

# Building Culture – a junior faculty perspective

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*“Honest advice to chairs from an Assistant Professor in the trenches”*

Friday, December 2, 2022  
9:30 – 10:30 am



Building and Maintaining a Positive Culture in a Continuous Storm

# Disclosures

- Dr. Chris Hardin's leadership was a driving factor in my motivation to join the faculty at the University of Missouri.
- I am not tenured, I am not a department chair, and I do not have a full appreciation for the challenges in your role.





# What am I going to talk about?

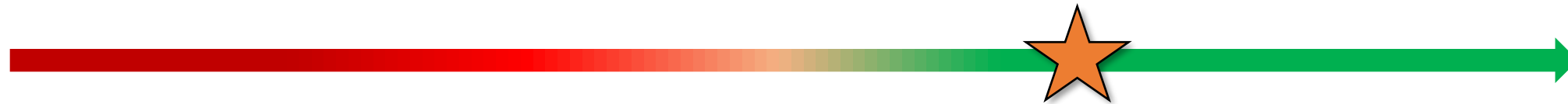


*Things chairs do that **help** and/or **hurt** early career tenure track faculty success and happiness with a focus on real stories, while highlighting potential blind spots*

- ✓ **Informal, anonymous surveys**
- ✓ **One-on-one interviews**

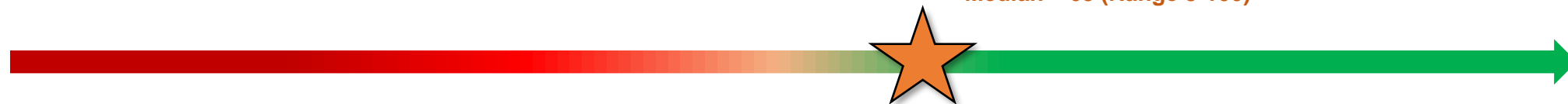
**My Department Chair facilitates junior faculty success:**

Median = 73 (Range 4-100)



**My Department Chair had helped my transition to Assistant Professor:**

Median = 63 (Range 8-100)



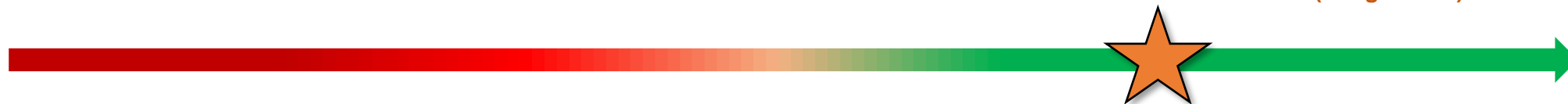
**My Department Chair helps ensure junior faculty are happy/fulfilled:**

Median = 60 (Range 10-96)



**My Department Chair builds/maintains a positive culture:**

Median = 80 (Range 15-95)



Strongly disagree (0)

Strongly agree (100)



# **1** Joining the Department

Joining the Department

Settling into a routine

Achieving full potential





# Joining the Department – The Good

- Personalized visit
  - Collaborators
  - Pre- and post-award team (meet the “team” early)
  - Department-funded lab manager
- Realistic expectations
- Competitive start-up package
  - Protected time
  - New laboratory space
  - Internal funding mechanisms





# Joining the Department – The Unrealistic

- Over-promising in start-up packages
- Offer letters that were not possible
- Breach of contract
- Centralized hiring



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- Over-promising in start-up packages
- Offer letters that were not possible
- **Breach of contract**
- Centralized hiring

*Multiple individuals described “buyers' remorse”*

<input type="radio"/>	Retirement benefits lost
	Lab space non-existent
	Last-minute edits to offer
<input type="radio"/>	<i>“All the things I came here for are gone.”</i>
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## Recruitment – A story....



“I went on 2 second interviews. At one institution I met with support staff, potential collaborators, and my family was invited out to dinner with some of the faculty and their families.....

....at the other institution, I did not get the visits I requested (like meeting with Clinical Research Unit staff to go over pricing) and when I ran into a potential departmental colleague and collaborator, they were surprised to see me. No one from the chair’s office had notified them of my visit. I seemed like an after-thought.”





## Recruitment – A story....

My lab space was overpromised and underdelivered. I was offered a space that ultimately does not exist and could not be used for animal work. This was a problem I was left to solve for myself.

I came with extramural funding and negotiated a good start-up. Because of this, the ADR notified me that I am out of contention for any internal grants. This “R01 or bust” mentality is going to give me a stroke.

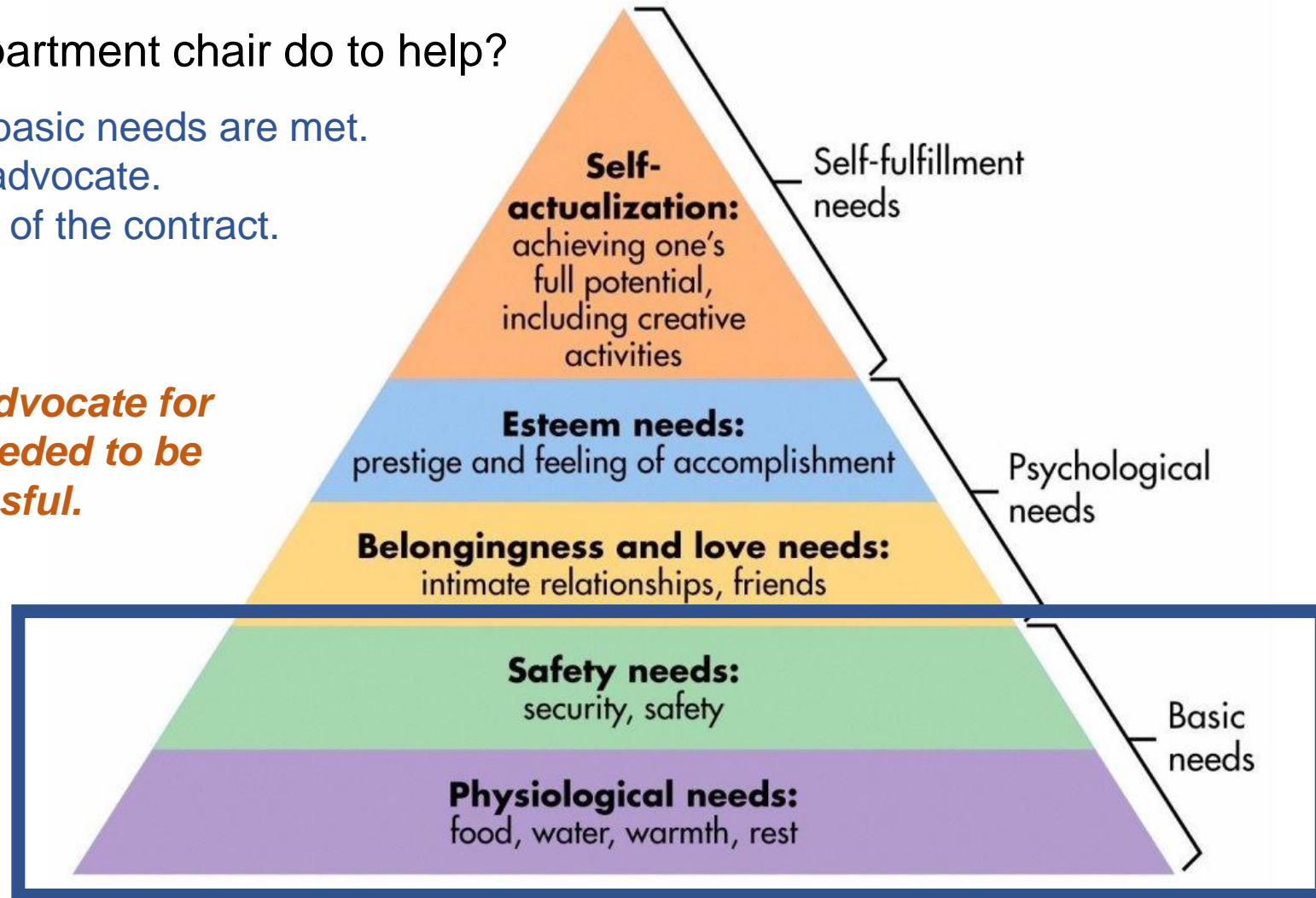


# What do junior faculty REALLY want??

What can a department chair do to help?

- ✓ Making sure basic needs are met.
- ✓ Serve as an advocate.
- ✓ Uphold terms of the contract.

*Be a strong advocate for resources needed to be successful.*



“The expectations placed on new faculty to bring in funding are not the same as they were 10 years ago.”

## **2** Settling into a routine

Joining the Department

Settling into a routine

Achieving full potential





## Settling in – The Good

- Mentorship team
- Financial support for professional development
- Help with lab renovations
- Direct access to support staff
- Help make connections across campus
- Teaching release to submit proposals
- Strategic service obligations
- Optimistic view about the future of the department





## Settling in – The Good

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## Settling in – A story....

My department chair “loaned” me a lab manager for my first 6 months to help me set up my lab until I could successfully hire my own person.

My chair immediately aligned me with a senior faculty that took me under their wing, included me in lab meetings and journal clubs, and “loaned” trainees (students and postdocs) for experiments and help with analysis.

When it became obvious that a new hire in my group was a risk to data integrity, my chair immediately stepped in and facilitated a change.





# Settling in – The Unrealistic

- Overburdening with teaching and service
- Not supportive of K award applications
- Unwilling to advocate for you
- Passive, saying “*that’s just how things are*”
- Assumption of knowledge
- Unwilling to address weaknesses in the support staff
- Not being clear on how contributions will be viewed in the P&T process
- Poor communication surrounding “process”
  - Collaborators, salary, internal portals, *etc*

**Introducing unnecessary  
barriers**







## Settling in – A story....

My mentoring committee came exclusively from my department. I felt pressured to submit an R01 when I was not ready – not for the success of my program, but for department metrics.

I was asked to cover lectures for senior faculty. I am teaching beyond my contract and it will not be counted as teaching for P&T.

My chair has not made me feel like I am welcome in the department. Sometimes giving people space feels like the department/faculty are ambivalent about your presence.

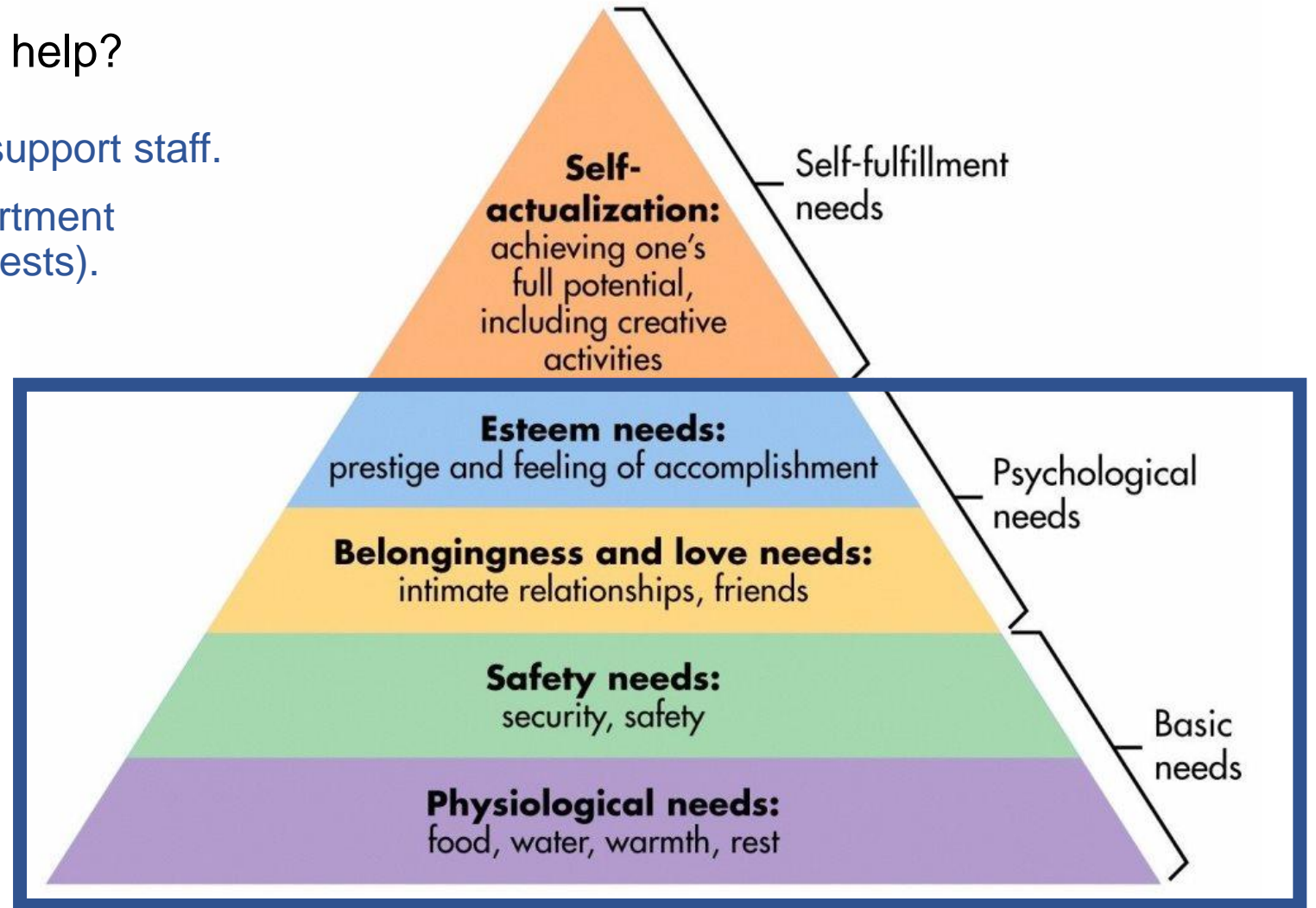


# What do junior faculty REALLY want??

What can a department chair do to help?

- ✓ Direct, regular access to department support staff.
- ✓ On-campus mentors outside the department (faculty, not the department, best interests).
- ✓ Provide resources to “hit the ground running” despite renovations (*i.e.*, shared space, staff).
- ✓ Protected time with fair and reasonable expectations for teaching.
- ✓ Well-defined expectations with benchmarks.

*Understand how system barriers influence career progression*



# 3 Achieving full potential

Joining the Department

Settling into a routine

Achieving full potential





# Achieving full potential – The Good

- Chairs that are generally supportive, cordial
- Truly care about my health and well-being
- Strongly promotes work-life balance
- Facilitated retention package
- Matching funds for University grants
- Clearly outlined expectations and official effort
- Protect faculty from service and teaching
- Has a strategic vision





## **Achieving full potential– A story....**

My chair asks and understands what my goals are and is willing to have a conversation on how to help advocate for things that support my goals.

Overall, I really appreciate my chair. They truly guided me to a position where I should receive tenure.





**There's a lot coming next.....**

**Joining the Department**

**Settling into a routine**

**Achieving full potential**





# Achieving full potential – The Unrealistic

- Unsupportive of the pressures on faculty
- Unrealistic goals about what is possible at this institution
- Poor oversight of how senior colleagues treat junior faculty
- Passive attitude towards culture
- Providing quick, short-term solutions for chronic problems
  
- Inconsistent expectations, favoritism
- Lack of openness and poor communication
- Unwillingness to work together on solutions
  
- New teaching preps in short amount of time
- Sacrifice success of the faculty for success of the department





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- **Sacrifice success of the faculty for success of the department**







## Achieving full potential– A story.....

I am expected to sacrifice my career trajectory for the success of the department. I came in with extramural funding, yet in 6 semesters, I am on my 4<sup>th</sup> new teaching prep.

My chair guided me to a position where I should receive tenure. However, my research productivity and grantsmanship was for the benefit of the department only.

After receiving funding, I was asked to use grant support within our department, rather than outside the department, even if it wasn't what was best for the project.





## Achieving full potential– A story.....

I was given service assignments that were not strategic and took significantly more time than I was promised, all while I am in a position where I can't say "no".

My chair has 1 meeting with me a year to "*tell me how I am doing*". While they say they "*want to help me anyway they can*" they offer no actual assistance or advice.





## Achieving full potential– A story.....

My chair is very negative about our college's view of the department. They often share things with us that we have no control over, which lowers morale. **I might have been more ambitious if I didn't constantly feel beat down.**

My department chair manages but does not provide leadership. There seems to be no drive to care what faculty are doing.

My chair made hasty decisions trying to solve issues.

My chair encourages a toxic culture by excusing it.

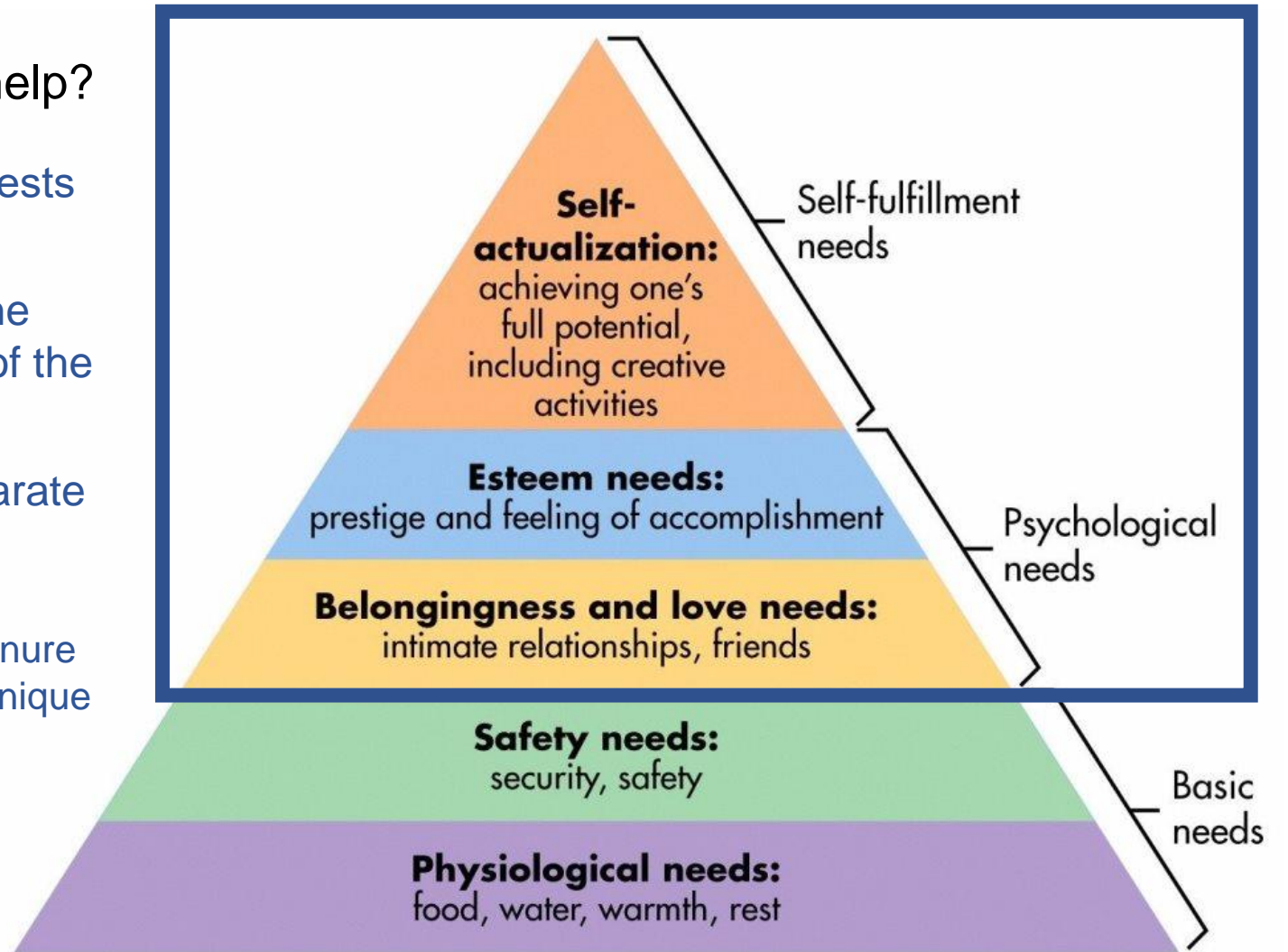


# What do junior faculty REALLY want??

What can a department chair do to help?

- ✓ Have the individual faculty's best interests in mind and make it known.
- ✓ Celebrate successes publicly, make the department/college/University aware of the good work being done.
- ✓ When big events happen, have a separate meeting with *pre-tenure faculty only*.
  - ✓ Department faculty meeting is rarely considered a "safe space", and pre-tenure faculty may have questions that are unique to their situation.

**Communication and collective vision**



“Just remembering everyone is a person and treating them like a colleague goes a long way.”

# The Last Word



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# The best chairs....

- Ask what I need, how I'm struggling, what my concerns are
- Are engaged, interested, and invested my success
- Facilitate collaborations
- Understand individual pressures of faculty
- Provide rationale for decisions, Forward-thinking
- Have consistent, straight-forward expectations (*do well, get rewarded*)
- Communicative
- Doesn't seek to please everyone, Assertive leadership
- Availability
- Genuine care for faculty, staff and students
- Promote work-life balance

***Have a firm understanding of  
their own strengths and a vision  
for the future***





## The “worst” chairs....

- Unsupportive of the pressures on faculty
- Too much emphasis on teaching
- Too easy/supportive of students
- Unwilling to advocate for new faculty
- Passive, saying “*that’s just how things are*”
- Provide problems with no solutions
- Lack of openness and poor communication
- Inconsistent messaging
- Unavailable for meetings
- Favoritism
- Micromanaging
- Assumption of knowledge
- Unwillingness to work together on solutions



# Closing remarks:

*“I love my department, colleagues, and have no issues with my chair. However, this exercise did elucidate they did not work to help me succeed as an Assistant Professor.”*

*“I have been really fortunate to have a great department chair.”*

**My Department Chair builds/maintains a positive culture:**





# Thank you!!

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