Performance Discussion with a Great Performer

Two years ago, the Music Department recruited a talented oboist, Igor Pryor, to join the tenure-track faculty. Pryor had spent the last several years as a full-time professional musician, and he filled a vacancy in the department’s internationally acclaimed woodwind quintet.

Professor Pryor has exhibited considerable expertise in his efforts to promote the quintet’s professional reputation and orchestrated their booking for a one-month tour of Europe last semester. He has also maintained a rigorous regional performance schedule. In the area of performance, he has proved to be even more impressive than anyone had anticipated, and the whole department has enjoyed increased visibility and a boost in reputation. (NOTE: Consider Dr. Pryor’s performance as you would other forms of scholarly activity that might include international travel, time spent in writing, lab management, etc.)

Unfortunately, the Chair has received numerous complaints from students who report that Professor Pryor is hard to find and does not keep office hours or schedule appointments with students. Some of the complaints suggest that his classes are not well prepared and the basis for assigned grades is never clear. In addition, Pryor is the department’s representative on an active College committee, and the Dean has indicated disappointment that he has attended only one of six meetings held.

The one time that the Chair assigned Professor Pryor to teach a large enrollment class, Pryor protested on the basis that his travel schedule, as dictated by his membership in the woodwind quintet, would cause him to miss too many classes, and another faculty member was given the assignment. Pryor made the case that he was hired because of his performance skills and interests and that other assignments should accommodate this important contribution.

During Pryor’s first year, the Chair soft-pedaled criticism of Pryor’s teaching and service, believing that he needed time to acclimatize to the demands of the faculty role. Now, in preparation for the second annual performance evaluation with Professor Pryor, the Chair is wondering how to address different workload expectations and his overall contribution to the department.

Discuss your approach to this performance evaluation:

1. What are the crucial elements of the case that you need to consider?
2. What do you need to do before, during, and after the performance discussion?
3. How will you recognize and reward positive achievement while setting clear performance expectations?
4. How would your approach differ if this were a tenured faculty member?
5. How do you incorporate the faculty member’s self-evaluation and professional goals?
6. What are the pitfalls to avoid?
7. What will be the most difficult parts of the conversation?
8. What will be the impacts of the approach you’ve chosen?