SOLO SUCCESS: How to Thrive in the Academy When You’re the Only ____________ in Your Department

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Kerry Ann Rockquemore, PhD is Executive Director of the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity. Her scholarship has focused on interracial families, biracial identity, and the politics of racial categorization. She is author of two books: *Beyond Black* and *Raising Biracial Children*, as well as over two dozen articles and book chapters on multiracial youth. After Dr. Rockquemore became a tenured professor (at the University of Illinois at Chicago), her focus shifted to improving conditions for pre-tenure faculty by creating supportive communities for professional development, research productivity, and work/life balance. Her award-winning work with under-represented faculty led to the publication of her most recent book: *The Black Academic's Guide to Winning Tenure Without Losing Your Soul*. Through the NCFDD, Dr. Rockquemore provides workshops for new faculty at colleges across the U.S., writes a weekly advice column for *Inside Higher Education*, and facilitates an online discussion forum for faculty, post-docs and graduate students at [www.FacultyDiversity.org](http://www.FacultyDiversity.org)
TODAY’S WORKSHOP:

Part I: Challenges
Part II: A Framework for Solo Success
Part III: Building Your Case
Part IV: Relationships, Conflict and Power
Part V: Post-Workshop Resources
PART I:
CHALLENGES ON THE TENURE TRACK
The tenure-track is stressful for ALL junior faculty due to:

- Varying degrees of preparation for ALL aspects of job
- Minimal feedback and support
- Lack of support for work-life balance
- Unclear criteria for promotion & tenure
- Ever-escalating expectations for research and funding
- Need to front-load research portfolio
- Long probationary period (6 years) followed by a series of high-stakes, yet anonymous votes
Challenges on The Tenure-Track

The tenure track is stressful for ALL junior faculty, but even more so for under-represented faculty because of the politics of race and gender. Under-represented faculty commonly describe:

1. Struggling to find time for research
   - Being over-burdened with service demands related to diversity
   - Feeling overwhelmed by students seeking support, mentorship, advising, guidance, and a role model

2. Feeling unsupported in their research agenda
   - Facing the hidden barriers that exist for those doing research on race, class, gender, and/or sexuality issues
   - Facing biases against methods and theories that are in any way “non-dominant”
3. Experiencing emotional exhaustion from differential classroom dynamics

- Students get confused and can respond differently to majority and minority faculty.
- Differential behavior creates questions about competence and belonging.
- Not getting the benefit of the doubt triggers over-functioning in teaching in efforts to prove that we deserve the position.
- When teaching about inequality, students can project their reactivity and discomfort onto the professor and/or punish them in course evaluations.
Challenges on The Tenure-Track

4. Feeling a profound sense of loneliness and a lack of collegial acceptance that are tied to “solo” status

- Navigating an overtly or covertly hostile environment without requisite skills
- Unclear how to negotiate conflict with (and say “no” to) those who have more power
- Lacking a support network, mentors, and sponsors
- Unlikely to reach out for help until there is a crisis due to a perception that asking reveals weakness and/or lack of competence

The nature of academic culture tends to make under-represented faculty feel like they are the ONLY one having these experiences, despite the fact that they are widespread.
Challenges on The Tenure-Track

Commonly described outcomes:

- Negative impact on productivity
- Self-isolation
- Emotional exhaustion and anxiety
- Stress-related illness
- Strained inter-personal relationships
- Thoughts of leaving the academy

Even when successful winning tenure, some faculty are so harmed by the process that they withdraw completely, unconsciously reproduce the oppressive environment they experienced, and/or are too angry or disengaged to be mentors or work for long term change.
THE CORE CHALLENGE:
To win tenure, there are basic research, teaching, and service expectations that all junior faculty must fulfill. For under-represented faculty, efforts to fulfill these expectations are often made more difficult by subtle racial and gender dynamics that create unique obstacles, challenges, and dilemmas that must also be negotiated.

Key Question For Today:
How can you fulfill research, teaching, and service expectations when you are confronted with a series of obstacles AND do it in a way that allows you to maintain your integrity, your emotional and physical health, and your relationships?
PART II: CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR SOLO SUCCESS
A Framework for Solo Success

1) Clarify your goals

2) Develop a pro-active stance towards your career, relationships, and scholarship

3) Connect to communities of support, accountability and healing
CLARIFY YOUR GOALS

Ask yourself:

- Who am I?
- What do I want?
- Where do I want to be in 5 years?

*Everything else flows from here...*
Once you are clear about your goals:

- Say “no” to whatever doesn’t move you toward them.
- Let “no” be your default, and force people to give you an extraordinary and compelling reason to say “yes.”
- Release yourself from any anxiety, guilt or shame over the items that are not part of your agenda.
## A Pro-Active Stance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REACTIVE</th>
<th>PRO-ACTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I <em>wait</em> for people to welcome me to the department</td>
<td>I <em>invite</em> people to meet for lunch or coffee when I arrive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <em>imagine</em> everything will turn out okay if I just work hard</td>
<td>I <em>create</em> a strategic plan, discuss it with mentors, and ask for support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <em>hope</em> to write at the end of the day after everyone else’s needs are taken care of</td>
<td>I <em>write</em> for 30-60 minutes every day and I do not compromise that time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I <em>avoid</em> conflict until it is intolerable and then maybe, I’ll seek help</td>
<td>I <em>work</em> towards the development of healthy professional relationships</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
DEVELOPING A PRO-ACTIVE STANCE

This enables you to:

- Identify your personal power
- Exercise that power in the domains you DO currently have control over
- Ease the transition from the graduate student role to the scholar role
- Become more professionally successful than you ever could be in a reactive stance
# A Framework for Solo Success

## Community & Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISOLATION</th>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I work alone</td>
<td>I am a member of community of scholars working towards knowledge creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wait until work is completely finished before seeking feedback</td>
<td>I have feedback loops and appropriate reviewers to share my work with throughout the writing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate conferences so there’s no reason to go</td>
<td>I understand the value of building relationships intellectually, professionally, and personally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can figure things out myself, there’s no reason to bother other busy people</td>
<td>I have a network of peers, mentors, and colleagues who I can freely ask for information, support, and contacts</td>
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</table>
A Framework for Solo Success

NEW FACULTY NEEDS

✓ Professional Development
✓ Emotional Support
✓ A Sense of Community
✓ Accountability for Writing & Research
✓ Area-specific, substantive feedback on research
✓ Institutional sponsorship
✓ Access to networks and opportunities

Most new faculty have a wide variety of needs!
Most people call ALL of this “mentoring” & expect it to be done by one (or a few) senior faculty THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE!
A Framework for Solo Success

TYPICAL NEW FACULTY NEED

- Professional Development
- Emotional Support
- A Sense of Community
- Accountability for Writing & Research
- Area-specific, substantive feedback on research
- Institutional sponsorship
- Access to networks and opportunities

Many core needs can be met effectively and efficiently OUTSIDE of your department

But others require in-house, one-on-one relationships
Connecting with communities help you to:

- Have support before, during AND after problems arise.
- Decreases alienation, loneliness, and stress.
- Provides a reference group beyond the confines of your institution, which can minimize the relative impact of departmental drama.
- Provides opportunities, networks, and external mentors and sponsors.
An ideal community support network would include:

- Internal and external mentors AND sponsors
- An excellent therapist and/or new faculty coach
- Local and extended network of friends
- A writing group that meets your accountability needs and celebrates your success
- Some physical activity that allows your negative emotions to get out of your body
- Regular participation in professional development activities
PART III:
BUILDING
YOUR CASE
THE GOAL:
A case that’s beyond reproach

1) Research: Publish and flourish
2) Teaching: Teach efficiently and well
3) Service: Make strategic investments
Publications are the currency in the academic market so your **market value** and **institutional value** will be determined by your ability to publish your research.

**The Problem:**

- We tend to prioritize based on accountability
- The most important activity in your promotion, professional reputation, and future mobility has no built-in accountability (research) while the things that matter least have lots of built-in accountability (teaching and service).
## Building Your Case: Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“TYPICAL” NEW FACULTY MEMBER</th>
<th>“QUICK STARTERS”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over-prepare for class</td>
<td>Don’t spend major amounts of time on course preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend far less time on scholarly writing than needed to meet promotion and tenure criteria</td>
<td>Consistently spend 3 hours (or more) per week on scholarly writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have difficulty developing productive contacts with colleagues</td>
<td>Regularly seek advice and talk with colleagues about research and teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel a sense of loneliness and lack of collegial acceptance</td>
<td>Report high levels of job satisfaction</td>
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It’s about different **BEHAVIOR**, not different **ABILITY**!
## Daily Writing & Productivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT GROUPS</th>
<th>PAGES WRITTEN PER YEAR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote Daily &amp; Recorded progress</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrote daily, recorded progress, and were accountable</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Building Your Case: Research

Daily Writing Helps to Align Your Time With Your Evaluation Criteria

Tenure & Promotion Criteria

- Teaching: 20%
- Research: 40%
- Service: 40%

Is this how you spend your time each week?

- Teaching: 20%
- Research: 40%
- Service: 40%

Teaching  Research  Service

Teaching  Research  Service
New faculty often imagine they must have long unbroken stretches of time to write, but the demands of an academic career seldom allow this luxury.

Daily writing leads to steady productivity and fewer feelings of anxiety over failure to meet expectations for productivity.

**Mental shift:** writing is the most important part of my job, therefore it’s my top priority.

**Behavior shift:** I write every day and create a way to be accountable that’s meaningful and works for me.
# Building Your Case: Research

## The Key Question: What Do YOU Need?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUPPORT STRUCTURE</th>
<th>NEED IT MEETS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write-on-Site</td>
<td>Physical companionship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Writing Groups</td>
<td>Daily contact &amp; support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability Groups</td>
<td>Problem solving and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Coach</td>
<td>Individual attention and externally imposed weekly meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boot Camp</td>
<td>Intense structure, community, support &amp; accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Nag</td>
<td>Help getting started each day</td>
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</table>
Building Your Case: Teaching

Avoid teaching when possible!

- Apply for internal/external fellowships
- Consider asking for teaching release in exchange for extra service you are already doing

Limit class prep to 2 hours per/hour of lecture (max)

- Align your personal standards with your department
- Use assessments that can be graded by other people
- Delegate: Hire a grader, RA/GA, Undergrad TA’s
- Organized files & space help to avoid wasting time
- Use lesson plans (so you prep once only)
Limiting class prep is extremely difficult for new professors, but those who do it find that they can still cover what they want, appear more relaxed, and teach at a pace that encourages active student involvement.

In Boice’s study: After just five weeks, faculty who limited their course prep time, prioritized writing, and pro-actively engaged their senior colleagues began to look and feel more like “quick starters.”
The Art of Saying “No”

- Keep in mind that “collegiality” is part of your service to the department. To cultivate your relationships, spend at least two hours a week on discussions with colleagues focused on teaching and research (not gossip or personal business).
- Learn how to say “NO” often and with grace.
- Never say yes on the spot! Buy yourself time to first consult your strategic plan and weekly calendar.
- Let “no” be your default, and say “yes” only when there’s a compelling reason (instead of vice-versa).
There are so many ways to say “NO”:

✓ “That sounds like a really great opportunity, but I just can't take on any additional commitments at this time.”
✓ “I am in the middle of __________, ____________, and ___________. If I hope to get tenure, I'm unable to take on any additional service.”
✓ “I'm not the best person for this, why don't you ask ______________.”
✓ “If you can find a way to eliminate one of my existing service obligations, I will consider your request.”
✓ “No.” (look the asker in the eye and sit in silence)
PART IV: RELATIONSHIPS, CONFLICT, & POWER
The key to thriving in the academy as a solo faculty member is learning to manage relationships, conflict, and power.

**Relationships:** Pro-actively cultivate professional connections and collaborations

**Conflict:** Learn to engage in conscious, constructive, and healthy conflict on a regular basis

**Power:** Tap into your own personal power and understand how power works in your environment
Developing healthy relationships is a critical part of your work as a faculty member.

- Professional relationships don’t require “liking” the person, they require being able to work with someone collectively without negative energy distracting or derailing the process.
- Pro-actively develop relationships with colleagues, mentors and sponsors

Your Goal:

solid professional relationships with your colleagues BEFORE any conflict, drama, or problems occur.
Dangers of Avoiding Conflict:

- Your feelings of anger get pushed down
- Anger = energy, so if you push it down, it grows, deepens, expands and can turn into rage.
- Rage will find a way out of your body!
- Rage is a normal response to persistent racial injustice BUT there are few socially acceptable forms of expression for women of color and they can result in your being labeled as “threatening,” “unprofessional,” “emotional,” “out of control,” “the angry black man/woman,” etc…. 
At the heart of winning tenure without losing your soul is learning to engage in constructive conflict.

That means, finding ways to push back that allow retention of your integrity while minimizing retaliation.

Conflict is inevitable, so you have to continually ask yourself:

1. **Do I push back or pull back?**
2. **What do I gain and what do I lose?**
3. **If I decide to push back, what’s the most effective way to do so?**
# Relationships, Conflict, and Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>UNHEALTHY CONFLICT</strong></th>
<th><strong>HEALTHY CONFLICT</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>You must change the other person</td>
<td>Clarify your position, influencing an outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation</strong></td>
<td>Domination</td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assumptions</strong></td>
<td>There is a right and wrong, I’m right and you’re wrong.</td>
<td>People have the right to hold different positions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td>Aggressive, dehumanizing</td>
<td>Assertive, focused on the issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship</strong></td>
<td>Intertwined and inseparable</td>
<td>Differentiates between people and positions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TEN TIPS FOR HEALTHY CONFLICT:

1. Be clear about your goals
   - Influence an outcome OR
   - Express your beliefs, opinion, or feelings

2. Make the power differentials overt
   - It disarms the other party
   - State your risk and why you’re willing to take it

3. Use “I” messages to claim your position
   - You = blame, invites defensiveness
   - An “I” message can’t be challenged
TEN TIPS FOR HEALTHY CONFLICT

4. Validate
   - Affirm what you value in the other person’s character or position
   - This humanizes conflict and distinguishes the person from their position

5. Find common ground
   - It usually exists
   - It creates a bridge to real dialogue

6. When appropriate, use strategic apologizing
   - If you hurt someone, apologize but never apologize for your position
   - This takes the emotional hurt off the table
TEN TIPS FOR HEALTHY CONFLICT

7. State what you want
   - Be as specific as possible

8. Clarify message sent versus message received
   - Requires reflecting back what you’ve heard and asking for the same

9. Be aware of your personal triggers
   - Try to avoid them
   - Redirect emotional reactivity when it occurs

10. Attend to the content and relationship levels of communication
Academics often feel a sense of powerlessness at various stages of their career. While you are vulnerable in particular ways as a graduate student, post-doc, tenure-track, and/or tenured faculty member, that doesn’t mean you are powerless!

**Your have power over:**
- Your productivity
- How you spend your time
- What type of supportive communities you tap into (or create)
- How you respond to conflict in your environment
- What you choose to do at your institution after you win tenure…
PART V: POST-WORKSHOP RESOURCES
Welcome!

The National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity is a professional development, training, and mentoring community. We work with colleges, universities, organizations, and individuals towards one goal: helping new faculty members make a successful transition from graduate student to professor. We offer online and on-site training workshops, leadership development programs, individual coaching, and institutional consulting.

Become a member of our community today! Then share, connect, exchange, and grow -- that's why we're here and we hope you are too. You can engage this community's resources anytime, from anywhere there's a web connection.

Welcome. We're glad you're here.

www.FacultyDiversity.org/?Depaul
## Post Workshop Resources

**www.FacultyDiversity.org**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Do You Need?</th>
<th>NCFDD Provides</th>
<th>Cost</th>
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</table>
| I need information                                    | **The Book:**  
✓ *How to Win Tenure Without Losing Your Soul*                                                   | $22.50|
| I need information + online community                  | **Individual Community Membership:**  
✓ Weekly Monday Motivator  
✓ Monthly Tele-Workshops  
✓ Private Discussion Forum  
**Institutional Membership (up to 25 faculty)**     | $240  
$2500                                                   |
| I need information + community + intense mentoring     | **Faculty Success Program:**  
15-week Boot-Camp  
✓ Intense structure  
✓ Weekly calls, accountability groups, daily writing support, and coaching. | $2950 |
Where do you want to go from here?

What do you want and need to create for yourselves?

What are you willing to commit to moving forward?