

“The Dean Team”¹

Your Dean is due back from his latest whirlwind fundraising trip this afternoon and his e-mail to you and the other two associate deans says that he wants to meet with “his Dean Team,” which is the three of you, this afternoon at 4:30PM. His message didn’t say what the meeting would be about, but even from your relatively brief experience as one of his three associate deans you know it’s one of three things: (a) he has to respond to something the Provost needs right away, (b) while traveling he came up with a great new idea and he wants to talk it through with his associate dean team, or (c) something went wrong while he was traveling and he wants to learn all he can about it from you three associate deans before he takes action.

You like this about the Dean: The energy, the enthusiasm, the new ideas and the way he uses the three associate deans as a real team. In fact, you had heard about the *esprit de corps* of this Dean’s Office when you were on the faculty and that’s why you agreed three years ago to accept his offer to become an associate dean. You’ve learned a lot about how to be an effective dean working in this office. And for a long time you were thinking that when your current term expires at the end of this academic year you’d like to accept a second term as associate dean.

Except that in the past two or three months you’ve noticed that things have begun to change. This year the Dean has been spending at least half his time away from campus on all sorts of university and college business and on other professional things. And while he’s “away,” either physically or mentally, doing all these good things, the “associate dean team” is getting more than a little ragged around the edges.

One of your associate dean colleagues, Barbara, is a senior faculty member with solid experience as a department Chair. She is in her eighth year as an associate dean. Barbara has confided that she is “on the market” this year and has had a couple of good interviews for deans jobs already. With each passing month she is acting more and more like she’s confident that she’s really going to be leaving. You like Barbara and want her to become a dean, if that’s what she wants. But what’s bothering you is that whenever the Dean is away from campus, which is rather often, Barbara acts like it is she who is the dean of this college. She’s making decisions that you know the Dean reserves to himself. And she’s starting to assert herself toward the staff and the department Chairs in ways that seem out of role. After all, her job hasn’t changed, at least not yet. You wonder if she’s “practicing” being dean, or doing some version of “resume building.” But, whatever it is, you don’t like it. And you’ve heard from at least one staff member and two department Chairs that they find it confusing when Barbara says to do one thing and the Dean comes back and says to do another. You particularly don’t like Barbara acting like she is your boss, ordering you around and giving you projects when the Dean is way, and then acting like your best buddy and teammate when the Dean is back in town.

And then there is Joshua, the other associate dean. He has been on the associate dean team for six years and has already confided to you and Barbara that he is seriously thinking about going back to the faculty next year. He’s asked you both not to say anything to the Dean at this time. He claims that he

¹All characters, situations, and stories described here are fictional. No reference to actual persons, events, or institutions is intended or assumed. Drs. Peter Facione and Carol Giancarlo developed and refined this hypothetical case based on the experiences gained through their service as faculty, administrators, workshop presenters, and leadership consultants to colleges and universities throughout the nation.

wants to rekindle his research and get some publications so that he can get promoted to full professor. All this year he has been talking to you about grant deadlines and wanting to spend every available moment working on getting himself some funding for next year. While you can certainly understand this, it bothers you that this year Joshua always seems to be out of the office whenever the Dean is away. Joshua was supposed to work with you on next year's budgets, but in the end he didn't deliver and you had worked late several nights to complete the budgets on time for the Dean's review. Joshua is supposed to handle student academic issues if the college's advising staff cannot, but lately those cases have been kicked over to you because Joshua has been "too busy" or not even in his office – except on days when the Dean is back in town. As a friend you have even suggested to Joshua that his absences have been noticed. But he says that he can't help what other people might think. He told you he has to plan now for next year or else "next year will be wasted too."

Questions:

- 1. From the associate dean's perspective, what is (are) the problem(s)? Are these the real problems or do you see things differently?**
- 2. What action steps should the associate dean take and what things should the associate dean avoid doing? At what point should this associate dean take action?**
- 3. If you were the Dean and this associate dean were to come to you with these observations and concerns, what steps should you take? Why?**
- 4. Given that next year the Dean is likely to continue to have major external responsibilities, that Barbara is likely to be hired away and that Joshua will be back on the faculty, what council and advice would you give this associate dean with regard to taking a second term as associate dean.**

You have the meeting with the Dean, Barbara, and Joshua at 4:30. The Dean did have a new project in mind and it seems like it a promising one. It's a possible new graduate program. And he wants to investigate the idea in more detail before he decides whether or not to approach the faculty with the idea. He asked Joshua to work up some tentative enrollment projections, Barbara to research potential competitors and market niche features, and you to work up a possible budget based on Joshua's enrollment projections. He says that he has to go out of town again this week but that he wants you three to get those things ready for a meeting with him by the beginning of next week.

You suspect that Barbara will work hard on her part of this, and maybe you worry a bit that she might talk about this new idea if she is going on any interviews in the near future. You wonder if that would represent a conflict of interests or the sharing of proprietary information. On the other hand, you suspect that Joshua will not give the enrollment projections any serious thought and that you'll be left building a budget based on poor projections or none at all.

- 5. What should you do at this point? If you decide to share your concerns with the Dean, how will you approach the Dean about them? What do you expect that the Dean should do?**