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EDITORIAL

Adventist Education: Four Essentials

C. GARLAND DULAN

Some years ago, while teaching in an Adventist college, I was approached by an administrator from a nearby secular university, who asked me to consider joining their faculty. I asked why he was interested in me when there were so many other well-qualified individuals. His reply: "Because of your commitment. I can always find qualified teaching faculty, but it's very difficult to find both qualified and committed faculty to teach at my institution." He continued, "I know the salaries are lower where you teach, but I also know the commitment is high; just tell me what you will need in order for us to entice you to come to our institution." What this administrator implied but did not say was that he was willing to pay for commitment.

Commitment is essential. Administrators sometimes forget the high level of commitment and competence that teachers bring to our institutions—be they primary, secondary, or tertiary. Teachers are successful not only because of their hard work in the classroom, but also because of the many hours they spend planning behind the scenes. Additionally, teachers often spend money from their own pockets to supplement the budget they are given to provide instruction. Administrators must be careful not to abuse the commitment of their teachers by either taking it for granted or by making excessively high demands, for once the feeling of commitment is lost, the teacher often seeks other employment where his or her dedication will be more highly valued. While a competent teaching replacement may be comparatively easy to locate, it is often much more difficult to find someone who is both committed and competent. Once teachers leave our educational system, many never return to work for the church.

A second essential quality in our schools is support. Both faculty and administrators must understand that the need to feel valued as an individual stands apart from the value given to the person's contributions as a professional. Administrators can give a few words of encouragement, a pat on the back, a smile for a job well done, a "thank you" or a brief note to indicate "you are special." This will go a long way toward helping teachers feel valued as individuals. It doesn't cost much to reward commitment or to provide support for faculty and staff members, just thoughtful, appreciative action. Faculty, too, should seek ways to support their administrators, since such indi-

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Adventist Education: Four Essentials

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viduals are given few collegial supports. Administrators need affirmation and collegial connections, too!

A proactive application of policy is a third essential. Though they are designed to provide information and guidance, policies are often viewed as necessary evils by the people to whom they are applied. In my years of service, I have seen altogether too many instances when policies were punitively administered. In some cases, employees had to personally discover benefits to which they were entitled. Those charged with the responsibility to administer policy should seek ways to highlight its benefits rather than using policy as a club to state why something cannot be done.

Finally, and most importantly, the faith and unity of purpose we espouse must be borne out in our actions toward one another in the work environment. Both faculty and administrators must strive to provide a kind, friendly context for work—

an environment without contention. It is not enough for faculty to provide meticulous course outlines or astute teaching, nor for administrators to require strict adherence to protocol, or to insist on timely meetings—though these are important. We need to practice the faith we preach as we relate to others in personal ways. Someone has said, “If you don’t practice what you preach and you don’t practice what you teach, then what you preach and what you teach will not reach; it’s just speech!” A Seventh-day Adventist Christian faith should be expressed and experienced in the positive ways we relate to one another.

Commitment, support, proactive and positive use of policy, and the integration of faith at work are a few essentials that we must consciously apply in order to nurture those for whom and with whom we work. An Adventist educational environment should provide the best of these four qualities. ✍

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