



## **From Doubt to Drive: Navigating Disengagement, Self-worth, and Faculty Workload**

### **SPEAKERS**

Kevin Dvorak, Rusty Carpenter, Tierney King

#### **Tierney King 00:01**

This is the Faculty Focus Live podcast. This episode is sponsored by the Teaching Professor Online Conference. Join us from the comfort of your own home and transform how you teach with nationally recognized teaching and learning presenters. I'm your host, Tierney King, and I'm here to bring you inspiration, energy, and creative strategies that you can utilize in your everyday teaching. Today, we're going to dive into some of the challenges that faculty are currently facing, and explore strategies to reengage faculty in their roles. We are tackling the issue of faculty disengagement. We'll be discussing strategies to overcome disengagement stemming from workload, stress, technology, and self worth. In this series of programs, Russell Carpenter and Kevin Dvorak will offer practical insights that can empower both educators and administrators to foster a more supportive academic environment, from celebrating faculty success to addressing self worth. We're here to equip you with the knowledge and tools to help overcome faculty disengagement.

#### **Rusty Carpenter 01:04**

So we find ourselves in a situation right now where workloads continue to increase due to a range of factors including budget cuts, the resignation of faculty and colleagues across the profession, but also the ways that technology has advanced, and the proliferation of the range of technologies that we use for teaching and learning, educating our students, and also day to day work demands. In addition, we're seeing an increased interest among students for flexibility, which has increased the amount of time taken by faculty to educate students to design courses and to respond to the many different ways that our populations prefer to receive an education. This leads to an increase in disengagement, but also an increase in burnout, specifically related to the workload challenges our faculty are facing, and engagement issues related to those barriers. And when we look at workload and we think about workload, we have to think about it holistically. What are the range of responsibilities? As well, we can also think about the institutional priorities, too, and many of our faculty will be teaching in institutions where educating students, along with publication, are significantly factored in the ways that the institution and higher ed broadly defined success, which could also lead to an increased course load that is more teaching responsibilities due to the lack of colleagues to fill those sections. That introduces a range of problems. As well as our faculty are educating an increased number of students, for example, thus, you know that, like you mentioned, having less time for other areas, how do we manage scholarship, when we are teaching more students? How do we manage leadership work or service or

committee work that is actually critical to our institutions into the way departments and colleges function as we think about workload and a holistic approach to workload? As well, we have to be very conscientious of the ways that we understand we articulate those problems as well.

**Kevin Dvorak** 03:42

One solution, I think, is to draw data from faculty work activity dashboards, and that can specifically help with transparency, to show supervisors, to show administration, what faculty are doing when they're doing it. And so that if there is an increased workload, there needs to be a decrease in the expectation for service and or scholarship to be very clear and upfront. With all of that so that nobody gets penalized for taking on additional duties in one area that help actually helps support the institution.

**Tierney King** 04:23

When you're assessing your own workload, or your faculty's workload, you also have to consider where the sources of stress are coming from. What can you do to help provide solutions to these stressors to better help faculty or yourself manage your workload?

**Kevin Dvorak** 04:37

One thing we can do as faculty developers is help faculty identify the source of the stress. Is it the teaching that is becoming overwhelming? Is it the pressure of the publication? Is it trying to get into a top journal? Or are there too many things happening in regards to service and leadership? So first, can we identify the areas, the areas that are becoming a problem after identifying those areas? My recommendation here is just to listen to faculty. Listen to what they're already doing. Hear them to understand how to best assist them. Rather than going into, say, a department meeting with an agenda for, hey, this new dashboard is going to help manage all of your issues. Things don't typically work like that. So I recommend listening to faculty to help them identify those stressors. And then from there have the conversations that determine the best ways to provide them assistance. Maybe you learn how to help them allocate time for specific projects, or tests. Maybe you can help them find an extra hour or two a week they were spending on something that did not apply to the tenure process. And so they can be relieved of that to do something that matters a little bit more for them. In addition, you know, how do we help faculty align stress management resources with the experience and expectations of being in the professoriate? We have lots of services for students around campus regarded to stress management, well-being. How do we help faculty find those additional types of networks, the additional types of resources that help them with their well being as well? How do we introduce those offices and services to them as well?

**Tierney King** 06:49

Try to remember a day that you've been extremely stressed, and think about how the power of a compliment or a simple thank you has made your hard work and stress feel validated. When one person says, "You've done a great job, this is fabulous," or "Thank you for doing this," it makes it seem worthwhile. That's why our next topic is professional self-worth.

**Kevin Dvorak** 07:10

And we know that faculty who feel that their work is valued, faculty who feel like they are provided the opportunities to grow and to be highly engaged in the university community, they tend to have really

engaged students. And so the connection between highly engaged faculty and highly engaged students is critical for all variety of reasons - for student retention and graduation rates. And so what happens when faculty members do not feel that they have much self-worth is that they tend to become disconnected from their communities. They become disconnected from their classrooms, their colleagues, their students, supervisors. And so what happens is, many of them may even question why they're in the academy in the first place. Now what happens when faculty do not feel valued? Well, some of the problems that faculty experienced are they don't feel like their their work matters anymore to the institution. They may feel like they're in the margins. They may feel like their work goes unnoticed. They may even "quiet quit," and slowly disengage from being an active member of the institution, an active member of the community. They also will start questioning their career decisions. They may even have feelings of impostor syndrome and feel like they lack the growth potential. And faculty often get involved in the academy, early on seeing themselves advance from assistant professor to associate and full with a variety of goals for their own research, or teaching. And so when they don't feel like these things are valued by the institution, they may start to draw away.

**Rusty Carpenter 09:10**

These are significant problems that you're addressing here with the issue, the challenge, of feeling valued within the context of this larger barrier of self-worth, self-worth among our faculty. So we might also look at some of the solutions to this to this issue. Consider implementing a thank you professor initiative, where students might have the opportunity to contribute a thank you message of some kind to recognize faculty for those contributions in the classroom. We can also consider ways that we can show acknowledgement perhaps at events like commencement or recognition and ceremonies, providing acknowledgement for faculty who are doing a good job, and highly contributing to engage environments on campus educating students, for example.

**Kevin Dvorak 10:13**

Additionally, and this one I like a lot, because I think it can be really easy is recognition of work in various media. All of our institutions, I believe, at this point have some form of social media. And many times I know at my institution, our channels, are looking for content. And when they're looking for content, let's showcase the great work our faculty members are doing. So thinking about the various channels we might have, and how do we even try to set up Faculty Friday or Faculty Feature Fridays, or anything along those lines, where we can highlight somebody for the work they're doing in the classroom, the work that they're doing in the lab, or advising or research or anything. It is any component of the work that they do institutionally. How do we showcase that to people? We have alumni magazines, newsletters, digital signage around campus. Again, how do we show the faces of our faculty to the community at large and make sure that the community understands that our colleagues are contributing at really high levels.

**Rusty Carpenter 11:29**

We can also think about and need to think about gratitude, especially gratitude from supervisors. So we're leaders within our educational contexts. And so some of the challenges that we need to consider is whether supervisors are recognizing faculty contributions, both the small contributions on a daily basis are those at a larger scale. Many faculty feel challenged when their efforts that they're expending

in the classroom or in the department are going unacknowledged from their supervisors. So maybe we can think about some of the solutions for overcoming this challenge as well.

**Kevin Dvorak** 12:14

And I think about how important the phrase "Thank you" can be and how simple that phrase can be, and how showing up in person, again, that could be physically in person, or even via Zoom to a department meeting, or during somebody's office hour or you know, somebody is on campus, for a supervisor to be more present in those moments when faculty are working.

**Tierney King** 12:50

Additionally, we also need to address technology and the toll that it can take on faculty workload. With emerging AI capabilities, it's been extremely difficult to juggle the numerous other responsibilities while trying to keep up with technology.

**Kevin Dvorak** 13:04

And especially this past year with the roll out of AI, and all of the various platforms that have come along with it, faculty need time, and they need support to figure out how to use these technologies, and how to use them not just effectively, but efficiently. How do we figure out ways that students are using them as well? What are the most effective ways for student learning and for teaching? Overcoming technology as a barrier to faculty engagement: first, let's think about how we can develop learning communities surrounding usage. Can we develop faculty partner programs or mentor programs? How do we get students involved in these processes? How do we bring faculty from different departments throughout the institution together for some interdepartmental learning, and how they can figure things out across the curriculum? And lots of times we see that faculty in another area are using it creatively, and while we never thought of that in our specific departments, so how can we figure out these ways to bring people together to have the conversations and learn from and with one another? Second, how do we think about designing 10- to 15-minute tech tools? We talked about adult learning before to make sure that we have both synchronous and asynchronous opportunities for learning, and so how do we create modules where faculty can learn asynchronously, perhaps through your learning management system, online on their own, and maybe even employ some kind of flipped classroom opportunities where faculty can learn on their own and then have the experience together in person with your colleagues. And third, make sure you are partnering with your IT department. Make sure that they know what you're trying to do. Make sure that they know what you're trying to do. Make sure you know what they are trying to do as well. And I think we've all experienced those moments when we learn that IT does or does not want a particular technology around campus. So we don't want to say, hey, everybody, let's use this new package or this new software program, but IT is saying, no, there's a major warning with that one. Or we can't implement that for bandwidth concerns, as Rusty mentioned earlier. It takes up too much. And our students, who are scattered throughout the state, they can't handle this kind of software. So make sure you're partnering with them, and they know what you are doing as well. And finally, and this is exciting, celebrate and showcase faculty success. Make sure people know what faculty are doing and when they're doing it really, really well. It's always exciting for faculty to be able to share what they're doing really well with their students. And so make sure that you can get those notifications spread around campus.

**Tierney King** 16:12

Whether you're driving to work or you just need 15-minute think session, we hope the Faculty Focus Live podcast will inspire your teaching, and offer ideas that you can integrate into your own course. For more information on the resources included in this episode, please check out the links provided in the episode description.