

The Administrative Adventure

BY LISA BISSELL PAULSON

We were flying over Mount Shasta. The plane was directly above the peak. My husband leaned over and remarked, "It makes mountain climbing seem futile, doesn't it?"

I thought about that. If you looked at Mount Shasta from a mountain climber's perspective, the top of the peak is the epitome of achievement. But one person's ultimate goal or achievement is another's beginning point.

Administration is both climbing a mountain and looking from the top of the highest peak in the range . . . noticing the entire range of hills and valleys, along with the stream winding through thick foliage and miles of rugged terrain. Any way you look at it, it's an adventure. The administrative adventure is best tackled with high-quality, well-recommended tools and a team of wise, strong, and capable assistants.

Combining time, care, and concern—along with your personal frame of reference—will allow you to maintain integrity in all things.

Trust in God

Years ago, a wise and understanding professor, Vernon Koenig, impressed upon me that one of the most important elements in successful administration is establishing your own personal frame of reference. This personal philosophy embraces all decisions, actions, and dealings inside and outside the work setting. It includes all that you do and say—it is *you*.

I have spent hours writing and rewriting my personal philosophy. It includes my strongest convictions: my belief in a personal Saviour; my understanding of God and the universe; my part in this earthly adventure; and ultimately, my assurance of God's promises in His holy Word. When I finally completed the working draft of my personal philosophy, I realized how it had affected my decisions all along. But it took the conscious effort of writing it (and rewriting it) for me to identify it, clarify its components, and appreciate its influence.

Integrity in All Things

As I wrote down my personal philosophy, I looked carefully at words that meant a great deal to me: *integrity, honesty, respect*. I wanted these words to be reflected in every

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Picture Removed

into my frame of reference. Today, I try hard to be intentional about play. Recreation, looking at the bright side, and knowing there is a little “summer” between the winters makes our lives meaningful. Enjoy what’s good about life—your Maker, your family, your students, your teachers, and your friends.

Use Binoculars

Every nature lover and hiker has several pairs of binoculars. Administrators, too, shouldn’t rely on their own vision—those blind spots will get you every time. And guessing doesn’t work, either. I highly recommend these bits of advice: “If in doubt, don’t,” and “Take a second look.”

Keep that pair of binoculars nearby. Looking at things through another lens will help you identify new angles, new problems, different perspectives, and—potentially—new solutions.

Psychology and the Individual Approach

Everyone is unique. It’s important to deal with and care for each person in a unique way. Taking courses in counseling, listening, and learning about human behavior are important; but more important is knowing how to use what you’ve learned in a real-life situation.

If a person is angry, I try to make sure I separate my “personhood” from the situation. Attacks on a situation (and sometimes on you) are usually about feelings that need to be heard, understood, and discussed. Action may or may not need to

action and decision I made as an administrator.

However, I also wanted to understand and appreciate the views of other people. Allowing for and listening to other people’s perceptions—though different from one’s own—plays an almost daily role in the adventures of administrative life. Listening with an open mind, hearing a person out, agreeing to disagree, respecting another’s opinion, and working together toward a solution is the honest and respectful thing to do. It also takes time. Combining time, care, and concern—along with your personal frame of reference—will allow you to maintain integrity in all things.

Work Hard!

Administrators work hard, but not every observer knows that. Leading by example is crucial. Being willing to dig in and work—physically work—is impor-

tant. Don’t ask others to do something you wouldn’t be willing to do yourself. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t hire a custodial crew. It does mean that if your institution has a school spirit day, and part of it is spent beautifying the campus—you’d better be there in your work clothes!

Have Fun

My husband, a physical-education teacher, would say that fun should come before work, assuring me that this is the right and crucial thing to do. We often discuss philosophy and rationale about play. Having grown up in a work-oriented family, I haven’t always been sure how “play” fits with the “vege-meat and potatoes” of life. For my family, dessert wasn’t guaranteed in a meal, and neither was play guaranteed in life. But I’ve been converted to the fun side.

At first, I didn’t put “play and fun”

be taken. An apology may be the answer; encouraging people to unburden could be a solution; listening to their concerns may resolve the ill feelings—all these are possibilities. But seek to answer these questions by the end of the conversation: “Did I assist these people in finding their own solution? Did they make a choice? Do they own their decision? Will they know what to do when they have no one to confide in? Did I get them to smile?”

You're Not Too Young

No, you're not too old, either. You're

just right. Age, gender, ethnicity, marital status, number of kids, and other statuses don't matter. Granted, every situation must be dealt with on an individual basis, but one does not need to worry that “she's only 26, single, and going to be the principal?!”

I recently hired a manager who is 22 and still finishing her senior year in business management at Pacific Union College; she already runs circles around the best of us! I also hired an 83-year-old editor who'll correct this sentence in an instant! I'm looking for characteristics,

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qualities, and commitment—not the “expected profile,” acceptable pedigree, or years of experience in this particular field.

Conclusion

I doubt whether my approach to administration is either fresh or new. I do know it is uniquely mine. It hasn't always been successful. However, God has always won. I believe the most important reminder came my way the other day.

Recently, my long-lost cousin, Lance, reminded me that it is more important to look at what is really important in life. Find the highest priority for the day and do it. Don't look at all the things that must be done or should be done, but ask yourself, “What decision will have the most significant impact?”

Lance also reminded me that taking care of self is more important than people think. If we don't take care of ourselves, we won't be able to take care of others. Communication with God, quiet time, eating right, and taking care of our bodies are crucial to our well-being.

Come on, you hikers, bikers, and mountain climbers. Join me in this adventure. Take on the challenge. Follow our Leader. When you reach the top of the mountain, you'll know you've only just begun. ☞

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Play is important to a balanced life.