NEW ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATORS

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SOME ADMINISTRATIVE “RULES OF THUMB”
SPEAKING NOTES:

1. **Speak softly; you are in a position of power.** Once you become an academic administrator your relationship with your colleagues will change. Your colleagues will understand that you have an influence over a number of the key aspects of their careers. Do not pretend that you can turn off from your position. Everything you say will be heard as coming from Chair / Dean / Principal. It will also be heard loudly - so speak softly. Try **never** to lose your temper with someone over whom you have authority, no matter how provoked you feel.

2. **Do not be afraid to ask for help.** Your colleagues do not expect you will have all the answers for the problems your unit confronts. In fact, they may resent you acting as if you do have all the answers. Your colleagues do, however, expect you to operate in a clear and transparent manner, to consult as appropriate and to seek advice from the appropriate offices. You will, on occasion, encounter very serious issues (personnel and financial) including actions which might be unethical or even illegal. Seek advice when such events occur. Do not improvise or try to muddle through. Your integrity and honesty are vital to your ability to lead.

3. **Recruit, hire and retain people who are better than you are.** In many ways an academic administrators’ legacy is often the people they hire / recruit and that is how their term is remembered. Surrounding yourself with excellent faculty and
staff will of course make you look better! On this same note, uphold the highest academic standards in all your decisions from merit, PTR to tenure reviews, even when it means a tough decision has to be made. There is nothing worse than inheriting a performance problem that somebody else did not address.

4. **Set a goal of leaving your academic unit in a better position than when you started.** Plan carefully areas of activity in which you hope to leave your mark. At the same time, recognise unexpected opportunities as they appear and be sufficiently flexible to re-order your priorities to take advantage of such opportunities (government programs, university programs etc)

5. **Treat employees the way you would want to be treated if the tables were turned.** Treat administrative and technical staff, faculty and students with respect and trust and you will enjoy very loyal and effective support. Actively seek advice from your colleagues and you will be surprised how much easier it is to make difficult decisions. You should never tolerate self-important academic staff “dumping on” administrative staff. As a leader you must respect each colleague no matter the prevailing department view of a persons worth. Create an environment in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

6. **Understand policies, procedures and governance and follow them.** Process protects, get advice - don’t improvisie. E.g. MOA, Policies book, Board of Governors, Senate, boards and committees.
7. **Communicate effectively.** A major part of your job is to communicate. You relay information from the Provost or from the Dean to your unit and also from your unit to the Dean and Provost. Read incoming material thoroughly, but once, and choose a course of action. Clear the in-tray! It is worthwhile spending time on communicating (e.g. when something goes well credit the right people; when something goes less well take some responsibility; when someone receives a reward, send them a note and advertise the event to your unit; when someone achieves something unusual send them a note). Let people know you care about them as people.

8. **Realize that very little is confidential.** Assume every decision you make (especially on financial and workload matters, every e-mail you send and every conversation you have) will become public sooner or later. Only the most serious and sensitive personnel matters seem to remain confidential. Understand FIPPA. As you make these decisions or write that e-mail, think of how they might play out in public.

9. **Apologize when you make a mistake.** We all make mistakes, and when we do so it is important to apologise. On occasion you will choose an inferior course of action. When it becomes obvious that you have made a mistake of judgement, do not be afraid to change your course of action. Your colleagues will know when you are simply being stubborn (however, reversing yourself too often will cause you to lose credibility, so make fully informed decisions).
10. **Do not forget to have fun and do not take things too personally.** Each of us came to our chosen careers for reasons related to teaching and research. Yet, each of us has been chosen by our colleagues to assume administrative roles. In the eyes of your colleagues you have demonstrated some attribute that has led to your selection. You must figure out how to enjoy the many aspects of your job for the duration of your term. We do better the things we enjoy. It is of course customary to declare how much we dislike administrative work and we cannot wait to return to the classroom / research laboratory. Your colleagues, however, will more enthusiastically rally to your leadership if they see you are enjoying the work. This work will undoubtedly bring with it its challenges and problems. Do not take complaints, appeals, and grievances too personally. They are a normal process based upon the fact that we have Policies and Procedures. Also, remember you are not alone. You share this leadership role along with many other colleagues and these colleagues can act as mentors and confidential advisors.