The College Administrator's
SURVIVAL GUIDE

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suffered a series of small strokes. The executive committee rounded up more faculty volunteers to offer tutoring sessions on the missed material, and Professor Holdover went on disability leave.

Sometimes you’ll need to be creative in collecting information or devising solutions. But you’ll always need to hear more than one version of the story and to be sure you’re on firm procedural grounds before you act.

Chapter 5

Bullies

You are now the head of a large unit in which you have been a faculty member for many years. Until you became head, you were not fully aware of the problems with one of your colleagues, Professor Choler. Now you feel besieged by complaints from staff members about his treatment of them.

You remember, over the years, having received Choler’s periodic email messages—sent to the whole department—complaining about one matter or another, but since most of them didn’t affect you directly, you paid little attention. You also knew that Choler could be unpleasant at faculty meetings, but he didn’t attend very often, and most of his complaints were ruled out of order.

Now, however, both the messages and the conduct at faculty meetings have become your business. In his typical email message, Choler describes a problem, personalizes the fault to a single individual, and recommends a solution that usually in-
Involves humiliation, if not discipline, for that person. The people he targets (or, in some cases, their union representatives) are the ones complaining to you and demanding that you take action. In addition, a few faculty members have asked you to “get this email thing under control” because they don’t want to be bothered by any more of his messages.

At meetings Choler uses the same general tactic, usually going after a particular person with strong language and in a loud voice. This makes some people so uncomfortable that they will not attend a meeting if they see him in the room. His victims have been known to leave meetings shaking, or even in tears, after his verbal assaults.

Reviewing the collection of email messages, plus other letters Choler sent to your predecessor, you have noticed a pattern to the situations. Generally he identifies a real problem. For example, his complaint about cumbersome and slow processing of travel vouchers was accurate, but his assignment of blame to a clerk in the business office was not, and his subsequent near-persecution of the clerk was (in your opinion, and certainly according to the clerk and her union steward) disproportionate to the problem and to her role in processing vouchers. Once Choler picks a target, he rarely lets up until that person leaves the department.

There is no evidence in the files that anyone has ever spoken to Professor Choler about his email tirades or his conduct in meetings.

Have you ever had a guest with an uncontrolled child or pet? The most intractable problems in academia have the same characteristics: someone running loose in your environment who does not stay within prevailing concepts of acceptable behavior. I’m not talking about behavior that is merely unusual or eccentric; in a university, especially, odd is okay if your work gets done and you don’t interfere with the ability of others to do theirs. I’m talking about someone whose refusal to play by the generally accepted rules causes trouble for the rest of your department. If you have not encountered this kind of troublemaker, use what follows as a form of inoculation against any such problems that might later infect your unit.

Some difficult people are merely minor irritants: others learn to avoid them as much as possible, and the overall working environment is not badly compromised. But a person who targets others, makes threats (direct or indirect), insists on his or her own way all the time, or has such a hair-trigger temper that colleagues walk on eggshells to avoid setting it off, can paralyze a department. In the worst cases, this conduct can create massive dysfunction as the department finds itself unable to hold meetings, make hiring decisions, recruit new members, or retain valued ones.

When I first got involved in helping department heads cope with such people, my colleagues and I used concepts and approaches we gleaned from studies of bullies. When we started, the literature was largely restricted to bullies among children, and the most useful concepts we found were related to bully-proofing elementary schools. In the years since then, many books have appeared about adult bullies, including those in the workplace, but these works have not brought about any major changes in the approach we refined using our own experience and the concepts we found in our original explorations of research focused on children.

The bullies I have encountered—and helped to neutralize—in the academic environment come in many forms, from those who
present themselves as victims ("You violated my rights and I'm entitled to special treatment to make up for it") all the way to classic aggressors who rely on physical intimidation. In academia and other settings populated by "knowledge workers," one often encounters other kinds of bullies as well, including "memo bullies" (who send regular missives to a long mailing list) and "insult bullies" (destructive verbal aggressors).

**Characteristics of Bullies**

Whatever their approaches, bullies are people who are willing to cross the boundaries of civilized behavior that inhibit others. They value the rewards brought by aggression and generally lack guilt, believing their victims provoked the attacks and deserve the consequences. Their behavior prompts others to avoid them, which means that, in the workplace, bullies are likely to become effectively unsupervised. If you think about the constellation of qualities that characterize bullying behavior, and especially the effects of that behavior in an environment that prizes collegiality and independence, and in which many members are conflict-averse, it's not hard to see why many people tend to withdraw instead of dealing with the bullies.

Remember the earlier discussion about stars? Sometimes your stars will have bullying characteristics, but more often the most problematic bullies are not major stars in your unit. They're simply people who have frequently gotten what they wanted through their outrageous conduct—and have even been rewarded in various ways for that conduct. If your bully is, in fact, a star whom it would be costly to lose, you'll need to proceed with extra caution, but it's your job to think about the good of the community as a whole: even stars must not be allowed to cause fear or impede the productivity of others.

In the worst case of an unsupervised bully I ever saw, a worker in a university's physical plant who had a habit of making direct threats ("I have guns hidden all over the campus") was assigned a job with no set hours, no duties for which he was held accountable—and the use of a university truck that he took home every night. His supervisors were (understandably) afraid of him, and they didn't want to take the risk that he would turn on them. It took a concerted team effort over many months (and a transfer to a different unit with different supervisors through two levels of responsibility) to bring this man back into a situation where he was actually performing work in exchange for his paycheck. (It didn't last long, though. He was arrested after an incident in his personal life, and took up residence as a guest of the state.) Across all categories of employment, bullies become unsupervised: I've seen secretaries, faculty members, and businesspeople who were so unpleasant to deal with that they were neither given the same duties as others in their environment nor held accountable for the duties they did hold.

My colleague Dr. Paul Joffe, a clinical psychologist who facilitated many of our workplace problem-solving teams, did much of the early literature review and brought the concepts about bullies to our working group. One of the major insights he brought us is that there are two major types of bullies: aggressor bullies and victim bullies. Aggressor bullies fit the usual idea of a bully: they threaten to beat you up if you don't give them your lunch money. Victim bullies, in contrast, demand your lunch money because of some harm they claim you've done to them. Think of someone running into you in the schoolyard, then asserting that you should...
give him your lunch money because you knocked him down and made him tear his pants. That's a classic victim bully. In workplaces, victim bullies are aggrieved and are trying to get their own way as recompense for their perceived mistreatment. Most of the bullies I have encountered in academia have been victim bullies, not aggressor bullies.

While many workplaces have bullies, institutions of higher education may be especially vulnerable to them because of some of the distinctive characteristics of academia. First, bullies flourish in the decentralized structure of universities: the isolation of so many microclimates, from laboratories to small departments, creates many opportunities for a bully to run roughshod over colleagues. Then too, the bullies of academia typically manipulate the concepts of academic freedom and collegiality with flair, and their colleagues are not well equipped, and not trained, to respond to their maneuvers. The propensity of bullies to misuse these central academic concepts only adds to the importance of being well grounded in those concepts yourself. If you have a firm understanding of what academic freedom is and what it is not, you'll be better prepared to cope with those who try to distort the concept for their own ends.

Another reason people in academia are generally unprepared to deal with bullies is that bullies are relatively rare. It's worth thinking about what are known as “low-incidence, high-severity” problems. This concept can be applied to a variety of situations that arise in academic settings, especially in personnel matters. A low-incidence, high-severity situation is one in which the problems don't arise very often, but when they do they are so serious that they can threaten the integrity of the environment. Bullying falls into this category. Research misconduct also falls into this category, and so do other serious violations of laws and regulations (see Chapter 7).

For these infrequent but major problems, it makes sense to focus on preventive and educational efforts rather than waiting to cope with the problem each time it arises. For research misconduct, that means ensuring that there is plenty of discussion about positive standards and expectations, as well as information and assistance for those encountering ethical dilemmas. Just as we do not expect students to acquire their substantive expertise by osmosis or mind-reading, we should not ask them to absorb professional ethics without direct formal and informal instruction. For prevention of bullying, creating and maintaining an environment in which respectful professional interactions are expected and reinforced is the most powerful approach.

When unprofessional or uncivil conduct occurs in the workplace, it's important to nip it in the bud. The tone of your response should be nonconfrontational: “Oh, I'm sorry, maybe we forgot to tell you that we don't act that way here.” Dealing with the problem head-on and promptly is critical.

Before taking action against a person accused of violating the rules, you will of course investigate the charges. If your investigation substantiates them, it is essential that you impose sanctions. If someone is verbally abusive to staff or threatens physical violence, the appropriate penalty must be imposed. Otherwise, you send the message that the conduct in question is acceptable.

If those responsible for supervising problematic employees hesitate to ask legitimate questions within the scope of their duties (“Do you have the required receipts for this expenditure?”) for fear of triggering temper tantrums, a person of higher authority should be brought in to enforce the regulations. Any other response—such as simply accepting the behavior or slinking away in the face of the histrionics—only erodes the trust of those who work hard to do
the right thing. Similarly, ignoring or tolerating inappropriate conduct in the workplace sends the message to all those who do behave professionally that the way to prosper is to misbehave, not to follow the rules.

**How to Handle a Bully**

I once got a request from a department administrator (let’s call him Barry Holmes) for advice about how to deal with a visiting faculty member (and let’s call him Raymond Cooper) whose contract was to expire in just a few weeks. Cooper had been verbally explosive all year, so people had learned to tread gently around him. But recently his volatility had increased, and a colleague who collaborated with him on research had begun to feel unsafe around him, fearing that his verbal aggression might become physical. Holmes wanted to know what he could do—if anything—to get to the end of the semester safely.

I asked Holmes how he had responded to Cooper’s earlier explosions. He had done nothing. This was better news than I had expected, as I’m often told something like “Well, that’s just the way he is, so we’ve tried to give him what he wants and not make him mad.” Nevertheless, the hands-off approach was not going to solve the problem.

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Avoidance Is Not Effective

Avoidance is one of the basic responses to conflict (others include denial, appeasement, negotiation, mediation, and “because I say so”), and it can be a wise response, especially when the issues are relatively small, of fleeting duration, and of little lasting consequence. Avoiding engagement with an issue is a positive reaction to someone’s momentary venting when you’re pretty sure the issue will pass. It’s a particularly good strategy at the end of the semester during the “silly season,” when everyone is under stress. But avoidance is hardly ever the right response when a person has shown a pattern of threatening or escalating conduct or when an important principle is at stake.

On the topic of the visiting Professor Cooper, I asked the department head whether and how Cooper had been informed that his outbursts were causing concern. Well, Holmes responded, “everybody knows” that that kind of behavior is unprofessional. I advised calling Cooper in, nonetheless, and telling him that his conduct was unsettling to his colleagues and students. I reminded Holmes that mind-reading is an imperfect form of communication, and that he’d be doing both Cooper and the intimidated collaborator a favor by letting Cooper know—unequivocally—that he was expected to control his behavior and to conduct himself professionally in all interactions with colleagues, students, and staff. People who are acting out need to be told clearly that there will be consequences for uncivil behavior. Otherwise, they’ll have little incentive to exercise self-control.

Holmes acknowledged that this made sense. But what could he say, and how should he say it? Academics seem to find it particularly difficult to raise troublesome topics, especially ones involving the personal conduct of a colleague. Over the years I’ve learned to recommend a three-step process: First, try to identify and describe a pattern in what you’re observing. In this case, the escalating explosive verbal conduct is the pattern, and it intimidates others. It sounds like a bullying situation. Second, sketch out a general strategy. In this case, the strategy is to send the message to the offender that this sort of behavior is not welcome in this department or this university. Finally, it is tremendously helpful to outline the points you wish to communicate and practice how you’ll say them. Hav-
ing identified the pattern of the problem and chosen a strategy, Holmes and I discussed the points he should cover in a conversation with Cooper and possible ways to phrase them. In particular, we rehearsed his opening lines and worked to put the concepts into his own voice, to find words and approaches he could make his own.

Let's say you are in Holmes's position: the department head faced with the volatile Cooper. The points to make in your talk with Cooper are, first, that his behavior is disturbing to others; second, that you are serious about maintaining a nonviolent work and learning environment; and finally, that you refer all threats and acts of violence to the campus police. (Some universities have official written policies that can be used to reinforce that last point.) You can tell Cooper, calmly and clearly, that you have learned from various students and staff members that he has seemed increasingly frustrated and has often been heard shouting. You can then express a sincere desire to be able to write a positive recommendation for him in his search for his next position. Be sure your words convey the message that you expect him to change his behavior—a warning that he is approaching, and has crossed at times, a boundary that must not be crossed.

After the conversation, you should send a cordial and factual confirming letter restating the gist of what was said. Some people's eyes work better than their ears, and you want to be sure Cooper gets your message. The letter should be short and sweet and say something like this:

Dear Ray:
Thank you for taking the time to talk with me this morning.
I appreciated your responsiveness in our conversation about effective ways to work in our department. As I said, I have been told that you seem increasingly frustrated and that recently you have been heard shouting on a number of occasions. While we all encounter frustrations, the frequency and level of your expression have been disturbing other members of the department. We expect everyone in our unit to contribute to a collegial and professional atmosphere. Thank you for your contributions, both professional and educational.
Cordially,
[your signature]

After the conversation and the confirming letter, let's hope no further action will be necessary. If, however, Cooper's conduct does not revert to the upsetting—but-tolerable category until his departure, your next response will be to call the campus police, who will supply a bit of what my colleagues and I have come to call “blue therapy,” involving a talk with a uniformed (and trained) peace officer. On the basis of past experience, I predict that, should the need arise, the interaction with the police will be both educational for Cooper and therapeutic for his tantrum habit.

This problem is relatively straightforward and amenable to correction because it is of recent origin—at least in your department—and because you have more leverage over a visitor than over one of your tenured faculty members. Since Cooper is about to move on to another short-term position, apparently making a career out of visiting, your recommendation, or your opinion of him as relayed by word of mouth, is likely to matter. The chances are quite high that he has a history of similar behavior at other places, and he may have found that many institutions don't check references when hiring or that most of the places he's worked in the
past won't mention this conduct, even if asked for a reference. Letting him know that you take references seriously may well have an impact. Then again, it's possible that, precisely because he is a short-termer, he won't bother to adapt his behavior. In that case, "blue therapy" is likely to be the most effective response, and it will have the side benefit of showing other department members that there are definite consequences for out-of-bounds conduct.

In contrast to this problem, many situations involving academic bullies date back years, if not decades. Problems with long histories are not quickly resolved. In fact, it generally takes more than a year to bring about significant change in a pattern of conduct that stretches back over years. But the key point to hold in mind is that significant, positive change can be achieved, given the right mindset, some patience, and persistence.

Change the Environment

The key to changing a bully's behavior is to change the environment. Think back to the advice in Chapter 1, about the basic mindset to bring to leadership positions. Most people want to be liked, to be successful, and to be respected in their profession. Even bullies have these characteristics in the main, and many of them have not been made consciously aware of the destructive effects of their actions. Of course, some people are quite calculating about getting their way through their conduct, and we'll talk more about them later. But for bullies across the spectrum, most have never been confronted with the consequences of their actions, or even been told that their conduct is not well regarded in their environment. Why? For the reasons discussed earlier: others in the environment are conflict-averse; it doesn't feel "nice" or collegial to raise the issue; co-workers have learned to avoid any behavior likely to trigger the bully's temper. Thus your task is to change the environment to begin attaching natural consequences to unpleasant behavior, and most of all, to remove any rewards it has yielded. This is the essence of the hard work to come.

Think of it as changing the parent's response to the child's grocery store tantrum from a candy bar to some signal of disapproval. The form this disapproval takes can vary, and it takes conscious thought, planning, and some coalition building. In the early stages, especially, making the changes can involve inconvenience to others: one of the steps a parent may need to take in combating the temper tantrum in public is to leave the public setting, even if that means the shopping is left undone. But any parent who has faced out even one such public event knows the salutary effect of holding the line. Don't cave in.

Let's say you have a faculty member who is abusive to the department's secretaries. He brings them typing at the last minute and expects it to be done right away, regardless of their other duties. He insists that his work get priority and generally is unpleasant enough that one of the secretaries either moves his work up in the queue or stays late to do it. His approach has always gotten him what he wants, and both the secretaries and the faculty members whose work gets delayed are unhappy and are complaining to you. The first step will be to tell him that his conduct with the secretaries is upsetting and is not appropriate. You will need to provide guidance about proper protocols for interactions and establish guidelines for reasonable work turn-around periods. Count on him to test your commitment to your stated position: the most likely response is that he will call you on the new deadlines by submitting something late in which you have a stake (like a grant application) to force you to choose whether to enforce your rule or back down.
If you can anticipate this eventuality and put up safeguards against it first—charging his funds for extra help to free up departmental staff to meet his deadline, for example—you'll be ahead of the game.

Alternatively, you could change the way he is permitted to use the resource the secretaries represent: you could assign one point of entry for his support requirements, such as bringing his work to you (in a small department) or to a senior staff member with a robust personality. Again, anticipate that his first level of response will be to test how serious you are. You should only choose new rules you can and will stand behind, and you should be prepared to take some inconvenience or pain as a likely consequence of standing firm.

While the goal is to make changes in the environment that remove the positive reinforcement the bully has been receiving for his or her actions, don't try to change too many factors too fast, especially in a situation where the bully has been holding sway for years. The corrective changes involve moving the boundaries closer to the acceptable range incrementally and gradually. So don't try to change everything at once: focus on what really matters. Is it the shouting, the insistence on having his work done before others', or the last-minute nature of the demands? Pick one and start trying to change it. Stick with it until you achieve your goal.

If Not You, Who?

All this sounds like a lot of work, and you may be asking yourself why you should bother. Especially if your term as chair or head is relatively brief—say a three-year rotation—and you'll soon go back to the faculty, why should you take the trouble to make the bully a more constructive part of the department? Why not just find coping mechanisms and live with the situation? You could do that. Many people do. In fact, if you have an entrenched problem of some duration, it's pretty much guaranteed that your predecessors took this route. So why not continue that tradition? Life is pretty short to buy trouble, after all.

Before you decide, there are two important things to consider. The first is that it's not hopeless—you can make a difference. True, taking action will not be without cost. That brings us to the second point. What will be the costs of inaction? After all, it's not just your personal discomfort or safety that's at issue.

How many victims—direct or indirect—in your environment are suffering from the bully's behavior? Direct victims are easy to see: they're the ones who get up and run out of meetings (or don't attend in the first place), the ones who bear the brunt of the bully's attacks and insults. In your calculus about whether to act, they're probably already included, and perhaps you've thought of ways to make it easier on them.

But what of the indirect victims? What are your students, for example, learning about how faculty members behave? What is happening to the junior faculty, or to the staff members: are they afraid to speak up or participate fully in the life of the department? Who may have good ideas but doesn't dare to express them? Are there people you expected to make contributions, or to succeed, who are not doing so? Is this because of some failure on their part, or is there perhaps something about the environment that is impeding their success?

Look around and see what the untenured members of your department are enduring and what they're learning about how established professionals in your field treat one another. Is this the message you want them to absorb and then potentially pass along as
they mature in their careers? Think about it: ignoring inappropriate conduct in your professional environment has long-term negative consequences.

It takes more than one person to change an environment. While someone must take responsibility for articulating the positive norms of the group, the most successful approaches involve a small but critical mass of colleagues (say three or four people) who are prepared to react in reasonably consistent ways to conduct that breaches those norms. The idea is to ensure that there is a response to each and every instance of behavior that violates the articulated norms, even if it is as low-key as merely labeling the behavior as troubling.

When I was in high school and enmeshed in the politics of a clique of girls, a particularly mature member of the group had a knack for defusing cuttiness by quietly saying “That hurt my feelings. I feel really bad now.” She didn’t make these observations accusingly or with anger, but as simple declarations. I still remember my amazement at her ability to be so real in the moment, and also at the apologies she triggered. Genuine responses to nastiness are powerful. Suppose your group interactions tend to clever put-downs, but your bully pushes the boundaries and is venomous where others are good-natured. If the target or anyone else in the group responds, in the pleasant tones the group normally uses, “Ouch, that one really hurt,” or even “That’s not nice!” the painful comment is marked as beyond accepted boundaries. Don’t follow the comment with hectoring or accusations, but instead let it stand on its own. Noting each over-the-line remark in this low-key fashion can be remarkably effective. It moves the group from shared, unspoken discomfort to modeling a socially acceptable response.

A stronger stance may be called for when the verbal bullying occurs in a more formal setting. Especially if you’re presiding, it’s important that you not permit personal attacks to occur in the guise of department business. Immediately ruling the remarks out of order and inviting the speaker to rephrase them to focus on the substance, not the person, is appropriate. Aside from the discomfort of the confrontation, you do risk turning yourself into the bully’s target when you do this. This is where coalition-building comes into play, and where it’s vital to be firmly within the group’s accepted boundaries when you respond. Don’t overreact or make yourself the problem: be sure your comment is quiet but firm and phrased politely.

Making such changes can be daunting. It takes advance planning and practice. The most critical ingredient is a calm and assertive approach that is neither punitive nor aggressive. The reality is that bullies—people who value the rewards brought by aggression—have a higher tolerance for conflict than the rest of us, and are likely to respond to signs of aggression by escalating their own aggressive behavior. Their escalation will rapidly surpass the coping abilities of even fairly strong individuals. As a result, staying positive, calm, and clear is central to succeeding in these situations.

What If the Bully Is Your Boss?

Dealing with bullying behavior within your department is difficult enough, but it’s even harder to cope when the bullying is done by someone with supervisory authority over you. Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions to this problem, which comes up disturbingly often.

First you need a careful diagnosis of the patterns of conduct you’re seeing, their seriousness, and how many people they are af-
fecting. If what you perceive as inappropriate or unprofessional bullying is directed primarily or solely at you, and it’s severe, not something you can grin and bear, your best bet is probably to cut your losses and leave. If you’re isolated in that kind of situation, unless the bully is very near the end of his or her career, the costs to you from staying are likely to be vastly disproportionate to the benefits, no matter how strong your commitment to the institution. This is especially the case if your bête noir is relatively recently appointed and basking in official favor.

If the problem is more widely shared and/or acknowledged, you still must exercise great care and caution, and should still consider whether you’d be better off leaving. The nature of authority in organizations means that you’re facing an uphill battle in which you may well come to be seen as the problem. There are constructive steps that can be taken, but they are far beyond the scope of this book and require an ongoing delicate calculus, the essence of which, at every turn, must be whether it’s more costly to you to persevere than to move on.

Responding to Professor Choler

The most striking thing about Professor Choler’s behavior is his consistent arrogation of authority to himself that belongs to others. Not only does he point out problems in the performance of others who do not have a reporting relationship to him (that is, for whom he is not a part of the evaluation or supervisory chain), but he takes it upon himself to “punish” them.

To change the environment so as to affect his conduct, you will need to reclaim your authority as the head of the department, and you will need to draw boundaries around his ability to affect the working condition of others so detrimentally. Steps to take before talking directly with him depend upon the structure of your institution and department, but it might be a good idea to have discussions with your dean and your executive committee to clarify lines of responsibility. This could provide a good foundation for what you will need to do next. It might even be useful to raise the issue in a faculty or department meeting, perhaps framed as a review of departmental operating policies.

Once you’ve affirmed that your authority over the members of the department (and especially the support staff) is generally acknowledged, it’s time to have a face-to-face conversation with Professor Choler. Since part of your agenda is to reclaim your authority, it’s important for this meeting to take place in your office, at your request. You should consider in advance whether to limit the discussion to a single topic—a stronger show of authority on your part—or whether you wish to cover other topics as well. Some of this will depend upon your own comfort level and upon other circumstances in the department. Have you already met with all faculty members individually (in their offices), for example? Are you familiar with Choler’s ongoing work and professional situation? Do you have other business pending with him? It’s worth thinking through these items before you begin. In general, your message will be conveyed more strongly if his interaction with the staff is the only topic of the meeting than if other items are also covered. Other topics may be useful, though, if your sense is that, with Choler, the best way to approach your main topic will be to lead up to it slowly and gradually.

Take one more step before the meeting: review Choler’s emails and identify his rhetorical patterns; pick out several themes or words he uses repeatedly. Think about ways to frame your message
in which you can employ those words in a positive way. Echo his own favorite phrases back to him.

Let's assume that “efficiency” and “effective” are words that recur in his missives. When you meet, start with the positive aspects of his actions: he is perceptive, he is committed to efficiency, and he seeks to improve the way your department works. These are praiseworthy traits. You might mention the example of the cumbersome voucher-processing system, and in discussing it, convey your expectation as head that in the future, when he notices such a problem, he will bring his complaint to you (or to someone else you designate). You should emphasize that, as head, you are responsible for the smooth and efficient functioning of the department, and that includes seeing that staff members perform their work properly. In a calm and clear way, you need to convey the dual message that he should bring problems to you and that it is not his place to chastise staff who do not report to him. The billing clerk, for example, reports to your business manager, and if Choler has a complaint about her performance, he should bring it to you—not to the clerk, and not to the faculty in meetings or by email—and you will take it up with her and her supervisor. You can emphasize your shared commitment to efficient functioning. You may want to point out that you are interested in his professional success, and you wish to relieve him of the burden of worrying about these matters (quite an inefficient use of his skills and time), so he can concentrate on his research and teaching.

Follow up the meeting with a short and cordial email (two or three sentences) thanking him for taking the time to talk with you and reiterating your commitment to addressing the concerns of members of the department and your expectation that, should he encounter a problem, he will bring it to you (or to the person you've designated). Copy yourself. Print out the message. Save it.

As to Choler's disruptive conduct in meetings, the first step will be to begin to articulate the group norm that interactions should be civil and collegial. It is always useful, when a meeting goes smoothly, or when a contentious matter is resolved professionally, to note that and to label it: “I've always liked the way our faculty resolves difficult problems without personalizing them.” This kind of comment will both articulate the norm and provide a foundation for your later action. Start laying the groundwork at the first meeting over which you preside. Have a private conversation with each person who complains to you, in which you state that you will be responsible for running meetings, but that each member of the department must contribute both by being personally responsible and by supporting civil and collegial interactions.

If Choler's outbursts happen at every meeting, the process of changing the environment to change his behavior may require several discussions about how faculty meetings should operate, and may even require amending the department's bylaws to specify how topics get placed on the agenda. If he doesn't come to that many meetings, and if there is a consensus among those who do attend regularly that his conduct is out of bounds, start even if he is absent, and start early. Describe your interest in constructive and efficient meetings, and thus how you plan to run them, elicit suggestions (you may want to start your coalition building by raising the topic ahead of time in individual conversations with key faculty members), and be sure the minutes mention the discussion explicitly: “Procedures for departmental meetings and the role of the presiding officer were discussed.” If your department has not distributed minutes in the past, start doing so now.

The next time Choler starts an attack during a meeting, interrupt him in a firm, positive, and polite tone: “Charlie, it's important that we be efficient in our meetings, and focus on issues, not per-
sonalities. Could you rephrase your comments so that we talk about the process issue? As you know, if you have a personnel matter to discuss, you and I can talk about it privately after the meeting.”

Be persistent, positive, and above all, calm. Each time he begins one of his verbal assaults, smile and either reframe it and direct the discussion yourself, or place it on a future agenda for discussion. If he raises a concern that is shared by others, think about appointing a subcommittee to examine it, or assigning a staff member to look into it. Do not let a personal attack occur. If Choler doesn’t respond to your calm intervention, you might suggest that he walk around the block to regain his composure. If someone else will chime in with a friendly and positive (or humorous) tone, all the better. But don’t sit by while a member of your department is personally attacked. If all else fails, adjourn the meeting. Try not to let the meeting turn into an escalating confrontation: use deflection techniques and humor, if you can, to focus on the issue, and to depersonalize the discussion as much as possible. The chances are very high that especially if you have the support of the majority of those present Professor Choler will back down and cooperate. The will of the majority can be a powerful force, even for someone who enjoys conflict. Everyone in the department will be reassured if you are fair and firm and focused on the issues—and if they see that you will not permit personal attacks.

Chapter 6
When Not to Improvise

You receive an anonymous letter reporting that Professor McNabb, a member of your department now on sabbatical at University A, has a full-time, paid faculty appointment there and is teaching courses. The letter also says that on her last sabbatical, eight years ago, McNabb received full pay for the entire academic year from University B, and that she taught courses there as well.

Your publicly supported university allows faculty members to augment their sabbatical pay only with grant and award support; it permits exceptions for honoraria for “a limited number of professional presentations” provided that they are approved in advance. The members of your Board of Regents are drawn from business and political sectors. In recent years they have repeatedly questioned the sabbatical system and sought extensive information about this perquisite for your faculty. The administration has prepared a number of reports showcasing advances in research and teaching made possible by sabbaticals and has increased the information provided to