



(<https://www.insidehighered.com>)

Reach more than 1.2 million talented higher ed professionals with your job posting [CLICK to POST NOW](#)

INSIDE HIGHER ED

The banner features a background image of three modern chairs (one yellow, two white) against a light blue wall. The text is overlaid on the left side, and the Inside Higher Ed logo is on the right.

Advice for mentoring underrepresented senior faculty members (essay)

Submitted by Kerry Ann Rockquomore on March 2, 2016 - 3:00am

Dear Kerry Ann,

I liked your suggestions about [how to mentor junior faculty of color](#) ^[1]. But as a department chair, my biggest challenge is how to mentor senior faculty who are underrepresented. I have one colleague in particular who is clearly struggling. She earned tenure two years ago, but she hasn't published anything since that time. I can see that she's overcommitted with service obligations, she's working all the time and she appears exhausted. I've had plenty of diversity training as chair, but nobody ever talks about how to mentor underrepresented faculty once they are tenured. I want to be supportive to my colleague, but I don't know what to do or what to say.

Any advice?

Sincerely,

Supportive Chair

Dear Supportive Chair,

I suspect many other department chairs want to be supportive but aren't sure how to do so or what to say. While you can learn about the [experiences of underrepresented faculty members](#) ^[2], it can be challenging to apply those lessons to specific individual mentoring situations.

Underrepresented faculty members face many challenges that differ from majority faculty experiences, but there are two concrete challenges that are ideal for starting a mentoring conversation: 1) a disproportionately high number of service requests related to diversity and 2) intense time pressures that can sap productivity. Both of these are escalated -- not alleviated -- after winning tenure.

Given that your colleague is likely facing both of these challenges, why not invite her to coffee and initiate a clarifying conversation? You can start with an honest and direct communication of why you care. In your case, you genuinely want to support your colleague, and your role as chair gives you a

reason to initiate this conversation in an informal meeting.

It can be as simple as letting her know that you want to have an informal conversation about posttenure mentoring. When you meet, express openly that you're highly invested in her success and want to do what you can to support her. Because you want to position yourself as a supporter, I recommend using the following questions to guide your conversation.

What Is Your Posttenure Pathway?

Most faculty members struggle with the posttenure transition. By that, I mean that the challenge pretenure is to win tenure by meeting externally imposed expectations. But once tenure is awarded, there's a new challenge: to consciously and intentionally choose a posttenure pathway [3]. The problem is that many faculty members are so accustomed to organizing their time and energy to meet institutional expectations that they struggle to designate their own pathway and set their own agenda posttenure.

For underrepresented faculty members, the challenge of choosing a pathway is maximized by a large number of diversity-related requests that can pull an individual in many different directions at once. You may be the first person to ask your colleague: Where do you want to be in five years? What are your big goals for this chapter of your career? How can I support you in meeting them?

You'll notice that I did not suggest that you start off by asking why she looks so exhausted or what challenges she's facing. It's very important that you begin the conversation by creating a space for your colleague to speak out loud what she's dreaming of, what she wants professionally, and what she imagines when she sees herself operating at her highest professional potential. Because you're creating a space of possibility, it's super important to communicate enthusiasm and positive energy, as opposed to raising criticisms and/or giving contrarian advice.

How Do You Plan to Get There?

One of the biggest mistakes I see posttenure faculty make is that even if they have a generalized sense of what they want their posttenure pathway to be, they don't have a plan for how to get there. If your colleague wants to be promoted to full professor, there's a path for that, and it's important she has a plan.

But it may be that her immediate posttenure pathway is something different. She may want to be a campus change agent, a public intellectual, a disciplinary super-star, take on a formal administrative position, leave the academy altogether or something else entirely. No matter what your colleague wants, an established pathway can lead her there. Opening the conversation about a plan can be incredibly helpful and it can be as easy as asking:

- "How do you plan to get from where you are today to [insert goal]?"
- "I would love to brainstorm with you how that could happen."
- "Do you know anybody who is already in that role? If not, I would be happy to [introduce you to someone I know, connect you with a training program, make a referral, etc.]."

Who Are Your Mentors?

Many newly tenured faculty members imagine that they no longer need mentoring. But of course, any time we move from one stage to another, we need mentoring. Specifically, we need new skills, new networks and new mentors. It is highly likely that your colleague is mentoring *lots* of other people but doesn't have any mentors of her own to help her through the posttenure transition.

I'm a big fan of using a [Mentor Map](#) [4] to demonstrate the concept that faculty members need a network of mentors (as opposed to one guru mentor). It's visual, it makes a powerful point and it leads to productive conversation about how to fill gaps. If it feels awkward to share a resource, you could just describe it as a helpful tool and explain how it's helped other faculty members to cultivate a network of community during transitions from one stage of the academic ladder to another. Then send her a copy as a follow-up to your conversation.

What Is Your Current Service Load, and Does It Support Your Five-Year Goals?

This gets to the heart of the issue. Just broaching this subject may be shocking. I don't mean for your colleague -- I mean for you. I imagine that you're generally aware of the fact that your colleague is receiving a disproportionately high number of service requests, but I've observed one consistent reality: the only person who knows the sheer volume of service requests senior faculty of color receive are those individual faculty members.

If you ask your colleague directly, she will rattle off a list of committees. But I want to encourage you to go a step farther by asking her to write down all of her current service commitments on one piece of paper. That may happen in the moment (if so, go with it) or it may serve as the basis for a follow-up conversation where the two of you can analyze the amount of service relative to other faculty members and whether the volume or types of service is aligned with your colleague meeting her five-year goals. At that point, you can choose to respond as an advocate (working to equalize the service loads of faculty members in your department in your role as chair), as an ally (to make sure her often invisible labor is formally recognized and rewarded), as a service mentor (helping her to pick which commitments to keep and to let go), or as a [coach](#) [5] (helping to connect her with resources to learn the [art of saying no](#) [6]).

I hope my description of the most important questions that guide posttenure mentoring will encourage you to schedule a coffee meeting with your colleague. If all else fails, you can forward her this essay and ask her if she wants to talk about it. And I'm sure that readers will have lots of additional suggestions about how chairs can intervene when they spot an underrepresented faculty member who needs support. (Feel free to post those suggestions below in the comments.)

Peace and productivity,

Kerry Ann Rockquemore, Ph.D.

President, [National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity](#) [7]

P.S. I'm always happy to receive questions at DearKerryAnn@FacultyDiversity.org [8]. Your questions will be kept confidential and anonymous!

Source URL: <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/03/02/advice-mentoring-underrepresented-senior-faculty-members-essay?width=775&height=500&iframe=true>

Links:

[1] <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2016/02/17/advice-white-professor-about-mentoring-scholars-color-essay>

[2] <http://www.amazon.com/Presumed-Incompetent-Intersections-Class-Academia/dp/0874219221>

[3] <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/06/25/essay-how-faculty-members-can-chart-meaningful-post-tenure-career>

[4] <http://bit.ly/1NNDkYY>

[5] <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2013/07/22/essay-calling-senior-faculty-embrace-new-style-mentoring>

[6] <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/07/23/essay-need-mid-career-faculty-members-turn-down-service-requests>

[7] <http://www.facultydiversity.org/>

[8] <mailto:DearKerryAnn@FacultyDiversity.org>

undefined
undefined