

Relax and Socialize: A Confessional

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Many of us have achieved success and been asked to serve as Department Chair because of our capacity for hard work, critical thinking skills, dedication, knowledge, “drive” and organizational acumen. Our heavy daily workload may discourage prioritization of the personal and social aspects of our leadership role. I, for one, am not one to seek out social situations. I enjoy problem solving, one-on-one teaching in the OR, reviewing journal submissions and other proposals (even budgets!), and other “solitary” work. I also enjoy the “vision” and “mission” aspects to meet the challenges of being an academic department in these challenging times. Departmental or health system meetings, parties, weddings, funerals, and other social events often take a back seat to my “real work”.

I recently made a mistake, and it had to do with the social aspects of serving as Chair. This error reminded me of a general area in which I have “opportunities for improvement”.

I recently attended a beginning of the year “meet and greet” party for the incoming group of residents. It was a beautiful family gathering held at one of our faculty’s homes. All the residents, attendings, and families were smiling and having fun. The San Diego weather was wonderful, and there were games for the children, great food, drinks, and lively conversation. I showed up, smiled, introduced myself to a few new residents and their families, and made some “small talk” with other residents and faculty. It was all “OK”, but I confess was making this appearance primarily because it was my job to do so. One senior resident came up to me and said, “I brought my mother along today and I would like you to meet her-I’ve told her all about you and the Department and she would love to meet you”. I said that would be very nice and that I would stop by her table later to meet her. I spent much of the time looking at the clock, trying to determine the exact amount of time the Chairman should stay at this party. Finally, after speaking with a number of people and having lunch I decided to discretely leave. I made up the story to myself “They’ll have more fun without the stuffy Chair being here anyway”. I made such a direct line out the door and to the car that I completely forgot to stop by and see the resident and her mom. I was simply too anxious to quickly meet my social obligation and get out of there. I am disappointed in myself, both because I did not allow myself to relax and enjoy this event, and because I let one of our residents (and her mom) down.

Many young faculty and residents look up to us as models, including social ones. I under-appreciated the importance of taking time (at a departmental get-together) to sit with junior faculty and residents, meet family members at get-togethers and simply get to know those who serve the Department. I am generally perceived as being approachable and personable (I think), but I have

fallen short, at times, at promoting the important social, personal aspects of what we do. These things are extremely important for the Department, but are sometimes overlooked because of the day-to-day logistical tasks, as well as the various other initiatives and priorities. Some ideas that might help address this;

1. Create a Departmental Newsletter that includes social events, births, and other positive life events in the Department
2. Use social media for #1
3. Take a brief period at the beginning of departmental meetings to announce social events, births, birthdays, weddings, etc.
4. Recognize importance of attending weddings, funerals, and other events when invited. These things are every bit as important as our other tasks as Chairs.
5. Recognize the importance of social events as a means to support departmental morale.
6. Add your own...

Suggested Reading

Mets, Berend. (2016). Leadership in Academic Anesthesiology: Theories and Practice. *International anesthesiology clinics*. 54. 66-82.