



The Peak Performing Professor: A Practical Guide to Productivity and Happiness

Robison, Susan
Wiley, 2013

Book Review

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Today the question of how to manage the three dimensions of a professor's work – teaching, writing, and institutional citizenship – in ways that are satisfying, sustainable, have integrity, and allow for other dimensions of “having a life,” is increasingly fraught. Multiple contextual factors contribute to this state of affairs, from economic conditions that result in fewer tenure-stream positions to demands for greater accountability and the questioning of the value of a baccalaureate degree. The contemporary situation creates uncertainty for faculty, most of whom have made significant investments to become professors. Uncertainty feeds anxiety that grows into distraction that saps energy and enjoyment in the work. This is bad for professors and for their universities. Enter Susan Robison, psychologist, former full professor, and faculty development expert. Hardly naïve about larger contextual factors impinging on the professorate, Robison offers a way forward: teaching faculty practices of self-regulation that “increase their own productivity and satisfaction in areas over which they have control” – their own lives and work (xv).

Robison presumes that faculty become professors motivated by deep purposes to which they are committed. Purpose grounds aspirations and commitments. It anchors internal coherence to satisfying lives in which professors accomplish good work as teachers, scholars, and university citizens. From this basic assumption flows Robison's framework: (1) capture the energy or “power” of one's deep purpose and articulate that purpose and the mission, vision, and goals that flow from it; (2) establish priorities, organize projects, and cultivate work habits that align with purpose; (3) develop interpersonal skills and cultivate mutually supportive relationships; and, (4) engage in the self-care essential to long-term health. After explaining and providing both reflective exercises and concrete strategies for each element in the first

four parts of the book, Robison applies her framework very explicitly to the roles that professors occupy – professor, teacher, scholar, servant leader, and human being – in part five. Her claim: when individual faculty “define productivity and happiness for themselves with a view to their own long-range success,” the results will benefit both faculty and institutions (11).

Composed in a workbook format, readers can turn to the sections of the volume that most interest them, or read from beginning to end. The volume employs theories and strategies from a range of fields, selected, conceptualized and presented specifically for faculty. This is one of its strengths. It also has an extensive bibliography for those wishing to pursue a particular topic.

Robison’s positive tone and direct, uncomplicated approach likely will lead some readers to dismiss *The Peak Performing Professor* as too simple, too normal. And the workbook format leads to some repetition. But for those trying to compose lives and careers, those looking to find a way to retrieve the lost pleasure of being a professor, and those charged with supporting others to do good work, this is a book worth reading

https://wabashcenter.wabash.edu/resources/book_reviews/the-peak-performing-professor-a-practical-guide-to-productivity-and-happiness/