TOP LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCED CHAIRS
July 2012

Contributions from chairs serving as ADFM New Chair Advisors, Nov. 2011

Your job and self-care

Be humble and determined.

Enjoy yourself. Chaos is the reason they need someone to do your job. When it stops being fun, quit.

Value and nurture your inner spiritual self and never compromise your ethics!!

Find another chair to mentor you and never hesitate to run things by him/her before you act.

Never hesitate to stall – it can be an effective and life-saving tactic!!

Take care of yourself. When you move from being a peer/collleague to a Chair, your relationship with faculty changes – it is not bad, it is just different. Find someone outside the department to talk to – you will need that. And, get sleep and exercise and time with loved ones and time alone. While that may seem like a luxury, it is precisely those things that will help you maintain the presence of mind to face the big (and small) challenges you will face each day.

Rome wasn’t built in a day. You will want things to work better, grow, evolve, faster than they will. We live in complex systems that don’t change quickly or easily. Be patient, and persistent. You will make a difference.

Do the right thing. That may sound like a grossly over-simplified way to lead and manage. But, in the end, most decisions devolve down to this level, and you will know what the right decision should be.

Get the culture right, and all else will follow. Don’t forget about the meaning in our work – and keeping your faculty in touch with that - while you deal with the rest of the crap. If you do, your department will be successful.

Be proactive but know when to be patient…life has a way of working itself out.

Job duties and job balance

When it ain't working, stop. This means giving up on some of your brightest ideas and most enthusiastic hires. Continuing to support bad ideas and bad hires destroys the enthusiasm of everyone else. About 20% of what you try is bound to fail. Get over it.

Be involved, stay uninvolved. Participate in as much as you can in as many areas as you can in clinical work, teaching, and research. However, don't forget to carve out time to
steal ideals from others and think. That is your job.

Write your own job description and stick by it. You need to balance some school wide and national involvement but you are paid to run a department. Never forget your "success" will be defined by the quality of your department.

Always try to say yes to a medical student request if at all possible

Always weigh in on the match list and alter if needed before it goes out as you will be held responsible in the end

Never give up practicing medicine and make sure you take care of as many VIP’s as you can

Work with as many medical students as you can

**People: hiring/firing/reassigning**

Count on the people in your department who know how to do their jobs; don't be afraid to make some new assignments.

1. Hire the right people (always)!
2. Get rid of the wrong people.
3. Learn the difference between 1 and 2 (not as easy as one thinks) and don’t become one of the wrong people.

Hire and appoint well. Always accept the fact that those you appoint to do a job will do it better than you can so stay out of their way. Help them, coach them, facilitate their success and respect their intuition and initiative. By doing this you effectively clone yourself and get a lot more done.

Make sure everyone has a job description. Job descriptions mean you don't have to argue about who does what. It is written.

Faculty who demand a lot of concessions during recruitment, will demand more consistently throughout their tenure – even if they receive more than anyone else – be certain they are worth it!

Recruit the best, brightest, most loyal, and hardest working administrator you can on day 1 – he/she singularly will be your greatest asset or a mill stone around your neck!!!

Deal with unhappy faculty…they can undermine your whole program

**Relationships with the Dean & Institutional politics**
Maintain clear, informed, and pleasant communication with the Dean. Often best to give information in writing and keep notes.

80% of communications/emails sent to the Dean or President or other “boss” should be good news. Maybe even 90%. Then they’ll be far more likely to respond to the 10% that require that they do something.

Be sure to meet regularly with your bosses, ie the Dean, President, CEO of Hospital, VP for financial affairs, etc. and find out what their priorities are and tell them what you are doing. This has been very helpful over the years, even though sometimes, I did not like what I was hearing. At least I knew where I stood and could help get the department through some rough times.

Learn the politics of your institution and pay attention to them. Recognize who is in charge and sustain their support.

If the director of the hospital says "don't worry, I will take care of it," be worried

Anyone with the title Provost, Dean, Chancellor does not understand adult primary care unless they are a PCP

In most circumstances the Dean of the Medical school who hired you wants to help you; however he/she must address the deficient of your department-- make sure the dean clearly understands family medicine and primary care and the difference between generating RVUs and cost avoidance.

Negotiating with the Dean – make sure you get it in writing

Learn who makes decisions about resource allocation and how best to influence their decisions.

**Relationships within and outside your Department**

Reach out to chairs of other departments. Ask them to contact you if there are problems with your people, and assure them that you will do the same. Similarly, also acknowledge the successes of your colleagues in other departments.

Build relationships with colleagues using the same skills for building long-term trusting therapeutic relationships with patients.

Build consensus within the leadership of your department when making difficult decisions such as budget reductions, changes in faculty plans, or disciplinary actions.

Trust no one – verify always! Especially if someone promises you money – confirm it immediately in writing – twice or three times.

Identify your battle buddies early on in your tenure – know who you can count on to watch your back – and wear full body armor in the presence of others!
Have an open-door policy for faculty, but close it regularly to truly get your job done!

Become close friends with the Chair of Internal Medicine even if they have a personality disorder

befriend all the surgical departments— they like you to refer patients and then care for them post op. In exchange they will vote in your favor on many department issues

Develop strong relationships with community family doctors who refer patients to your hospital

**Finances**

Establish logical cost centers for every initiative the department becomes involved in. Then be certain they make a profit, break even or are so valuable that you can support them. No money, no mission.

Centralize budgetary management to you and your administrator – know the money really well and don’t let too many people make budgetary decisions other than the two of you. (Unless the department is really large and truly uses accountable division structure.)

Someone told me every year that each budgetary year gets harder than the last one. Sounds pretty negative as advice, but it has actually been helpful to me. If you have an “easy” year, then you aren’t taking enough financial risk to build the next great thing.

I wanted to have an open, transparent department re the financial situation so I put together a departmental budget and finance committee which looks at faculty compensation, reviews and makes suggestions about the incentive plan and helps with the budget each year re advice to our Leadership Team

There is no such thing as no money – they may say it is not available to you, but there is always money!

Learn cost accounting

**Communication**

It is impossible to communicate too much. Something like a weekly Chair Update has been very helpful. I learned this after Hurricane IKE when I did daily updates at first, then weekly and the faculty, residents and staff really appreciated it

Never, ever, ever end a day hitting the send button. It is best to wait until morning- then think better of it and pick up the phone and talk to someone.

**Reflections on Being a Chair**
Jack M. Colwill
(from University of Missouri New Chairs’ Workshop, April 15-18, 2012)

“When you’re up to your ass in alligators, it’s hard to think about draining the swamp.”

Gratifications
Immediate
• Working with people you respect.
• Providing leadership and vision.

Delayed
• Seeing the successes of the faculty and graduates.
• Seeing how your institution is different because of your department.
• Feeling you have had an impact.

Downside
• It’s a lonely job.
• A good day is two steps forward for one backward.
• Many days it’s two steps backward for one forward.
• Change is slow.
• There is always a crisis.
• Overload!!

Roles of a Chair
• Provide Leadership and Vision.
• Recruit the stars.
• Be a Money Grubber.
• Problem solver and conflict resolver.
• Be a chaplain and mentor.
• Be a role model.
• Milieu creator.
• Institutional statesman and team player.

Vision and Mission
• Chair’s unspoken vision.
• Importance of Departmental Vision and Mission Statement.
  A Department which shares a vision and a mission marches together.

Recruitment
• Select people who are better than you.
• Find the start and then define the job.
• Know whom you are hiring.
• No faculty may be better than bad faculty.
• Be Careful Whom You Tenure.

Money Grubber
• Hunger is a powerful motivator.
• The institution doesn’t owe it to you.
• It’s a collective responsibility.
• Be Transparent – Share the Data.
• Don’t be perceived as a Debtor Department.

Problem Solver & Conflict Resolver
• Each morning think of a problem you are avoiding. Then address it!
• Some decisions can be made by edict, but most major decisions require group buy in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Can be autocratically defined</th>
<th>Simple solution</th>
<th>Elegant solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Requires group buy-in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Get people on board before – rather than after – the decision.
• Who owns the problem?
• Don’t try to solve problems by email!!
• Anyone afraid to put his/her job on the line shouldn’t have the job.
• Don’t use all of your silver bullets.
• Remember, you can outlive the bastards.

Role Model
• You are one of the faculty.
• Be competent.
• Live by the three-legged stool.
• Be a pied piper.
• Remember – the Chairmanship comes first. Spend necessary time.

Statesman
• Be an institutional chauvinist.
• Remember that the Dean and other chairs are as altruistic as you are.
• Put yourself in their shoes.

Communication is vitally important
• Be accessible.
• Be open. Share data and info.
• Regular meetings with faculty.
• Regular meetings with executive committee.
• Regular meeting with the Dean.

Surviving
• Have time to be proactive and time to be reactive.
• Don’t be a World War 1 flying ace. You can’t do it all.
• Don’t let your paranoid gland hypertrophy.
• Avoid kamikaze missions.
• Have a support system.
• Tell faculty that you don’t like to be surprised.
• Get away!

**Causes of Failure**
• Loss of faculty support.
• Conflict with the Dean.
• Failure to balance the budget.
• Inability to recruit the stars.

**The Imperial Chair**
• An autocrat.
• Knows all the answers.
• Speaks much; listens little.
• Rules by edict.
• Views faculty as employees – not as colleagues.
• Puts self above call, etc.

**Consequences**
• Faculty initiative and leadership stifled.
• Chair’s decisions may be viewed as capricious.
• The chair is left to solve the problems.
• Ultimately loss of faculty trust and support.

**The Successful Chair**
• Listen!!!!!!
• Is service oriented.
• View faculty and residents as colleagues.
• Has an openness and honesty – leading to trust.
• Delegates responsibility.
• Challenges faculty to achieve.
• Shares governance while maintaining the power of veto.
• Seeks advice before making decisions.
• Views Chairmanship as a Career.

**Signs of Success**
• A productive faculty.
• A faculty with a common vision and mission.
• A faculty which provides institutional & national leadership.
• A faculty with obvious heirs apparent.

**Suggestions**
• Have a mentor
• Visit other programs
• Have external reviews of progress
• Take time to smell the roses
• Have fun