

# **2009 ACADEMIC HEADS' CONFERENCE: PRACTICAL LEADERSHIP**

## **ROUNDTABLES: HOW TO STRENGTHEN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE SUMMARY**

### ***The difficult conversation – how to strengthen performance of under-performing academics at early/mid/late career***

#### **What works well?**

1. Initial self-assessment of performance
2. Identify problems such as loss of passion, staleness with same job
3. Buddying them up with a mentor who is a good teacher/researcher
4. Intensive teaching/research workshops
5. Draw on data - Invite proposals for solution of problems
6. Ask them what their passion is in the job
7. Clear expectations
8. Offers of development support
9. Defining clear targets relevant to research and teaching. Defining strengths and focusing on that if possible
10. Some, but limited tolerance of excuses for not achieving concrete outcomes
11. Flexibility related to life circumstances e.g. health, children i.e. relative to opportunity. This should however be decided on a case by case basis.
12. Help to improve efficiency – how do staff spend their week. Question is in detail. Help with delegation.
13. Not avoiding it and getting as much into it as you can about the background
14. Determining standards of 'under performing'. What is reasonable to expect when contracts indicate a predominate teaching/clinical supervision load.

15. Clarifying roles and what the expectations are
16. Clear statement of expectations at each level (explicit documentation)
17. Including early retirement as an option in discussion
18. Frank discussion of individuals' goals/aspirations/ interests
19. Direct appeal to personal interests/reputation/ego
20. Clear documentation of evidence (rather than opinion)
21. Divide broad tasks into smaller actions and prioritise
22. Identify both rewards and consequences (carrot and stick)
23. Seek advice from others (managers, HR)
24. Appropriate mentoring, well targeted advice

### **What doesn't work so well?**

1. Blame
2. Bullying
3. Desultory tick the box approach (basic compliance)
4. Lack of support and anecdotal criticism
5. Repetitive discussion of chronic problems without moving to solution phase
6. Leaving 'problem cases' to their own devices.
7. Pushing negatives
8. Starting with a negative
9. Using tasks as a punishment
10. Not knowing full history
11. Appealing to collegiality
12. Avoiding the issue
13. "Stick" is theoretical but difficult to wield in practice
14. Often difficult to get clear information on university priorities/directions especially for small groups/isolated groups
15. Underperformance of senior staff may reflect failure of past performance management

**What advice would you give to a new head who is dealing with this issue?**

1. Document PD processes accurately and honestly (no satisfactory reports for poor performances)
2. Utilise probation provisions to manage out chronic poor performers
3. Realistic performance targets
4. Focus on long term career development
5. Promotion application as PD
6. Delegating to strong and effective performance managers and giving clear guidelines to them
7. Question staff about how they see their roles
8. Determine how they actually spend their time
9. Regular follow up
10. Take performance management seriously
11. Inculcate process in senior staff
12. Be clear about university/faculty/school objectives and translate these – clear statement of expectations
13. Be willing to listen
14. Take an individual approach.

## ***The challenges of improving teaching performance***

### **What works well?**

1. Examples/Benchmarks of award winners
2. MonQuest/Unit evaluation if used carefully
3. Peer evaluation and mentoring
4. Team teaching
5. Collegiate curriculum development
6. What does good teaching look like? Depends on content and context
7. Core topics can be boring to teach and boring to learn (use the context in detail not just the theory)
8. Rotating people through
9. Different core content – new perspectives and critiques
10. “Clinical stories” – e.g. medico legal issues; ethics
11. Less is more – over teaching and over assessing is bad.
12. Get the students’ opinions and perspectives (both inside and outside the teaching situation)
13. Viewing “the lecture” as only the starting point – principles; context; philosophy
14. “Classroom control” – canvas students’ opinion – ground rules, timing; attendance for staff and students
15. Use interaction methods including technology
16. Setting expectations for students
17. Discussing with good teachers

### **What doesn’t work so well?**

1. Supervising older/more experienced staff
2. Research emphasis – sidelines teaching
3. Can teaching-intensive positions work?
4. Insistent of PhD for good lecturer

5. Teaching-only is 'kiss of death'
6. MUSO chunky
7. CALT as a research only group!

### ***Gaining commitment – how to get academic staff to complete their performance documentation (now online)***

### ***Building engagement – how to get academic staff to engage with the idea of building their performance***

#### **What works well?**

We feel in our table that the question is not appropriate: it deals with symptom (lack of engagement in one's performance building) rather than the source (how come this is happening?) So that is the question that we decided to tackle. Why? Perhaps because people are feeling under pressure (constant sense of low level panic and guilt). The pressure to perform excellently in all aspects of academia has increased massively in the last 5 – 10 years. Yet there is less and less funding which means higher and higher work loads.

#### **So what works?**

1. Empower academics to take control (but this requires them to clearly know where we are realistically going)
2. Have permission and space to fail
3. Have time to think, to re-feel the passion and focus on it
4. Assurance that the path chosen (with Monash back up) will take them to promotion
5. More collaboration and less competition
6. Release their time by employing some strategic admin help

#### **What doesn't work so well?**

1. Stick. Our people are (mostly) working really hard. Telling them off for not being great is not useful
2. Mixed messages (e.g. saying that teaching is important but not clear on what the criteria is to be promoted on it)
3. Tell staff they need to do everything great, excellently. It is unrealistic and demoralising.
4. Competition and focusing on "playing the game". It is necessary but it should be seen as a tool, not as an end

5. Be bogged down with administration procedures (offer strategic administrative help)

### ***Kick-starting ideas – what to suggest when a career has stalled***

#### **What works well?**

1. First of all ascertain why the career has stalled. Personal issues???
2. Don't apply for major grants at the moment (beating your head against the wall is soul destroying)
3. Think about smaller grants
4. Collaborate
5. PhD student(s), but how to fund this work? Will vary with disciplines.
6. Mentoring from different sources important
7. Suggest writing reviews

#### **What doesn't work so well?**

1. Blaming the staff member
2. Making the staff member feel isolated
3. To focus on outcome (rather than process)
4. Don't make grant applying compulsory

#### **What advice would you give to a new head who is dealing with this issue?**

1. Be prepared to commit some seed funding (amounts will vary depending on discipline)
2. Mentor on grantsmanship (again discipline specific) e.g. previous successful applications in this field