

As the new department head, you have just finished your evaluation of the staff. You call the human resources office to ask about the possibility of transferring the longtime business/office manager, Bob Johansen, out of your unit. He is a twenty-two year employee of the institution, the last seventeen in your department.

You have concluded that Johansen must go for a variety of reasons. He is a disruptive force in the office. He is abrupt and condescending with the staff (a strong and good group of employees, in your assessment), sometimes berating them in a loud voice, and he sometimes refuses to perform certain assigned tasks, citing “previous practice” in the department. You often have to check to be sure he has carried out his responsibilities, and you have been chastised by the college office because reports for which he is responsible have been submitted late and often have been incomplete.

The HR staff member queries you about Johansen’s personnel file. You have not previously seen it, but when you retrieve

it, you discover two nominations for the campus Professional Excellence Award (copies of which were provided to Johansen), two annual evaluations rating Johansen’s performance as “superior,” and three rating it as “good.” There are no other evaluations over his entire time in your department, and no indications of any concern about Johansen’s performance, although your associate head tells you that your two immediate predecessors expressed reservations about him. The associate head offers to write down these concerns so you can use them as documentation.

It’s clear to you that Bob is a real problem. One reason you took on these administrative responsibilities was to improve the research profile of the department, and one factor in that is the ease (or difficulty) of getting work done. You know the department has a bad reputation in this area, and you think some aspects of it should be simple to fix, but Bob is stubbornly resistant to the changes you want to introduce. Further, you can see that he’s causing problems for productive staff members. Moving him out seems like the right thing to do.

*What is your next step?
What factors should you consider?
With whom should you consult?*

Besieged by Complaints

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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 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 out after a particular person with strong language and in a loud voice. This makes some people so uncomfortable that they will not attend 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 (in your opinion, and according to the clerk and her union steward) disproportionate to the problem and her role in processing vouchers. Once Professor 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.

*What are the issues?
What steps should you take?*