

A Difficult Professor

It was May, and time to plan for the next semester. My position was Director of the X Division on the campus. Among the activities at the time was hiring new full-time and adjunct faculty, and supervising the work of the existing faculty. My boss was Pat, the Dean. I had held several meetings with Pat regarding a particular instructor, Jack.

For several semesters, this instructor's attitude toward students and the institution was irresponsible. He missed class regularly, did not attend faculty meetings, and often arrived late.

It was 8:45 a.m., May 12, when I met with the Dean. We agreed to discharge Jack, because we had already discussed his performance with him on a number of occasions, and he had not improved. With Pat's support, I was ready to tell Jack that we would not be renewing his contract for the coming academic year.

At 10 a.m., I called in Jack and explained the situation, trying to review all the areas of his performance that led to the decision. Jack became furious. He said that such a thing was impossible, and began to use unpleasant language. I tried to calm him down and re-explain the situation, but he did not listen. He said, "I'm going to talk to the dean and I'll deal with you later."

At 11:10 a.m., after meeting with Jack, the Dean said to me, "I think we ought to give him another chance..."

At that moment, I realized that the Dean and I had one thing in common -- neither of us knew how to handle this situation.

The instructor did not return until the next day -- late again, as usual.

How do I confront him? What should I say to him? What should I say to Pat, my boss?

The instructor continues to report to me, and I still report to Pat.

Study questions:

1. As Terry (the author of the case), what would you do next?
2. Assume that you will be having a meeting with Pat, at your request, to discuss what happened with Jack. What will you try to achieve in the meeting? How will you approach Pat?

This case was originally written by "Terry," a college administrator. It was edited and adapted by Lee G. Bolman, Harvard University. All names have been disguised. © 1990, President and Fellows of Harvard College.