

Dealing with Conflict and Maintaining Faculty - and YOUR own - Morale



MS365 Stock Photo

**Nancy A. Stanlick, Ph.D., Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy
College of Arts and Humanities
University of Central Florida**

Institute for Academic Leadership, June 2025

References to publications/sources are noted as appropriate.

Does this look familiar??? Is this you? What my cardiologist said about a "Chair"....



Conflict and its Manifestations

"Being a chair is easy. It's like riding a bike, except the bike is on fire. Everything is on fire. And you're in hell." (A variation on an Internet meme about being an adult.)

Is This Your Department Meeting? Faculty Cats in Conflict!

- The **parliamentarian** faculty cat who doesn't listen well, but who expects everyone else to do so
- The **too-good-for-this-meeting** faculty cat. She's too important for all this
- The faculty cats who **annoy everybody**
- The tired, **sleepy faculty cat**
- The **Chair cat** who prepares carefully. She is **very brave** in leading this group and she checks her hair for fleas regularly. Nobody listens to a chair who scratches a lot.
- The **Assistant or Associate Chair** cat and their plans.
- The **competitive faculty cats** having hissy fits. The Chair must respond! Disciplinary letters!
- The almost always **absent faculty cats**

A Brief Interlude....



Just a little humor. It helps.

- **Feeling Disrespected**
- **Comparing Salaries**
- **Resentment** of hierarchy
- Clashes of deeply held **convictions**
- **Simply Coming to work**

- And a host of other sources such as:
 - Perceived pay disparities or differential treatment
 - Lack of understanding or acceptance of rules, policies, regulations, and laws – and sometimes refusal to listen

You are the supervisor, the manager, the evaluator, the scheduler; you're responsible for the budget. Don't let the complainers get you down. You are the "Sovereign" of your department.



You may be the sovereign, but you're not absolute. And you have plenty to do in addition to resolving conflicts and maintaining faculty morale. What about YOUR morale?

- Here's a table of tasks for chairs and directors derived from an article (2023) in the Journal of Higher Education Management ("Chairs and Program Leaders...", pp. 4-16. The content of the table below is mine. The Headings (1-4) are the authors':

Service to Academics	Service to Administration	Service to Students	Service to Faculty	How about you?
Your Teaching	Reporting	Grade Appeals	Mentoring, Funding, Progress	What do you need?
Your Research	Budgeting	Scheduling	Assignments	
Your Service	Programs	Progress	Evaluations	

Service to the following (it's not an exhaustive list, but it is exhausting).

Academics (Your Dept/School)	Administration	Students	Faculty	Other Service	Challenges (from JHEM)
Analysis of Historical Dept Data	AESP editing	Program Quality	Promotion & Tenure Criteria, PTR & PIP	Grant funding, development, support	Authority and Training
Program development and maintenance	Yearly reporting, Strategic Planning	Grade Appeals and other complaints	Evaluations, Mentoring, Awards	Task Forces; committee service	Problematic Faculty
Scheduling	Scheduling	Scheduling	Scheduling; Program development	Professional Organization service	Communication
	Budget	Recruiting	Recruiting, Hiring, Budget		Budget

Managing Conflict and Benefiting From it:

- There are benefits to conflict. Perhaps redirect conflict or its source?
 - Ask those in conflict to:
 - propose solutions
 - Become actively involved in enacting proposals
 - Be sure they are recognized for the work they've done

"Resolving conflict isn't about figuring out who is right and who is wrong. It's about making the department better" (George Justice, "Managing Conflict as a Department Chair," Chronicle of Higher Education, May 13, 2021).

End Conflict

- **By solving the problem**
 - Gain and maintain **trust**
 - Address **obstreperous behavior** when it occurs
 - **Listen** to those experiencing conflict
 - **Communicate; explain; justify**
- **When it can't be solved, move on**
 - **Letters of counsel, instruction, reprimand**
 - Referring employees to an **Employee Assistance Program**
 - Appropriately monitoring behavior consistent with CBA requirements. **READ THE CBA.**

Give Yourself a Break: Your Morale Counts, Too. This is Important Advice. Take my advice on this. *I'm not using it.*



Teddy

- **Go home and hug somebody, or watch tv in bed with your cat.**
- **Talk to a friend** who understands you & what you do.
- **Thank that friend. *Thank them more*** by being there and listening to them, too.
- **Ask for help** when you need it.
- **Make friends** with other chairs and directors. *They know lots of stuff.*
- **Take time for lunch.**
- **Take annual leave**