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Put Yourself in Your Administrator's Shoes

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had experience with administrators. I worked under at least one, and many of us have even been one. I've worked under six school administrators and held three administrative positions, including my last position as an assistant head of school.

Exposure doesn't make you an expert; like a good librarian, I decided to do some research.

In the process, I have amassed quite a collection of books. Clearly publishing has recognized a cash cow, perhaps because administrators have more discretionary income than teachers. The stack of books (see sidebar) ranges from the self-help approach of *Finding Your Leadership Style* to Jossey-Bass' comprehensive anthology addressing five areas of educational research:

- leadership, management, and organizational behavior;
- principals, superintendents, and other leaders;
- diversity, including gender and race issues;
- moral leadership and building community; and
- shared leadership between educators.¹

These topics reflect current thinking about administration. They help me define the idea of leadership better than my ancient thesaurus (1937), which places the term *administrator* under the larger concept of *director*.

Charismatic visionary, instructional leader, collaborative facilitator—each role has its research support and advocates. I look back at the administrators I've had, thinking how they fit these labels. I wonder, "What type of leader do I like to work with?" While that's a natural question, it's the wrong focus. A more productive question is "How can I capitalize on my administrator's goals to further my own program goals?"

To think this way, put yourself in your administrator's shoes. What does the current research say that person *should* be doing?

Many principals know what to say about leading a school—though they

Administration Leading and Partnering

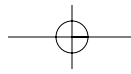
may not know how to actually do it. In fact, researchers have repeatedly noted a mismatch between what principals profess and what they practice.²

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They need our help to bridge the gap between their vision and its actualization.

Good administrators can convincingly communicate your school's mission to teachers, parents, and students. Your administrator probably doesn't understand your library goals and how they fit into the school's mission. So, if you don't have a mission statement for the school library that aligns with the school's mission, develop this fundamental statement of your purpose with your staff.³ When I was director of my school's technology, library and curriculum department, we developed the mission statement "to support the library and technology resources and services for elementary and middle school students, staff, and administration." Today I might add, "so that they can become critical and creative thinkers and doers," which aligns to a phrase in the school's mission statement describing the environment as one in which ". . . children learn to make choices that benefit the world." It's worth spending time to get this right for your particular library; there are plenty of examples.⁴

Another important document to develop is a unified acceptable use and library selection policy. Administrative preparation programs, Hartzell reports, tend to focus on potential problems, particularly copyright violations or censorship fights in school law classes.⁵ Since school administrators are likely to develop an impression of school libraries as "legal time bombs," a policy that is understood by staff and students and approved by the school board and



principal is proactive.⁶ Key agreements on copyright and censorship between the library and technology departments will be forged in the process. One more minefield navigated for your administration.

A number of the authors in this issue describe specific communication strategies, such as writing executive briefings and data reports, or institutionalizing regular meetings with your supervisor. Compelling evidence of your program's achievements or your expertise can be subtly communicated through external sources:

- an article or column you write for *Knowledge Quest* (that's an offer), which now publishes original material in both print and online at KQWeb;
- an award you apply for—you don't necessarily have to get it, but you can be sure that the paperwork will be read by your administrator before signing;
- a project in collaboration with another school, putting your institution on other educators' radars;
- a research study using your library, supported by a university or foundation;
- National Board certification or another professional degree; or
- workshops you conduct for a parent group or teachers.

Successful leaders in a complex, changing organization institutionalize their leadership. They must "create or strengthen systems that will survive them."⁷ Obviously that means you should create a strong library program that will survive both you and your administrator. However, administrators won't have the background or experience to know what a strong program looks like, as Linda Alexander, Robert Smith, and James Carey report in this issue. The critical aspects of successful programs have been a major focus of this journal since its inception, so use the *Knowledge Quest* Archives <www.ala.org/aasl/kqweb> to think through your own understanding. For further enrichment read Ken Haycock's *Foundations for Effective School Library Media Programs* and Doug Johnson's *The Indispensable Librarian: Surviving (and*

Administration: A Bibliography

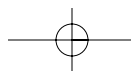
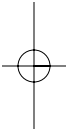
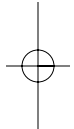
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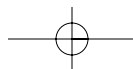
Thriving) in School Media Centers in the Information Age.⁸ Then assist your administrator in understanding the role of a strong school library by putting a copy of AASE's "The Principal's Manual" brochure on her desk and selecting pages from David Loertscher's guide to accompany your periodic updates.⁹

Good administrators are visible instructional leaders; they spend time in classrooms, in talking with their teachers, and in designing or facilitating professional development. I have never known an administrator who was satisfied with the quality or the amount of time available for these inter-

actions. To support your administrator, you can act as a surrogate, advancing your school's collegial and professional climate by:

- finding time to be in classrooms to understand the context in which research assignments will be made;
- designing a process with another school librarian at a different site that involves year-long, focused observations of each other and peer coaching followed by written reports to both administrators;
- making teachers' and administrator's professional development your top priority:





alert them to relevant conferences, route the table of contents for journals, purchase professional materials out of your budget (no matter how meager), and offer your own expertise (reading comprehension, booktalks, Web resources, information literacy, research strategies) as professional development opportunities to them;¹⁰

- facilitating a professional reading group or teacher study group designed with your teachers—hosted in the library, supported by library materials—with ongoing short reports to your administrator; or
- volunteering to mentor a new teacher. No longer just “buddies,” mentoring works if the teachers share the same students, have a common planning time, and the mentor understand how adults learn. Sound like a setting for collaboration as well?¹¹

Good administrators are familiar with the research data. It is unlikely that your administrator has the research data from studies done on the relationship between strong school libraries and the academic achievement of students. If you aren't continually adapting or copying from *AASL's Advocacy Toolkit* and Keith Curry Lance and David Loertscher's *Powering Achievement: School Library Media Programs Make a Difference: The Evidence Mounts* to educate your administrator on the value of school libraries, you're missing easy opportunities to increase his or her understanding.¹²

Provide your administrator with site-level data that documents progress. Conduct an action research project that explores an issue of direct relevance to you that is shared (bumps, warts, and all) with teachers and your administrator. Then act on the results. Examples can be found throughout *Knowledge Quest*.¹³ Such credible evidence of learning and improvement is likely to be used in the community news bulletin or your administrator's memo to his or her supervisor.

You're not going to do everything in this column. That's common sense. What you choose will depend on your school's climate, your own inclinations, and your administrator. Just for fun, take a look at three online résumés of these administrators: Paul W. Knowles

<http://home.maine.rr.com/rbank/Memorial_Web/Office_Web_Site/Resume.htm>, Cynthia A. MacLeod <www.irvingtononline.org/IrvingtonElementarySchool/Principal/Resume.shtml>, and Albert M. Adams II <www.lwhs.org/~aadams/resume.html> and ask yourself how your strategies would differ under each one. Who might be supportive of a library program that used technology to teach students career planning? Who might be interested in a collection development plan that supports reading and writing? Who might be delighted if you developed an action research project?

There has been no shortage of administrators in the United States. While administrators comprise 20 to 40 percent of educational personnel in most European and Asian countries, 57 percent administrative staffing is customary in the United States. Many think tank educators, such as Linda Darling-Hammond, suggest that such spending is counterproductive:

By investing in teachers rather than educational bureaucracy, other countries pay teachers more, provide serious induction, and ensure ongoing professional development. Rather than fund add-on programs to compensate for the failures of teaching, they spend their resources on what matters most: well-trained teachers who work intensively with one another to improve their work.¹⁴

Recently there have been widespread assertions that principals and superintendents are “retiring and resigning from education in unprecedented numbers,” resulting in “simultaneous problems of quality and quantity.”¹⁵ However, the Center on Reinventing Public Education finds the problem to be one of distribution rather than shortage. The reduction in the number of qualified candidates is more pronounced at the secondary level, typically in schools with the most challenging working conditions, higher concentrations of poor and minority students, and lower salaries for principals. The center suggests that schools that cannot attract talented leaders should consider

alternative leadership arrangements, potentially combining the leadership skills of one individual with the curriculum and instructional expertise of another.¹⁶ Other experts claim that the problem of developing instructional leader-administrators is more widespread:

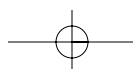
Instructional leadership is the equivalent of the holy grail in educational administration. Most programs that prepare superintendents and principals claim to be in the business of training the next generation of instructional leaders. Most professional development for school administrators at least refers to the central position of instruction. This is mainly just talk. In fact, few administrators of any kind or at any level are directly involved in instruction. Principals who develop skills and knowledge required to become instructional leaders do so because of their own preferences and values—and often at some cost to their own careers. The institutional structure does not promote, or select for, knowledge and skills in the area of teaching and learning. At best, it tolerates the few who cultivate them.¹⁷

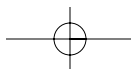
Clearly a vacuum exists, and school librarians as instructional consultants are in an ideal position to fill it.

I am not suggesting that you can work for any administrator. I wouldn't work in a school where the administrator lies, for example. Or where bad teachers are tolerated. Each of us will have our own bottom line, but above that line the opportunities are there if we're clear and strategic. ●

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 10. Other handy Web resources include: Debbie Abilock, “Homepage,” *Knowledge Quest* 32, no. 1 (Sept./Oct. 2003) with a grid listing all the national discipline-area conferences. Available online: <www.ala.org/aasl>, path: Publications and Journals; Knowledge Quest; KC Conference Special; National Professional Organizations: Conference Listings. Susan Brooks-Young, *101 Best Web Sites for Principals* (Eugene, Ore.: International Society for Technology in Education, 2003). Slowly feed bites to your administrator in focused executive summaries related to a particular issue. I’ve found it most helpful to identify a specific resource within a site, then put it in the context of teaching more about the value of that site. That same model of “teach them to fish . . .” applies to resources you identify for teachers.
 11. Sylvia M. Roberts and Eunice Z. Pruitt, *Schools As Professional Learning Communities: Collaborative Activities and Strategies for Professional Development* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Pr., 2003), 145.
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 14. Linda Darling-Hammond, “What Matters Most: Investing in Teaching,” the School Administrator Web Edition, Mar. 1997, <www.aasa.org/publications/sa/1997_03/viewpoint_darling-hammond.htm>. Accessed 23 July 2003.
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