I have just completed my first year as division chair. To say that it was a “learning experience” filled with “teaching moments” is putting it mildly. I had no idea what I was getting myself into! In addition to the normal duties of chair, my division was moving to a new building, the college was working on its accreditation self-study, we began collective bargaining, we added two new members to the division, we conducted a search for an additional new member, and I taught a fully online course for the first time.

How did I do it all? I’d like to say that I did it because I have learned the secret to balancing the teacher, scholar, and administrator roles of my position. I’d like to say that, but it simply is not true. I found, in this first year, that I spent almost all of my time on the “administrator” role. Teaching and scholarship came in a very distant second and third. I’d like to share my thoughts about what I wish I had done and what I plan to do in the future.

JUST SAY “NO”
Easier than it sounds, especially when the person asking is a dean, vice president, or president, but sometimes the best thing you can do for yourself and your division is to say “no” to new commitments so that you can focus on the ones you have already made.

TOP FIVE
This suggestion I do actually follow. I have learned that I tend to work better when I have a “to do” list; however, I never get through all the items on the list because of meetings, classes, interruptions, and so on. So I have started creating a list of the five most important things that I want to accomplish each day. I feel a much greater sense of accomplishment at the end of the day, and it forces me to prioritize.

MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR SECRETARY
I have been extremely fortunate to be blessed with a secretary sent from the heavens! She has access to my Outlook calendar, and she prints a copy of my schedule each morning and leaves it on my desk. She is also able to schedule appointments for me. She answers my phone when I am out and sends me an email summary of any calls that I have missed. I’m not sure that I would be able to be as effective
without her. Of course, not everyone has a terrific secretary, but you can try to establish a good working relationship with whomever you have.

**DELEGATE, DELEGATE, DELEGATE!**

This goes hand-in-hand with having a terrific secretary. Being division chair does not mean that you have to do everything yourself. This is a particularly hard lesson to learn for those of us who are perfectionists and control freaks! What can you ask others to do? In our division, each discipline has a coordinator. I have asked my secretary to reroute all discipline-specific issues to the appropriate coordinator. This frees me up to deal with those issues that truly affect the entire division. Along these same lines, the chair does not have to be the division representative at every meeting. Ask for volunteers among your division colleagues.

**SCHEDULE TIME FOR SCHOLARSHIP**

This is one of those tips that I plan to start implementing next year. I am going to schedule time to write and conduct research. I will actually schedule this time in Outlook. The “trick” is to keep the commitment to myself the same way I would keep it to others. That means that if I say that I will devote 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. each day to scholarship, I need to hold that time sacred. If someone asks to meet during that time, I can say I already have an appointment (rather than “that’s my writing time”). I know that the only way this will work will be to spend this time outside my office, not in it. If I try to work in my office I will inevitably be interrupted.

**REVISE YOUR TEACHING**

This will be another challenge for me. I simply do not have the same amount of time to devote to my classes that I had in the past. So how can I maintain my integrity in the classroom while maintaining my sanity? First, I will take a course release rather than a course overload as compensation for my work as chair. More money is not as valuable as more time. I will examine the assignments I require so that students are getting the same quality of education but are not generating the same quantity of assignments to be graded. I will consider group projects, oral presentations, and different exam formats. I will try not to schedule brand-new preps for the spring semester, so that I have the summer to prepare for new material (not just the short winter break).

**SCHEDULE “ARTIST’S DATES”**

This idea comes from *The Artist’s Way*, by Julia Cameron, one of the oft-cited self-help gurus. I know that this will sound silly, but it truly is important to schedule time for yourself, by yourself, each week.
She calls this spending time with your inner “artist.” This is separate from the time you spend on scholarship, teaching, and administrative duties. You need to schedule time to recharge. Do something fun, something that you find interesting. It doesn’t have to cost anything. Visit a museum, go for a walk in the park, take a drawing class, practice the violin—it doesn’t matter. Just do something that takes you away from your work and is focused entirely on you. Personally, I practice my ukulele! Research on both stress management and creativity suggest that this time away from work can bring positive results including stress reduction, increased creativity, and increased productivity when you do return to work.

**RECOGNIZE THAT YOU REALLY CAN’T DO IT ALL**

Often you have so much on your plate that something is going to fall off. If you have made too many commitments, you can either continue to disappoint yourself and others or you can admit that you took on too much and give up something.

**DEVELOP SYSTEMS**

According to another self-help guru, Susan Silver (*Organized to Be Your Best!*), a system is merely tools plus habits. There are several great time management tips, techniques, and tools out there, but they will all be wasted if you do not actually use them regularly. The key is to try something new, see if it seems like it would work for you, and then make a conscious effort to use that new tool regularly until it becomes a habit. Once you develop new habits, you are on the way to creating a more balanced life.

**REFERENCES**


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