

# Find Your Peace to Get Through the Back-To-Campus Rush

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As the dog days give way, higher education professionals brace themselves for the annual autumn crunch. This busy season on campus can be especially challenging. Although you may feel taxed and stressed, you play an ambassadorial role to a vulnerable constituency. Despite your overloaded calendar and inboxes, you don't want to lose your cool while you're assisting a nervous first-year student or a jetlagged grad assistant.

One exciting thing about working on a university campus is the buzz that radiates through the community when students return. Sure, it brings some chaos, but it's also a thrilling part of the rhythm of life in a college town. This is a unique and exciting part of jobs in academia, as long as you're emotionally prepared for it. Here's how to get ready.

## **Shape Your Outward Face**

It can be a challenge for professionals, across industries, to show clients a polite and friendly face during peak seasons. This is especially complex in higher education, where the services span housing, administrative, academic and student affairs, among others. But underlying the many facets of this work is a central objective: to create a vibrant learning community that students feel comfortable calling home.

Dr. Sandra Mohr, Dean of Academic Resources and Administration at [New England College of Optometry](#), reflects: "On campus each fall, I am reminded of what it was like the first time I stepped onto campus as a freshman student. All of that energy and excitement and potential for the future ahead helped shape my career into what it is today. It really gets me back into the mindset of why I do the work I do every day."

Cultivating this mindset helps. The vibe students and their families get from the teams that assist them is essential to their feelings of comfort and safety as they acclimate to campus. Projecting a calm, helpful face to students and their families is key. If anyone gets to lose their cool, it's them.

Undoubtedly, it is a lot of pressure on staff and takes plenty of support to maintain. Dr. Mohr notes: "When working with my staff, I like to remind them of why they chose the job and field they did. We go through many stressful times during the year and work through a variety of issues." Dr. Mohr points out that it helps "If you're passionate about the work that you do, you enjoy coming to work and find opportunities in the busy moments of the very important work we do."

It takes supportive strategic leadership to help a team weather the autumn chaos. Dr. Mohr notes: "As a leader, I try to encourage staff to take good care of themselves and do things that support their health and success, which ultimately benefits the team and the students we serve. Small things like coffee breaks and snacks with notes of thanks are helpful ways of reminding them that their hard work is appreciated. It is also important to create a culture where they feel comfortable asking for help or support through difficult situations -- together we can work through anything."

### **Emotionally Compartmentalize**

This means being able to put your feelings on ice when you need to. Let's say you work in financial aid, and you're dealing with a family who is mad, stressed, confused, and hot. They've been traveling, and they're nervous and outraged because what they understood to be the situation is not materializing. You may not be doing that great yourself. This may be the tenth hot, stressed family you've met. Their affairs may be more out of sorts than the other nine; meanwhile, you're desperate for a break. Justifiably stressed parties are seated on both sides of your desk.

Emotional compartmentalization means that you can put your emotions aside momentarily. You'll come back to those. But right now, this family needs your attention. They need your empathy. It's hard to give them when they're being difficult. And you'll get your chance to share how the situation made you feel when you're in the company of those who are empathetic to you. Right now, though, these are your clients and they're in pain. Your service can relieve their stress. While you're uncomfortable and spent, at least you're on familiar turf. They don't even have that.

Cauterize your raw emotion. Dig deep like a marathon runner and be there for this family. You will be proud of yourself. You will serve your community well, this student and their family who are floundering in front of you will get their affairs sorted out. Then they can get back to the wonderful work of loving the institution you represent.

You're positioned to save the day for this family. Get in there and spin your brilliance.

### **Own Your Space**

Overprepare your process and your space so that you feel calm and in control. Kimberly Friedmutter, career coach and author of the best-selling book [Subconscious Power: Use Your Inner Mind to Create the Life You've Always Wanted](#), explains: "When there is movement (or migration) of a group of people such as students coming into a campus surrounding, there are a few interesting dynamics that occur. One is that the students are coming in filled with excitement, adrenaline, some begrudgingly, etc....but all with passion and a sense of excitement that can seem overwhelming. The great thing about energy is you can shore up your own...Don't get sucked into their energetic patterns, rather entice them into yours." You are the one in control here. You maintain your control by being present and prepared.

Friedmutter further notes: "Chaotic energy is always seeking balance and resolve, and you are that...stay balanced, sure of yourself and you will see your students fall into place, with you. Keep breathing, stay assured and do not waver. You are the constant in your domain, and this ground you hold will be the bedrock for your students!" Don't give way to their chaos. Your ability to maintain a calm disposition is your asset, and it starts with your prep.

**Note Fixes for Next Year**

Take plenty of notes, so that you're always improving operations for next year. Use every hang-up and slow down as an opportunity to improve your process. High volume times are stressful, but they also test the mechanics of your systems. They find the bugs. Note those carefully and debrief immediately.

**Be the Mission**

You are serving people who are in the pursuit of higher education. Part of what drives the work you do is your belief in higher education. The people and families you meet are about to engage in life-changing study. Treat your work with the reverence it deserves and recognize your own importance for doing this.

Then celebrate your success with your team. You've earned it!