



Case Study: Are You the Doormat?

Your department is lower in faculty strength than is comfortable for sustaining your curriculum and graduate program and you are not getting budget increases while costs are going up. You are struggling with morale, trying to combat the idea that the department doesn't matter to the university and/or is a sinking ship. This is an uphill battle, given that just this year, for fiscal reasons, you have had to cancel your newsletter and seminar series, and stop buying new equipment. There are only two bright spots: you've gotten permission from the dean to search for a mid-career (tenured) position (the dean has agreed to fund the line), and you've won a hard-fought battle for your faculty to be eligible for funding from the campus pool for scholarly travel. Your faculty members will have to apply, but any who are speaking at conferences are guaranteed funding.

You have a meeting in ten minutes with Professor Honcho, the head of another department housed in the adjacent building. This "nontraditional" hire was brought in with much fanfare and at great expense; he holds an endowed position and has more personal discretionary funding than your whole department. The donor, a self-educated supermarket king, is big on "reforming" higher education, and gives speeches lauding Professor Honcho as one who will lead the way for the entire university to reform its outdated ways. From friends and colleagues you have heard only negative reports about this guy. They say he doesn't know or care about your university's policies and never hesitates to remind people of his program's visibility and funding.

The topic of the meeting is a request you have repeatedly turned down to relinquish your only large, high-tech classroom for use by Professor Honcho's department on Thursday afternoons from 4–6 P.M. This room is heavily used every day of the week. Two months ago, Professor Honcho's assistant requested use of your classroom for their showcase seminar series. This series draws big-name speakers from outside academia and gets much attention. Since the classroom was fully booked for teaching, you couldn't grant the request, even had you wanted to, and you thought the matter would end there.

Unfortunately, that was only the beginning. You have since been bombarded with email and phone calls, first from Professor Honcho's assistant, then from the great man himself. They have suggested that you move your Thursday afternoon classes to their department's building so the highly visible seminars can be held in the high-tech classroom. No one has ever suggested that the seminars require the high-tech facilities; the argument is just that it would benefit the university for these events to be in your better-looking room, and that you should be willing to make this trade for the sake of the university.

Prepare for your meeting with Professor Honcho.

What is your opening line? What tone will you take?

What are the questions you need to ask?

What is your goal?

What do you want out of this meeting?