

Scenario 2

“Protecting a Poor Performer”

You chair a small but very busy department/area that includes a team of three colleagues, including your executive director, a program manager and one staff assistant. The workload is constant and often quite heavy, but your small department/area works hard. You have been in this chair position for two years.

The executive director is new to the department/area but not new to Harvard, while the staff assistant has been in his role for five years. The program manager (**whose name is Grace**) is a longer-tenured colleague who has been at FAS for over twenty years.

Over the past six months, you’ve noticed that work presented to you often includes mistakes and several important time deadlines were missed. From what you can tell, the team works diligently, and everybody seems to perform at a high level. You’ve asked your executive director several times if there are any problems or issues that she would like to discuss, but nothing has come from those conversations.

Last week, a memo that went to the Provost’s office was incomplete and contained errors. Clearly frustrated, you ask to speak to your executive director once again.

Your executive director finally reveals the *‘elephant in the room’*: that everyone appears to accept and work around Grace’s inability to carry her own workload. The executive director tells you that she was quietly warned that Grace was hired many years ago by a University professor, who continues to have a long-standing friendship with Grace. Nobody wants to expose Grace’s failure to perform for fear that they will be retaliated against by the University professor. As a result, this problem has never been surfaced.

- What is the best way to approach this situation? What additional information do you need?
- Should you speak with your faculty colleague (the University professor) and if so, what should you say?
- What guidance would you give to your executive director?