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A primer for administrative/managerial success



William F. Stier, Jr.

Dr. William F. Stier, Jr., has been a junior high coach as well as a coach, teacher, department chairperson and athletic director at the high school level. He also served, on the collegiate level, as an administrative assistant to the vice president, as the chief administrator of a satellite campus, department chair, director of admissions, department graduate director, varsity basketball coach; and, as an athletic director. In addition, he served as president and CEO of a Florida corporation and treasurer of its parent corporation. He currently serves as Distinguished Service Professor and Director of Sport Management/Athletic Administration at the College at Brockport, the State University of New York.

As one who is contemplating retirement, having spent some 45 ± years in the profession as an administrator (academic, business and athletic arenas) as well as a teacher, and coach, it is not infrequently that I am asked to summarize and share what I have learned (or thought that I have learned)—from both formal education and from experience—with the young and not so young professionals within the arenas of education and/or sports. This article is the result. It is applicable for those in administrative roles who might benefit from such strategies and hints as well as those subordinates who must work for and with administrators and managers.

Twenty-One Strategies for Administrative/Managerial Success

The following strategies are common sense and proven strategies and tactics that are fundamentally as well as experientially and scientifically sound; but, nevertheless are all too often either forgotten or neglected in the real world of supervision, administration and management. Sometimes the most basic concepts that can often be recipes for success are simply overlooked or ignored because individuals believe they are already aware of them. However, there is a big difference between being aware of what one should be doing, how one should be acting or performing; and, actually doing, acting and performing in the real world, out there on the proverbial firing line.

- One of the more important roles of an administrator is to be personally and

professionally honest and truthful. Being fair, honest and just in making decisions and rendering judgments is imperative. Playing favorites—or giving the impression of doing so—in the decision making process associated with being an administrator is the doom of any would-be manager. Similarly, making decisions that are right, just, fair, and not based on falsehood or as a result of undue influence from others (i.e., political, financial or personal factors) is important for one's survival as an administrator.

- Administrators have a responsibility to protect their staff members from unwarranted and unjust accusations. It is far too easy for one's personnel to be accused of improprieties and for ineffectual administrators to assume that such accusations are accurate or correct. Administrators need to publicly and privately protect staff members and wait until all of the facts are in and then, and only then, make informed, timely and accurate decisions based on the true situation—rather than on political, personal or financial factors.

- Don't assume that students and student-athletes (or adults for that matter) will always tell the truth or be accurate in their statements, excuses or accusations. Administrators need to be cautious in accepting what is told to them by others, especially by students. Instead, administrators need to accept what they are being told with "a grain of salt" without jumping to conclusions and making questionable decisions or initiating imprudent actions (or inactions).

- When new to an administrative position it is vital to be wary of being unduly influenced

in terms of important decision making by those who are already at the organization, especially direct subordinates. New administrators will be recipient of numerous examples of input and suggestions from others in the hope that they can influence the decision making of the new manager. Thus, prior to making any major decisions when new to a position, it is vital to insure that one's decisions are truly one's own and not others who have influenced you to act on their behalf.

- Problems happen, that is the nature of administering and managing educational and sport related entities. One must not unduly delay or fail to deal with problems or problematic situations in a timely fashion. Avoiding dealing with actual and potential problems (sticking one's head in the sand, so to speak), is not only foolish but professionally suicidal as well. Anticipating, preventing and resolving problems in a timely fashion are key factors in a successful administrator's arsenal.

- Knee-jerk reactions to troublesome situations or occurrences, on the other hand, are not only unnecessary but wasteful in terms of time, energies and other resources. Prudent administrators take time to carefully evaluate and assess any situation and related factors prior to making decisions and taking action.

- Keeping, maintaining and sharing appropriate and accurate records (hard copy and computer) are most important for the modern day administrator. Not only can such records reveal what has happened in the past but they can be instrumental in guiding (planning) current and future decision making and actions and in illustrating the achievements of the entity for which one is responsible. Use of records can be used to protect oneself and one's department or programs from unjust, inaccurate accusations or erroneous perceptions.

- Laziness is a totally unacceptable malady for any administrator. Yet how many have been heard to complain that: "I don't have the time

or the energy to deal with 'this'"? Competent administrators must understand that they must be literally "on the job" 7/24/365 in terms of rendering help or assistance to staff or other constituencies and when facing challenges and problems. Being unavailable or not having the time or energy to deal with the myriad of problematic situations facing managers just is not acceptable. Nor is making inappropriate decisions for the major or sole reason of making one's life as an administrator easier and less time consuming.

- Operating in the so-called crisis mode is a sure sign of an incompetent manager and one who is weak in terms of planning and the ability to anticipate. One must be skilled in strategic and tactical planning so as to prevent many unanticipated problems and challenges. Of course, no one can prevent all problems, but to consistently be in the crisis mode is simply unacceptable and shows a lack of fundamental managerial competency.

- The need to establish and follow appropriate and timely policies, practices and procedures is paramount for effective administrators. This is part of the responsibility that managers have in terms of planning for the future. Such policies, practices and procedures are instrumental in guiding the actions and conduct of those affiliated with and affected by the organization. Yet, when circumstances warrant, administrators need to be willing to make appropriate exceptions.

- Administrators typically should not do anything or say anything that they would hesitate to announce over a loud speaker in the town square or make known over a national news program. Having hidden or secret agendas, doing things covertly (unless legally acceptable or mandated), and saying things that might come back and haunt the manager—is simply foolhardy. Generally speaking, the successful administrator is one who is open in one's actions and words, rather than being

sneaky, Machiavellian or outright deceitful.

- Related to #11 above, but yet distinct in and of itself, is the concern over the ill-advised utilization of professional and personal social networks. Up-to-date managers must be sure to adequately use one's own social networks properly, as well as oversee those of one's staff and others for whom the administrator is held responsible (i.e., students and student-athletes).

- When making significant or far reaching decisions, especially those which may be appealed to one's superior, it is often wise to consult with one's superior prior to making a final decision in an effort to make that individual aware of the situation/circumstances and the decision that might soon be made. This is done to ascertain whether the superior has information or facts that might affect or alter the decision making process and the decision itself. A second reason is that should the decision be appealed to this same superior—the likelihood of the decision being overturned is slight indeed.

- Administrators need to take ultimate responsibility for their own actions/inactions as well as for the actions/inactions of their subordinates. Providing excuses or blaming others for one's own failure is common but nonsensical. This is part of the delegation process in that one cannot delegate total responsibility to a subordinate. The successful administrator retains ultimate responsibility for the task(s) delegated to others. One cannot escape responsibility for one's failure by attempting to blame subordinates or others. And, when addressing problematic situations, it is very important not to be overly concerned with assigning blame per se. Rather, concentrate resources on solving the problem and getting the organization/entity back on track. Trying to blame others not only wastes valuable resources but frequently makes the problem solving process more difficult by having others making excuses or hiding pertinent information.

- Administrators should never allow themselves to be manipulated, should never overreact, and should never display anger or other negative feelings in response to behavior or decisions by others. Instead, they need to always "smile" while being calm, cool and collected in the face of challenging circumstances. Thinking before one acts is good advice for the administrator at any time, but especially so when facing a crisis or difficult situation.

- Dress for Success is a title of a book written by John T. Molloy and originally appeared in print in 1975. The latest edition, *New Dress for Success*, appeared January 1, 1988. In 1977, *The Women's Dress for Success Book* was published. Its latest edition, *New Women's Dress for Success*, appeared December 1, 1996. Administrators, both men and women, should heed the advice which the titles imply by dressing appropriately, by dressing as true professionals so as to be indistinguishable from any other modern managers or administrators in today's business/education worlds. Dressing as if every day is a "dress down" day is unprofessional and counter-productive. Having a professional appearance involves not only clothing but overall physical appearance including hair style/length and overall physical appearance/weight.

- Administrators should be a role model (which facilitates the motivational process) for all of one's subordinates as well as others with whom one comes into contact with in the role of an administrator. This role modeling involves all aspects of one's professional life including one's physical appearance, work ethic, and professional skills, abilities and capabilities. It includes remaining at the cutting edge relative to knowledge and skills within the confines of one's overall areas of responsibility. And, being a role model includes the ability to refrain from speaking ill or making unflattering comments behind an individual's back—as such behavior

is not only unprofessional but all too often such disparagement finds its way back to the criticized party.

- Humans possess two ears, two eyes and only one mouth. Administrators should take this as a sign that they should observe and listen (at least) twice as much as they speak. Observing what is happening within the organization and listening to others, especially subordinates and other members of one organization is an excellent strategy for the efficient and effective manager. One needs to understand what is really happening and an effective and efficient way to accomplish this is to listen and observe. It is important to exhibit the impression/perception that one values the input of others. Talking too much is often a sign of an overbearing, arrogant and incompetent manager.

- Capable administrators need to exhibit high energy and visibility in the performance of one's job. Management by Being Seen (MBBS) is an important concept and implies being able to be (frequently) physically present (visible) within various areas of one's responsibilities as a manager. This concept is also commonly referred to as Administration by Walking Around (ABWA) to emphasize the physical presence among one's subordinates and constituencies. Administrators must not hide in their offices as reclusive hermits.

- Successful administrators have a consistent tendency of surrounding themselves with highly qualified, skilled and competent professionals. Failing to accomplish this deprives the organization with cutting edge knowledge, skills and abilities with which to resolve problems and to reach meaningful objectives and goals. Being fearful of having superior subordinates is likened to repeatedly shooting oneself in the proverbial foot. Having subordinates who are highly desired and sought after by other competing organizations is much wiser than having staff members who are not highly sought

after or are not employable by other entities. The latter is a truly disastrous situation for the manager to find oneself in.

- Effective administrators should be professionally trained in the art and science of management and the administration of appropriate entities. It is not sufficient for untrained, unprepared individuals (in the processes and subject matter of administration) to be promoted or moved into meaningful managerial positions without some type of training (formal, informal and ongoing) in preparation for the increased responsibilities and challenges. This doesn't mean it doesn't happen; only that such a move is often counter-productive.

Conclusion

In summary, individuals who assume administrative and managerial positions have a responsibility to be competent professionals in the conduct of their duties. They owe it to their staff and various constituencies that they will be fair, just and right in terms of their decisions, relationships, and actions. They also must not only be competent managers and administrators but give the impression that they are competent professionals in the performance of their duties and in the fulfillment of their responsibilities. And, as successful administrators they need to be cognizant of the fact that they will face situations that will require them to assume, at various times, the roles of decision maker, problem solver (preventer) and risk taker.

Becoming a successful administrator is not automatic when one is bestowed with the title but requires some essential knowledge, skills and competencies. And, the knowledge, skills and competencies so necessary for one to be successful as an administrator (manager) are typically the result of formal as well as informal training/education and experience relating to the tasks of administering an organizational

entity. Although adherence to the above strategies or tactics does not guarantee success as an administrator/manager, failure to follow these suggestions is one way down the path to failure.

Working for a competent and motivating administrator makes one's life as a subordinate not only bearable but truly enjoyable and rewarding. To work for an incompetent administrator can be a nightmare. When faced with the latter situation, the unfortunate subordinate is often faced with the choice of attempting to leave for greener pastures, to stay and attempt to outlive or outlast the inept manager (who might leave of his/her own accord or at the bequest of yet higher administrators), or simply to stay and endure years of unending trials and tribulations. Hopefully, individuals who become administrators will be successful by following the above strategies and tactics. Those who work for and with managers and administrators deserve no less.