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## Tip from a Department Chair:

### Advising Faculty to Know When to Say “Yes” (and When to Say “No”)

I find myself giving the same advice to faculty members over and over again. This part of my job as department chair, commonly referred to as “faculty development”, is much more rewarding than some of the other parts, such as assigning faculty workload, evaluating faculty members, planning and implementing a budget, dealing with curricular issues, and faculty members and student conflicts. I particularly like developing faculty members who are early in their careers; I like helping them to succeed by pushing them to reach a potential that I can envision, which they might not yet be able to do.

I am a counselor. Not in the traditional sense, as therapist, but as an experienced faculty person, (as their “boss”) faculty members ask me for advice. Very often, a faculty member will come into my office and ask if I think they should do this or that; this thing or the other thing. I take out a piece of paper and put it in front of them. I draw a circle and tell them that this is how much time they have. The circle includes time for sleep, exercise, and time with family and friends, not just work activities like teaching, writing papers, and meeting with students and colleagues. When they say that they want to add something (serving on a committee, joining a task force, writing a grant), I draw it with an arrow going in to the circle and I draw a small cutout, like a small piece of pie. With this, I try to help them figure out what they can then take out of the circle, i.e. what they can stop doing to allow them the time to do the new activity. (This, of course, assumes that all regular full time faculty members are busy, and I believe that they are.) I tell them very clearly that sleep, exercise, and family/friends must not be the activities that get cut out. In the United States, they are often the first to go. Faculty members, at first, usually feel at a loss, but they quickly realize that there is some relief in thinking about a new project, but also thinking that they have been given permission to “take something off their plate” (the circle can also represent a plate that is already overflowing).

The trick for faculty members is knowing what to say “yes” to and when to say “yes” to it. This is a more difficult concept to teach/learn. The “one in” and “one out” concept is much easier, but not all things are equal. For example, serving on a university committee that is deemed as powerful would be good for a senior faculty member who was planning to go up in rank, to full professor. This activity might be more important than serving on another faculty committee in the College of Nursing, for example. Thinking about your career, and career trajectory, is important in deciding which things to which you agree to do.

The other side of this, of course, is when to say “no.” I’m a proponent of writing out your short and longer term goals, and they come in handy here. When someone asks you to join a committee or scholarly project, I suggest that you

review your written goals before saying yes or no. If the activity is consistent with your goals, then say “yes”, if not, you can respectfully decline.