

How to Deal with Bad Advice

- In this helpful article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, David Perlmutter (University of Iowa) offers suggestions for dealing with off-the-mark advice from colleagues – and situations where two people give you different advice. He wrote this with a university setting in mind, but it definitely applies to K-12 teachers and administrators.
- *Investigate before you commit.* “Unless you are advised to ‘Duck!’ because an errant fraternity football is zooming toward your head, you should never immediately employ any recommendation, no matter its apparent merits,” says Perlmutter. “So sit back, gather more data, accumulate more wisdom, and ponder before you plunge.”
- *Triangulate contradictory advice.* If the colleagues offering you different advice aren’t too prickly, you might reach out to both of them and ask for their help resolving the differences.
- *Hear out even seemingly useless advice.* One assistant professor had a negative reaction to a mentor’s suggestion to find a quiet carrel in the library for serious work. But then she tried it and greatly appreciated the solitude – nobody could find her, she turned off her cell phone and e-mail, and could really concentrate.
- *Plead “busy” and just say no (thanks).* This is a good strategy when you’re asked to take on an additional project that’s not on mission. People understand the word *busy*.
- *Don’t assume that an off-the-cuff suggestion is a “must do.”* A lot of advice by mentors is given in the spirit of “you might” rather than “you must.”
- *Seek out a champion.* “The best antidote to bad advice is a trustworthy, decent, supportive, shrewd, and politically powerful mentor,” says Perlmutter. “When someone else offers a suggestion that seems to be a waste of your time and energy, your champion should be someone who will say, ‘Don’t worry; I’ll handle it,’ and then does.”
- *If possible, flee.* A few bosses enjoy making underlings miserable. They make you feel bad, feel stupid, put themselves forward as the only source of wisdom, the only one you can trust, blame you for failure, and don’t take responsibility for bad advice. “Don’t get caught up in the pressure or drama of a moment,” says Perlmutter. If you’re the victim of bullying, get out of the relationship. “The advantages of learning to discern good advice from bad will not just flow to you,” he concludes, “but will make you a good advisor to your own mentees, and so uphold the best values...”
- “Avoiding Bad Advice from Your Colleagues” by David Perlmutter in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Mar. 8, 2013 (Vol. LIX, #26, p. A35-36)