

# THE CARE AND FEEDING OF COLLEAGUES

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## Abstract

*In restaurants that serve lobster, there is never a lid on the tank. This is due to the simple idea that the other lobsters in the tank will not allow them to escape. As one lobster is starting to become successful, the other lobsters will reach up and pull them back down (Foote, 2012). In academia, faculty are often regarded in only how they produce (Huenneke, Stearns, Martinez, & Laurila, 2017) including the amount of grant money they bring into the university, number of publications, service on high level committees, or student evaluations. This can create an atmosphere of competition for faculty instead of an atmosphere of collaboration thus there is a deterioration within the academic climate for faculty (Teichler, Arimoto, & Cummins, 2013) and so the Lobster Syndrome continues and flourishes through this atmosphere of competition. This article examines the aspects of what could create this atmosphere of collaboration.*

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Higher education has become a place where the Lobster Syndrome has been not only allowed to run rampant but is often encouraged. In restaurants that serve lobster, there is never a lid on the tank. This is due to the simple idea that the other lobsters in the tank will not allow them to escape. As one lobster is starting to become successful, the other lobsters will reach up and pull them back down (Foote, 2012). In academia, faculty are often regarded in only how they produce (Huenneke et al., 2017). This production includes the amount of grant money they bring into the university, how many publications produced, service on high level committees, or student evaluations. There is an additional demand for growth of the university, and the applicability of research (Mudrak et al., 2018; Bentley, Coates, Dobson, Goedegebauer, & Meek, 2013). This can create an atmosphere of competition for faculty instead of an atmosphere of collaboration leading to a deterioration within the academic climate for faculty (Teichler et al., 2013). Thus, the Lobster Syndrome continues and flourishes through this atmosphere of competition.

This article was inspired by the book *The Care and Feeding of a Teacher* by Brenda Preuss. She states that she published this book because, "I want teachers to read this book and feel validated, loved on, and empowered. I want administrators to read this book and say, 'Oh, wow! I forgot what it was like to be a teacher'" (2017, p. 1). There are a great many articles and books about teachers needing to take care of one another, to mentor and coach novice faculty, to support one another, and even a website where teachers pay one another for lessons and materials. There is very little written on what happens to novice faculty when they start teaching in a university setting. Academia is more than just teaching at a higher level. There are so many other facets to be an effective faculty member at today's universities. In a book chapter by Fredrickson, McMahan, and Hansen-Thomas (2017), the expectations for new faculty are addressed.

When entering into academia, new faculty members are introduced to the academic triumvirate: scholarship, teaching, and service. The expectation of junior faculty is often to be ultra-productive in all three aspects from day one; quality and quantity are expected in all areas. (p. 123)

Such expectations certainly imply that junior faculty need support and guidance to meet with success. The discussion below will examine conditions needed to create an atmosphere of collaboration instead of competition. Such aspects include mentoring, leadership, and an “ethic of . . .” lens.

### **Mentoring**

In academia, it has become more difficult for novice faculty to find mentors within the ranks of seasoned faculty willing to coach in all aspects of academia; teaching, scholarship, and service (Carmel & Paul, 2015). Faculty cite numerous reasons for this lack of mentoring in the academy. Some seasoned faculty indicate they do not feel qualified to serve as mentors due to the lack of mentoring they received, the pressures of publication and scholarship (Pololi & Knight, 2005) and simply not having enough time to devote to a junior faculty member (Ehrich et al., 2004).

The Conference Board (2013) shared the importance of mentoring in organizations outside of academia. Organizations with mentoring programs keep good employees engaged with the organization. Therefore, new initiatives find support more easily and building a climate and culture reflective of organizational norms and values becomes systemic. Academia has not caught up with outside organizations in this regard. All aspects of mentoring in organizations could be of benefit at the university level. Keeping great faculty and keeping them engaged with the university would be of tremendous benefit. Additionally, with the dynamic atmosphere within higher education, mentoring could help to support these changes. Finally, one of the reasons most cited by faculty for leaving or staying within the university is the climate and culture of the university (Flaherty, 2016). By building and promoting high quality mentoring programs at the university, the climate and culture within academia could be enhanced. It should be noted, however, that most of the programmatic aspects are controlled by the leadership of the university. In the following section, aspects of leadership within academia will be addressed.

### **Leadership**

Often the spirit of collaboration or competition existing in higher education has its origin within the offices of its leadership (Leisyte, 2016). This is due to immense pressure put on administration to raise the scholarship profile, financial profile, and the reputation of the university (Humphreys, 2013). There is a demand for universities to create a more highly educated populace while at the same time, “. . . maintaining quality and navigating changes in technology, funding patterns, accountability frameworks, and the diversity of our student bodies, we urgently need more effective and widespread collaborative leadership” (Humphreys, 2013, pp. 1-2). Humphreys (2013) states three ways collaborative leadership can bring about change within the university as it: (a) assists in sharing the mission/message to the public (including policy makers, families, and the media, to secure the necessary funding and help with regulatory support); (b) becomes the quality and maintenance of the operations of the university; (c) educates a more diverse population to meet the demands of the workforce in the twenty-first century. Improving collaboration in academia has also shown to improve student retention and success in higher education. Burns, Crow, and Becker (2015) stated,

In the often-contentious discussions about the future of U.S. higher education, one idea garners wide agreement: our institutions need to innovate. Since collaboration is the driving force for most innovation, it follows that developing a successful model for collaboration innovation -- for innovating together -- is the most sorely needed disruption in higher education. (p. 10)

There are many things that a university leader can do to improve the collaborative efforts at the institution. Loeche (2018) lists three ways that higher education leadership can create a more collaborative environment. Leaders should: (a) improve both their financial knowledge and technical training, (b) find incentives to drive outcomes, and (c) share institutional knowledge. This includes not only financial support, but encouragement for collaborative activities such as interdepartmental meetings, multidisciplinary scholarship endeavors, and attending conferences and seminars outside prescriptive fields.

University leadership should also empower faculty to serve as collaborative leaders (White, 2017). According to White (2017), steps to develop faculty leadership roles include:

- Engage faculty in roles that impact or reflect their academic responsibilities.
- Create communities of practice inclusive of faculty across campus who serve in leadership roles.
- Provide support and feedback for faculty leaders as they grow into their roles.
- Recognize faculty leaders in a high-profile manner.
- Help mentored faculty recognize, recruit, mentor, and support new faculty leaders.

There is a great amount written about creating teacher leaders within schools; however, there is less written that targets faculty leadership. As faculty are the “front lines” within a university in dealing with students, core academic values and democratic beliefs that underpin higher education, faculty are integral to the success of the university. Therefore, it is important for faculty leadership at the university to be effective and reflect the institution’s core values and beliefs. Even with all of this, “. . . few institutions offer effective support in developing faculty leaders” (Kiel, 2015, p. 8).

### **Ethic of . . .**

The discussion of ethics and ethical dilemmas dates back to the days of Plato and Aristotle. Ethics as a system of moral principles was viewed as a decision-making guide by providing a framework for values and rules. Within education, ethics is often viewed as a theoretical standpoint rather than an action.

From an academic search using the term, “ethic of”, results focused on multiple effective and imperative leadership qualities emerged. Fostering such character traits within the university could assist in building a collaborative environment among faculty and academic leadership. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2018) examine the concept of ethic through four different lenses that could be used within the educational setting. These include ethic of care, ethic of justice, ethic of critique, and ethic of profession.

**The ethic of care.** The ethic of care. Based on the work of Nel Noddings, the ethic of care encourages educators to guide students not only academically, but emotionally and morally as well (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2018). The students are the main focus of endeavor however, this is easily translated to the university setting. Translated to faculty in a university setting, the ethic of care could be used to create an atmosphere of collegiality among faculty through an emphasis on emotional and moral teaching, scholarship, and service rather than simply relying on a continuance off the status quo. This ethical lens can create relational values in faculty that include a feeling of belonging, trust, value, and self-efficacy; thus, creating a spirit of collaboration within the university.

**The ethic of justice.** Constructed on the ideals of a democratic society, the ethic of justice is defined by Strike (1991) as “a commitment to human freedom. . . [with] procedures for making decisions that respect the equal sovereignty of people” (p. 415). This can be at an individual or group level (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2018). Often this is looked upon as what is best for society instead of the individual. Using this lens of ethic of justice could help build a climate of collegiality and collaboration at the university by giving faculty opportunities to contribute to the good of the whole. This would require decision makers to break down educational silos so consideration of what is good for the university is recognized (in some instances) over the good of the college, department, program, or individual faculty.

**The ethic of critique.** Grounded in critical theory, the ethic of critique examines ethics and morals through the lens of social justice. It examines factors that impact inequities and power based on group or individual diversities (Shapiro & Stefkovich 2018). These include race, ethnicity, language, gender, religion, and social class. At the university level, using the lens of critique would create an ambience of collaboration among faculty as it would encourage cross collaboration of diverse groups of individuals. “Such a process should lead to the development of options related to important concepts such as oppression, power, privilege, authority, voice,

language, and empowerment” (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005, p. 16). These discussions could open up lines of discourse across campuses.

**The ethic of profession.** This is the newest of the ethics put forth by Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005). They consolidated the ethic of care, justice, and critique to create the ethic of profession. This can be built by leadership and professional organizations by using the multiple lenses of ethics to create their own professional ethical and moral framework. At the university level, this ethic of profession could take on a value and merit that could gain significance with all university stakeholders. By engaging all stakeholders in this collective belief structure through the lens of profession, it could build collaboration within the university.

### Conclusions

In the above discussion, aspects of creating an atmosphere of collaboration are addressed however; what happens to continue to create this? There is little written about maintaining this in a colleague-to-colleague manner. Some suggestions from the literature on creating a collaborative environment include:

- Measure, share, and celebrate collaborative success (Keast & Charles, 2018).
- Develop shared vision and goals of the organization and the collaborative work (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).
- Create spaces that can serve as interdisciplinary research and meeting space (Adams, 2015).
- Develop a non-judgemental atmosphere to build and foster creativity (Field, 2012).
- Serve as a campus organizational leader, thus giving you access to different groups and stakeholders within the campus (Altizer, Harris, & Shartar, 2015).
- Expand discourse across campus to embrace all stakeholders (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).
- Reward both based on individual accomplishments and efforts and those of the group (Field, 2012).
- Keep a toxic nature from entering into collaborations (Keast & Charles, 2018).
- Work in different settings than just your office. Consider going to the library, dining hall, student union, or coffee house on campus to meet different people from your campus (Altizer, Harris, & Shartar, 2015).
- Communication is important in gaining the trust of the collective. (Field, 2012; Baldwin & Chang, 2007).
- Invest in relationships with one another (Keast & Charles, 2018; Adams, 2015; Caskey & Carpenter, 2014; Field, 2012).
- Do not just dismiss conflict, expect conflict, and reflect upon the resolution (Caskey & Carpenter, 2014).

The implementation of these strategies can help to create a spirit of collegiality and collaboration on university campuses which must be modeled throughout educator preparation courses as we seek to show preservice teachers the importance of collaboration and care.

Although a great deal of the information provided is regarding new faculty members, it is important to address the needs of seasoned faculty members. As the university landscape continues to change and evolve, more demands are being placed on faculty to perform at higher and higher levels. This includes larger teaching loads, scholarship and publication demands, service expectations, and grant writing to provide funding at the university. It is more imperative than ever that we take the time needed to create a spirit of collaboration in academia and let go the constant competition demands and lobster mentality. It is time to provide the care and feeding of our colleagues.

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