or institutional level, a formal review process is probably already in place. Typically your evaluation as an employee will occur on an annual or semi-annual basis before tenure. If not, ask your department head and senior colleagues to help out by providing feedback on your progress at regular time intervals. This information can then be used in an informal version of continuous improvement, so that the combined self/departmental assessment results in specific useful modifications designed to help you achieve the next milestone of your strategic plan.

REVIEW AND REVISION OF YOUR PLAN

Not only is your progress worth reviewing, your plan must be a dynamic tool which assists you as you strive for personal and professional satisfaction and success. At regular time intervals, as well as when circumstances change radically, your priorities, goals, and constraints must be re-evaluated to ensure that you are following the best path for you and those people who are greatly involved in your life. Department heads come and go; personal health changes; and parents, spouses, and children continually affect both our personal and professional desires. Sometimes we discover that the professional success we have sought is not providing the satisfaction we expected. Sometimes opportunities arise that were never anticipated, but which are "the



right thing.” The distinction of strategic planning over traditional planning is the intention of continually adjusting the plan to changing conditions, while facilitating desired change.²

LET’S GET MOTIVATED!

There are many different motivations for developing a comprehensive strategic plan. They can stem from feeling no control of time, family, or workload, or perhaps from frustration when procrastination continually causes problems. At times, seeing someone else’s success may be the motivation. These examples apply to everybody. So why is it important for new faculty, in particular, to develop a strategic plan?

A recent survey⁹ of our faculty showed that 88% of new and untenured faculty are married and 64% are dual career families. Seventy-nine percent (79%) also have children to consider and 65% have interests or hobbies that require time commitments away from work. Approximately three-fourths of our faculty reported that they spend from 40 to 60 hours each week on university related work with 20% spending over sixty hours each week. Even when not in pay status, during the summer months, 66% of the tenure-track faculty spend over ten hours each week at work (11% reported working over forty hours each week).

Much of faculty workload is in support of long term milestones. Goals of research, course development and improvement, and publication typically involve years of work. With all of the long and short term time commitments filling the lives of untenured faculty, and with the control that a well developed strategic plan can provide, the motivation for developing a plan becomes apparent. Planning not only identifies the milestones to reach but it also provides a sequence of steps to take in order to reach those milestones. Both Covey⁴ and joint authors Burka and Yuen¹⁰ point out the need for and significance of completing small, sequential steps in fulfilling goals.

SUMMARY

Tenure and promotion are highly desirable goals for new faculty. To achieve these goals while maintaining some balance between personal and professional life, the actions taken to obtain promotion must be consistent with one’s overall career and life plan. Sacrificing all personal and all other professional portions of life for five or six years to meet one milestone is unwise and shortsighted. Planning can ensure that sacrifices are minimized and can be made without losing sight of “what’s important.”

RECOMMENDED READING LIST:

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