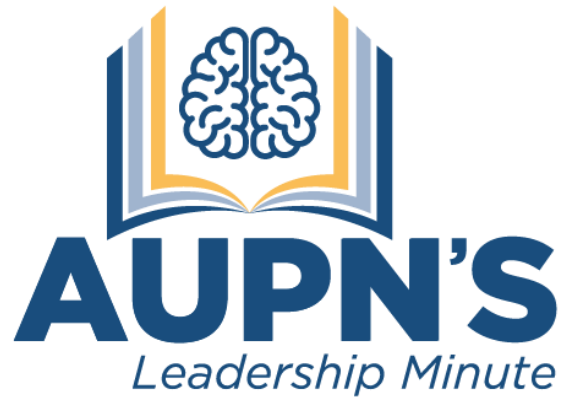




Rohit Das, MD
Oregon Health
& Science University



*Dealing with Sour Apples:
How to Manage
Challenging Faculty*



Steve Galetta, MD
NYU Grossman
School of Medicine

Sour Apples: How to Manage Challenging Faculty

- One of the hardest jobs as a leader is to manage challenging faculty who may not be the greatest team player, who act unprofessionally with colleagues, patients or trainees or who are unreliable in performing their duties. In this podcast, we review some suggestions to prevent, improve or limit such unwanted behaviors.
- The first step is to not model being sour apple yourself!

Prevention: The Safest Way to Go!

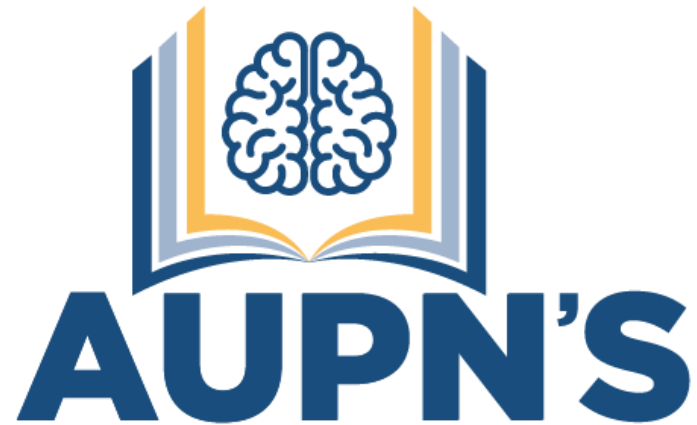
- It is important to hire people you have trained. You know them and they know you. It shows that you believe in your program, and the hires can perpetuate the culture. Always be willing to set aside other potentially enticing features to hire the team player!
- When hiring from the outside, you need to do your homework. Prefer the phone over email, if possible, to talk to their mentors. You get more candid information that way.
- Don't make people do things that they are not good at. If they do not enjoy research, for example, don't make them do it. Not everyone has to teach the students or residents, but many will be good role models or mentors in select situations

Work with them; don't give up right away!

- Understand why people are underperforming. Meet with them---in-person when possible. Often, there are personal issues that you don't know about. You don't need to know the details but try to set a time limit for improvement.
- Really try to give them guidance about what they are doing that does not immediately fit your expectations or those of others. Perhaps those expectations are outdated? Give them a mentor to work with them and talk with the mentor about the issues.
- Everyone brings different life experiences to the table. For instance, some faculty may respond to positive feedback, but sometimes you may have to set limits. They can't be emailing the senior administrators at midnight telling them how great they are!

The Last Resort: Addition by Subtraction!

- Sometimes, it is a poor fit. In that case, have a conversation with them emphasizing that their goals may not align with those of the department. They may be a great neurologist but, for some reason, their placement is not working. Just like athletes, they may perform better on another team.
- Tell them that you are not going to renew them, but before you do so, make sure you have consulted HR and the legal teams. You have to know what kind of notice they are entitled to, and you have to try to understand their state of mind. Be supportive here because it can be traumatic.
- You can't let people destroy your culture. You have to let those people go. You can't tolerate mediocrity because they can destroy a team and everyone thinks that is the level you are looking for. You should strive for a culture of accountability that has aspirations.
- You hope that people who are not the best fit for your department will be successful in other environments.



Leadership Minute brought to you by:

***The Association of University
Professors of Neurology's
Media Engagement Committee***

Copyright 2025