



## BECOMING AN AUTHORITY FIGURE: QUICK TIPS

*Five quick tips to help you get started on the right path towards establishing yourself as an authority figure.*

### *It's about the institution and the mission.*

Few people will want to do something simply because you think it's a good idea or because it will make you look good. The goals and plans your faculty and staff set for themselves are based on what they know is rewarded by the institution; explain to them how the initiatives you propose or actions you ask for will help them to fulfill their objectives. Consider how the ways you spend your time reflect your personal and institutional values. Remember, authority amplifies everything you say, so speak carefully. How often do you talk about "my unit," "my goals" and how often are you talking about "our unit" and "our goals"? People are listening and will take note, and it will affect their buy-in for the directions you propose.

### *Listen. Listen. Listen.*

Build the habit of listening more than you talk, and learn to ask questions that will help you gather valuable information and understand what the real issues are among members of your unit and what factors affect progress in your unit. You aren't expected to have all the answers, and your colleagues are your most valuable source of information. And remember, you don't always have to respond with a decision immediately. Buy yourself time to think about what you've heard, and set a timeframe for getting back to the person with a response.

- \* Tell me more about that / And then what happened?
- \* How do you see that fitting with our department's goals?
- \* What are some of the positive and negative consequences if we go that route?

SAMPLE SCRIPTS  
for effective listening

### *Develop good boundaries.*

Manage your time with an eye on your goals, keep your interactions with others professional and consistent, and watch what you discuss and with whom. Be aware of close friends and colleagues looking for favors; develop a mental test: would you do this for someone you don't like?

- \* You bring up an interesting point, and I'd like to think about it. I'll get back to you by (date).
- \* That's not something I would do for others, and I'm not comfortable making an exception because of our relationship.
- \* That's not something I am able to tell you, so let's move on. I hear what you're saying and I respect how you feel.
- \* My position requires/duties mean that I must also factor in some other perspectives/considerations in coming to a final decision.

SAMPLE SCRIPTS  
for good boundaries





## *Build relationships and trust.*

Your title (chair, dean, etc.) gives you institutionally-conferred, "positional authority," and this will suffice for many daily tasks. The title makes you "the boss" (of some things); it does not necessarily make you an influential leader others will heed. If you rely solely on your title to get things done, it will not persuade or win over hearts and minds. Moral authority is earned by building genuine connections and establishing trust, honoring your commitments, and taking actions that are perceived as fair and principled. Moral authority is not a style of leadership--it underlies your ability to be effective no matter what your personal style is or how you inhabit your role.

## *Learn to apologize.*

As a leader, you will not always get every decision right. You are human; you will make errors. Authentic and trusted leaders are willing to admit when they are wrong, and explain what they will do to "make it right." This with demonstrate to others that you are a leader with strong moral authority, willing to take responsibility for your decisions.

### The '4 Rs' of an apology

#### Remorse

Sincere, "I'm really sorry this has happened."

#### Responsibility

"I own this." Or, "This was my mistake." Or, "I clearly misunderstood..."

#### Rehabilitation

"Here's what I've learned and here's what I'm going to do to change going forward..."

#### Recompense

"To the extent I can, here's what I'll do to make it better."

