

# director's MESSAGE

## Lessons learned

Serving as the director of the Institute for Systems Research these past eight years has been a great privilege for me. In my last "Director's Message," I would like to share with you a few of the lessons I have learned along the way.

### Were you prepared to be ISR director?

Absolutely not! I walked into the director's office as a faculty member. Up until this point I had been going through my own promotion processes. The opportunity to become ISR director came about shortly after I was promoted to full professor.

In my favor, I did have a history of helping my community no matter where or at what level I was. I managed a lab when I was a graduate student, and large projects as a postdoc first and then as a research scientist. As a faculty member, I played an active role in the launch of new entities like the Maryland NanoCenter, the Maryland Energy Center and the initial discussions for forming the Robert E. Fischell Institute for Biomedical Devices, in addition to launching and running my own research lab. I also was used to collaborating with neighboring national labs and working with interdisciplinary colleagues across campus and elsewhere. This, at least, helped me get started.

But none of these things prepared me for the responsibilities that come with being in charge of an institute the size of ISR. I learned that just because you are a part of and are familiar with the environment of the university, it does not mean you understand its administrative processes. You have to figure out what these priorities are and how your unit fits within them.

Because the university had no formal program offering administrative mentoring, I had to come up to speed quickly and seek

mentoring from those I trusted to help me move forward. *Mentoring is important!*

I would also say that *faculty should not be shy about trying out a period of administrative opportunity.*

There is much to be learned from seeing the university from this perspective, and from growing in your professional life when you are in a position where your primary tasks are to serve your fellow faculty, students, staff, and the organization

at large, rather than your own interests. Seek out opportunities on your own if they are not provided to you.

### What did you learn as director?

I am grateful for everything I learned as the ISR director, but perhaps the most important thing is this: *being an institute director or department chair mandates that you be completely selfless.*

This is not something we faculty members instinctively know, and it is certainly not something in which we are trained. As faculty, we are thinking all along about our own shops, what it is we need to do, and how we need to do it. We take pride in our own accomplishments and those of the students in our programs.

This is all meaningless in an administrative position! To be successful in this job, the accomplishments, failures, progress, and well-being of the community must be your priorities. Helping junior faculty overcome their problems, and encouraging senior faculty to let go of their ingrained habits requires you to be a selfless person who can make your unit's wellbeing the top priority, no matter what is at stake.

Sometimes this requires you to work with high-powered faculty members and administrators with their own agendas, or people with difficult personalities. It is all part of the diplomacy of the job, and it is a sure place of personal leadership growth. Remember, *it is not about your own success, it is about the success of your unit as a whole.*

### Where will you go from here?

Thank goodness I no longer need to be promoted! I have been fortunate to keep my research group active during my years as ISR director. One benefit of the position is that I have been exposed to the breadth and depth of the research we conduct here. It has broadened the perspective I bring to my own research. I plan to steer my research group in a way that will be in tune with and focused on real societal, systems-oriented challenges, specifically in health care.

It would be foolish not to take advantage of these experiences and bring them forward! My advice to everyone is to *use what you have learned, technically and otherwise, in your next step.*

Best regards,



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