The Educational Administrators Impacts on the Tenure and Promotion Process

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Abstract

One of the major responsibilities of a departmental head is to evaluate faculty, which at times, could be difficult and controversial. Therefore, it is very important for a department head to show how they can recruit a new faculty member, and help them to attain tenure and promotion. The intent of this paper is to discuss some of the important issues associated with the educational leadership as a head/chair and how a good leader can make a difference in assisting new and especially younger faculty to obtain tenure and promotion.

Introduction

Important aspects of departmental leadership have been identified as dealing with politics of academia, encouraging teamwork, faculty recruitment/retention, faculty professional development, and motivating senior faculty to maintain their research activities. The other important issues for department heads/chairs are: providing new faculty with start-up money to facilitate initiation of their research, summer funding opportunities for research, travel money for presentation, assigning a graduate assistant, assigning a senior faculty as a mentor, released time, summer teaching, involving a faculty with committees at the University and national level, grant/proposal writing for external funding, and legal issues.

In reality, the department head/chair must be an effective leader to make a difference. Having the title of department head doesn't qualify one as a good leader. He/she needs to actively demonstrate leadership skills to motivate a group of individuals to work together toward a common goal. He/she needs to actively demonstrate leadership skills in support of young academics in the tenure process. Faculty needs the department head support especially in the areas of teaching, research, and service. If the department operates smoothly and efficiently, it will be an optimal service to its students, college, university and community. The objective of this paper is to discuss some of the important issues associated with the leadership of a department head/chair to attain tenure and promotion for their faculty.

Developing Leadership Skills

A department head should discover what it takes to motivate the faculty and staff to over-achieve at work. There is a good chance that most department heads are quality leaders and they have a dependable and trustworthy faculty and staff. However, the fact is that they can do much more for their faculty, students and the profession. First of all, it is a good idea for a department

head/chair to understand his/ her personal leadership style [1]. It can be autocratic, directive, positional power, democratic, personal power, motivational, controlling, visionary, etc. It is important to apply different leadership styles for different situations. In most cases at the university level, it appears that the department head must use something other than autocratic, directive, and controlling types of leadership[3]. The personal power or persuasive power is usually more effective. A good department head should have a passion to help the faculty and staff to become successful in their profession, and he/she needs to do whatever it takes to give the faculty and staff the opportunity. Faculty can be loyal, energetic, and dynamic employees that the department heads have dreamed about if they would just take the time to listen. Barier [2] indicated that the most important areas of leadership skills that employees respect are communication, accountability, and trust. Being a department head can't qualify one as a good leader.

Communication

In workplace or in every day's life, the ability to communicate effectively is the most important skill to have. It includes speaking and listening. The first step for developing this skill is to write a mission statement, which lays out a company's goals and how they will achieve those goals. Another aspect of communication is to continue to tell the faculty why they should work hard and to emphasis the goals of the departments. It is important to keep the faculty informed in all aspects of the department. Excellent communication skills in the workplace can also create a setting which is more relaxed, allows for creative problem-solving, higher morale among the employees, and produces a more efficient operation that saves of time and money. The first step for a department towards helping a new faculty to become loyal, energetic, and productive is to take the time to listen.

Accountability

The department head should communicate effectively about the goals of the department to the faculty. Then he/she needs to hold everyone accountable for his or her actions including himself/herself as well. Of course, it is better to focus more on the positives (seeing the glass half full), than the negatives.

Trust

We are all humans, and by that very definition, we all make mistakes. It is how we deal with these mistakes that make the difference of gaining or losing the respect of the faculty. Accepting the responsibility for the mistake and rectifying the error in a timely manner is critical. Similarly, the department head can earn the faculty's trust by being honest, and following through on commitments made. A common error made by department heads is to micro-manage. Trust is the glue, which holds people together. It is the main ingredient that can strengthen the department, should crisis ever occur. Making mistakes create opportunities to learn how to do things better and even to make some changes. Empowering the faculty through a positive attitude, trust, and respect shows the strength of a department head and will ensure the stability of that department.

Tenure Process

According to the American Association of University Professor (AAUP), the objectives of academic tenure are to warranty the "freedom of teaching and research and of extramural activities and economic security to make the profession attractive to qualified candidates."[4] Homkes[5] said that the tenure and promotion practices guarantee the institution that the best interests of the institution are being met. The decision to grant tenure or promotion is often based in part on the department head's evaluation and recommendation.

The current tenure and promotion process may produce unnecessary anxiety on the faculty member who is being evaluated. Especially this is true for younger faculty going through the process for the first time. This process may also create a negative relationship between some individual faculty and administration. In some cases, it is important to find out how opinions are in regard to the objectives (based on research, teaching, and service) and subjective (based on the faculty behavior, attitude, or recommendations of other faculty and relationships with students) nature of the tenure and promotion process. Therefore, it is critical to find out the insight of different levels of evaluators (peer-evaluations, chairperson, dean, and vice president of academia) to set some criteria in advance, regarding the tenure and promotion process for faculty. The importance and relative weight of these criteria depend on the university. Evidently, there is also some criticism that some institutions do not want to keep a higher number of tenured faculties because of the high cost[4]. The lack of good incentives for experienced faculty also creates the tenure system not accepted among scholars[4]. So, it is critical to get familiar with what the department expects at the beginning of their career. Nevertheless, the current system does not help to build upon the unique strength of individual faculty, contribute to department cohesiveness, or to fit current needs as evaluation strategy.

The main elements for the evaluation process can be research, teaching, and service. In research institutions, the emphasis is placed more on research than teaching. However, it is very important to do a good job in teaching even in primarily research-focused institutions. An employee needs to find out what the chair expects from the faculty in these three areas. For research, areas of national presentations, proceedings, refereed and non-refereed journal articles, and grant funds, etc. can be used. In regard to service, items such as: club advisor, software donations, committee duties (national, state, university, departmental), undergraduate and graduate academic advising responsibilities, outreach programs and consulting can be classified. In teaching, the number of courses, labs, independent studies, supervised students' projects, teaching evaluations (by students, fellow faculty, alumni, and department head), developing new courses, etc. can be used. So, it is important to communicate effectively what the department goals, objectives and visions are and what is expected from the faculty applying for tenure and/or promotion. This should be consistent at all levels. Therefore, the tenure process will foster a positive growth and result. If the department head isn't committed to the goals, no one else usually will be. It is also very important for a department head to be fair in this process. Some faculty can get discouraged, if the department head promotes everyone the same way, regardless of their performance in the three areas (teaching, research, and service). A department head should avoid delaying on praising a good faculty on a job well done, using threats, breaking promises, etc.

The best practices for faculty support/development

In some cases, a good faculty resigns because management can't meet the faculty's needs. In some other cases, some high-quality faculty can't leave the department because they might be too old to move, family members do not want to move, or he/she doesn't want to go through the tenure process again. Therefore, they are trapped and probably get angry at the system and their productivities reduce.

It is very critical for the department head/chair to act as a supportive leader and be able to make a difference in a faculty's professional and personal life. It is important to communicate to new and junior faculty clearly and often what is essential from a faculty to get tenure and promotion. How and what the fellow faculty should expect in the process should be periodically emphasized. In the research area expectation might be in the areas of national presentations, proceedings, refereed and non-refereed journal articles, and grant funds, etc. In the area of teaching, the number of courses, labs, and independent studies are taught. Students, peer faculty, alumni, and department head teaching evaluations are important. In addition, it is important to develop new courses. In the category of service, the following might be classified: committee duties (departmental, college, university, community, state, national), graduate and undergraduate advising, club advisor, brining into the department software donations, workshops, professional consulting, and working with community outreach programs. Communication will bring trust and accountability to the process and encourages teamwork. It also reduces the politics of academe. The department head can also support the faculty's professional development with following initiatives:
- providing new faculty with start-up money to facilitate initiation of their research
- summer funding
- opportunities for research, travel money for presentation and curriculum development
- assigning a graduate assistant to help in grading, labs, etc.
- assigning a senior faculty as a mentor/coach to share their wisdom, knowledge and experiences in the tenure process
- released time for research and publications, and support for grant/proposal writing for external funding
- involving a faculty with professional committees at the University and national level

All of these may create a sense of interaction, personal involvement & competency that spreads throughout the department. Therefore, it will help in recruitment and retention of good faculty and reduces the legal issues and absentees. At the same time, a good leader can motivate senior faculty to maintain their research activities with support of graduate assistants, travel money for presentations and curriculum development, and summer teaching. It is also important for a department head to establish a friendly relationship with the faculty. They may need help in both professional and personal life. Last but not least, salary adjustment plays a crucial roll to keep the good faculty in the department. If the department can take care of a faculty in a positive growth environment, he/she will take care of the department head when he/she needs them the most.

Conclusion

The chairperson's position is a unique one. With a foot in each trench, the department head represents administration and faculty. It is critical for the department head to lead by example: to be fair, honest, and trustworthy in his/her interactions with faculty in and outside of the department, as well as accountable for his/her actions. In carrying out his/her responsibilities as a department head, an attitude of leading by serving the faculty is important, as this creates an atmosphere which promotes team-building. The department's mission, goals and objectives, which are arrived at collectively must be followed within the confines of the university's and college's policies and procedures. These become the measurement of employees' performance, along with the department's Tenure and Promotion Guidelines. Once tenured, senior faculty may become less motivated. However, with proper coaching and initiatives, new opportunities may be created to motivate senior faculty to continue to make a significant and positive contribution to the department and the profession.

And finally, the department head should particularly focus on communicating clearly and providing as much assistance as possible to help young faculty to obtain tenure and promotion. After all, these young and energetic faculties will have profound impact on future of our educational system. If coached properly and treated fairly, the young academics of today will become true leaders of academics of tomorrow.

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