



High-Stakes and Consequences for a World-Renowned Researcher

By Nancy Capistran, PCC, CPC

A “brilliant mind” at a top-ranked private research university is at the frontier of controlling diseases. This principal investigator has a lifelong quest to make a difference in our world by continuing to expand his teaching and research to save lives. His groundbreaking efforts of achievement fill an important gap and extend the range of possibilities.

This professor’s state-of-the art laboratory and his team of researchers had been making well-respected, internationally recognized progress. His passion for transformative developments within his area of specialty was being interrupted by escalated human dynamics challenges with a few colleagues within his immediate academic community. He was referred to me by a mutual business acquaintance.

Starting from “Hello,” I could sense that he was beyond frustrated with his inability to handle the elevated human dynamics issues which placed him well outside of his comfort zone. He was being exposed to sniping from administrators as well as from some of his peers. There was criticism of his teaching ability being made through backchannels and then delivered to him either second hand or not at all. The pushback, politics, and lack of support were unquestionable. He explained to me that the pressure to perform, to publish, and to win research grants was intense, with the stakes and consequences being colossal. He is a trailblazer with his high-impact teaching, research, and regular international speaking engagements. Scholars of his caliber should be viewed as a valuable asset instead of as a threat. Extreme competition often breeds toxic environments. With this type of fierce pressure, there will inevitably be those individuals who will play dirty politics, especially when it involves either cutting edge research, securing intellectual properties, gaining funding, or intellectual independence. It is difficult to find the proper balance between the critical roles of research and education for faculty members at research universities. To keep our world evolving, innovation is critically needed. Our global society greatly benefits from and depends, upon these research enterprises.

Our potent work together continues as I support and guide him on how best to navigate this culture-clash environment. He lives in a world full of scholars who should be collegial, but in his professional life he finds himself stepping around and over landmines. Our collaborative efforts are focused on covering his blind spots and supporting him to pick up the pace of prodigious traction on his lifelong quest of being a catalytic force for scaling breakthrough research. His passion is deep-rooted to alter the course of debilitating diseases. He has the intellectual capacity to save and improve millions of lives. However, if he can’t learn to dovetail his approach with the present system, his self-esteem will have been irreparably compromised and his brilliance will have been for naught.



About the Author: Nancy Capistran is a best-selling author, an award-winning, internationally certified executive coach, motivational speaker, and trusted advisor. She is Principal of [Capistran Leadership, LLC](#), and [Crisis Interception, LLC](#). Nancy's best-selling international leadership book: [Open Your Eyes and LEAD](#) shows readers how to become a positive force in the world and how to balance and manage omnipresent tensions while striving for leadership excellence. Capistran shares inspirational stories and advice from her 30+ year career to help both seasoned and emerging leaders develop intentionality while maintaining their core values and beliefs even when life's pressures dictate otherwise.