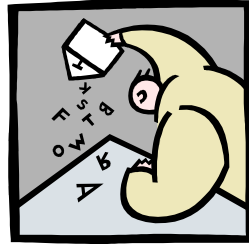


Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me ...



(and that I had acted on!)”

When Allyn approached me to give this talk, she said she wanted me to share some of my experiences as a fairly junior faculty, and to think through the lens of “if only someone had told me....” or “if I knew then what I know now....”

What I realize today, is that probably no one could have told me much on the day I sat in the chairs you occupy today – so much of my learning has been the inevitable trial and error process that we all use to learn. However, I imagine a little mentor, sitting on my shoulders over the past six years – what do I wish I would have been reminded of more often....?

- Remember the “as if” rule. The university is a complicated bureaucracy – many things happen for reasons that are impossible to fathom. To make sense of the nonsensical, we often make up stories or explanations to account for our own or other people’s behaviour. Do not mistake your own accounts (or those you hear from others) as truth.
- Write, write, write! If you’re excited about something – write it down. Look at it from different angles. Show it to someone else. Write some more. Your ideas will take shape if you take the time and discipline to write more – soon, your confidence will grow and you will be ready to consider writing grants, abstracts and articles.
- Don’t be so stubborn, afraid to ask for help, believe you’re supposed to know something without asking....don’t isolate! I found this a paradox of the place – so many people: my colleagues, students. All of us engaged in exciting work of teaching and research – so much energy and opportunity. Why does it feel so lonely and impersonal? Unless you are coming into a well-organized, broadly based research team or something similar, you may have to work a bit at feeling a part of the academic community. Look around at the people here today. Try to have lunch with someone you don’t know. Better yet, make a lunch date with that person for 1 month from now. Compare notes.

- There are ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES to do exciting things. Do you know what really fuels you? What you feel passionate about? Get as much of that in your work life as you can. Find other people who want to work with you. Never say “yes” to something you feel you “should do” until you have all the information you need – consider all the options and opportunity costs before you take on something you’ll resent.
- Having the career you want is your responsibility. There will be things along the way that irritate/frustrate/upset you. You will have much more luck resolving problems if you have a good sense of what you want and what you need. Your Chair will likely be much more responsive to an issue with proposed solutions than generalized griping.
- The richness of your career will be directly proportional to the richness of your relationships. Get to know your colleagues – preferably as people as well as researchers/scholars. Ideas and creativity – the lifeblood of scholarship – flow in environments of trust, appreciation and feedback. Good relationships require tending.
- Re: Teaching Dossier. If you do nothing else (and it all depends on your level of organization) – KEEP EVERYTHING. Remember e-mails, Palm archives, notices of rounds, etc.
- Your Chair isn’t a mind reader – he/she will only know what you tell them. If it is really important they understand, keep with them until they do.
- Find and use a family doctor. Don’t rely on yourself or your colleagues for diagnosis or treatment.
- Create opportunities for reflection and receiving feedback at regular intervals.
- Seek out people who love what they do – and learn from them. Aspire to be such a magnet for your students and colleagues. Have an honest look in the mirror every month or so – if you don’t like what you see, take stock, ask for help.
- Sin boldly, but learn from your mistakes.

Suggested tasks for the first 3 months:

- Try not to say “yes” to anything in the first month unless you feel you know exactly what you’re committing to
- visit the web page for the **Program for Faculty Development** www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/facdev/ and the **Centre for Leadership in Learning** www.mcmaster.ca/cll/
- Have lunch with your department’s administrator - have them tell you what makes the department “tick”.
- Begin to canvas your own local resources for a mentor.
- Go up to any one of your new colleagues and try the following line: “You know, I have really appreciated the way you.....can you tell me more about how you learned about that?”