

## What Make a Person a Good Educational Administrator?

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### Introduction

A lot of people may wonder what make a person a good administrator. Is a good administrator “born to be” or “learned to be”? I personally believe that a person can learn to be a good administrator providing that he knows what to learn. I think a good administrator should have at least one understanding and three skills, namely nature understanding, job-related technical skill, human understanding skill and world view conceptual skill. For example, if we sit down and spend sometime quietly looking at the nature thoughtfully, we can learn some new things from it in different aspects. We can learn how different kinds of living things living together in harmony in a forest, and how certain types of plants or animals struggle for live successfully in such a highly competitive circumstance. Some well-known scientists such as Isaac Newton and Benjamin Franklin, to name a few, could unexpectedly discover new things like law of gravity and static electricity in the air from natural phenomena. Therefore, there is a classic quotation given by M. A. Antoninus saying “Nothing happens to anything which that thing is not made by nature to bear” (Quotation, 2003:5). Moreover, he should have good job-related technical skill to perform well his responsible duties, good human understanding skill to deal with others effectively, and good world view conceptual skill to project his prospective view correctly. In addition, if a person wants to be a good educational administrator, he should have some other typical characteristics and duties to perform since his responsibilities are different from other kinds of administrators. All mentioned components will be elaborated in the following sections.

### Nature Understanding

A good administrator should be a person who is quick at understanding the nature as a great teacher trying to teach him implicitly a kind of administrative lessons. For instance, here are some of them:

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### **a. A Forest and an Organization**

In a natural forest, there are many kinds of trees, plants and animals of different sizes, species and colors. Some can grow well above the ground, but some can do so under it. Some live on others whereas some let others live on them. However, as members of the forest, they all live and share mutually benefits with each other either directly or indirectly. Although they are different as mentioned earlier, a combination of them all is a forest, which can be a beautiful and peaceful one.

As an administrator, he should understand that an organization is like a forest. It consists of different kinds of people from different backgrounds, sexes, beliefs and religions, to name just a few. There is a Confucius quotation saying "Men's natures are alike, it is their habits that carry them far apart (Quotation, 2003:4). In other words, they are individually different. Therefore, dealing with them, he has to bear their differences in mind and use different approaches to suit best each group or even each person so that he can gain the most from them. If his first attempt fails, try different approaches. He should not give up easily since he may not try hard enough the first time.

### **b. An Iceberg and Personnel in an Organization**

When a person sees an iceberg floating in the sea, he can only see its top part, which is approximately one-ninth of the whole. The most dangerous part is not the top part that he sees, but the invisible part. So, if he were a sailor, you had to be very careful the unseen part. A good administrator should know that, like an iceberg, his subordinates have their hidden part, which is normally unknown to him. As an administrator, he should try to get to know them as much as possible. He should know their feelings and attitudes towards him and his organization, their backgrounds, beliefs, religions and also conflicts within the organization. Newstrom (1997: 453) says that to understand a person completely, one has to know his/her hidden parts as much as possible.

If he is a good administrator, what should he do after finding out that his personnel are different in different aspects? Analogically, if you have an ice cube and want it to be an ice cone, what should you do? What you should do are 1) melt it, 2) put it in a cone-shape mold, and 3) freeze it. Metaphorically, like an ice cube, the

unfavorable feelings and attitudes of his personnel can be changed to favorable ones in the same manner. Lewin (cited by Luthons, 1995:569) suggests that there are 3 steps to make changes to unfavorable behaviors of the personnel in an organization as follows:

1. Unfreeze all unfavorable behaviors,
2. Move such behaviors to favorable ones, and
3. Refreeze the favorable behaviors.

#### **c. A Bird and Resistance**

When an administrator looks at a bird flying in the sky, he may be wondering how it flows. It can fly because there is some resistance from the wind or air around it, otherwise it cannot do so. This shows that there are some benefits from being resisted. Figuratively, if he is a good administrator, he should not be afraid of resistance in his organization. Generally speaking, in an organization, employers, subordinates or colleagues are bound to have different thoughts, beliefs and attitudes towards the organizations and their administrators. These could be causes of conflicts. S. Visalarporn (2533:11) says that a conflict is a normal natural phenomenon in any societies and is inevitable as long as we are in a society. However, there are some advantages of a conflict. It makes the organization moved, active and changed for better. It also makes the administrator think more thoughtfully, critically and carefully. As a result, it makes the organization progress. Like air resistance making a bird fly higher and faster, resistance or a conflict in the organization can make the administrator achieve his/her goal faster and better than without it.

#### **d. A Wind, a Pine Tree, a Fire and a Mountain**

In a book translated by B. Sangrawee (2534), he gives readers many interesting comparisons. Here are some of them. There are many kinds of wind and naturally each of them moves very rapidly, forcefully and suddenly. Some, for example, a tornado and a hurricane or a depression wind are very powerful and dangerous especially they move unexpectedly in unpredictable directions. They can destroy anything in their way. However, how can a pine tree survive from a strong wind?

Naturally, it bends its trunk, branches and leaves along with the wind. It does not stand still against it.

Now, let's talk about some nature of a fire and a mountain. When there is a fire, it can burn anything continuously. With some wind and wood, it can even burn things much faster and more fiercely, except for a mountain. It can remain firmly as if nothing happened to it.

Metaphorically, like a wind, a pine tree, a fire and a mountain, a good administrator has to know how and when to behave himself like those of the 4 natural phenomena. For instance, he should make his decision to do certain thing quickly as a wind so that his decision can have strong impact in time on the deeds needed to operate. When facing a serious problem with subordinates, a good administrator should spend some time thinking thoughtfully and carefully to solve it out. He should sometimes be flexible and try to understand them as much as possible. Learn a lesson from a pine tree facing a strong wind and it can be solved successfully and peacefully.

In addition, like a fire, a good administrator should know how and when to take a chance to do things continuously and fiercely. In other words, he should hit an iron repeatedly when it is red hot. Besides, when facing with a lot of problems, like a mountain, a good administrator should remain firm and brave. He should not panic or feel frightened to death. Just think that a problem is something to be solved or an indicator to test his ability. There is a quotation saying, "Chance is always powerful. Let your hook be always cast; in the pool where you least expect it, there will be a fish" (Ovid, 2003:2).

Furthermore, Sun Tze (Sun Tze, 2003 : 7), a very well known Chinese philosopher once suggested that in order to win a war;

"During stillness, be like the forest. During aggression, be like fire. During defense, be immovable like a mountain. In hiding, be as impenetrable as darkness and in ambush strike like thunderbolts.

A good strategy is flexible to changing conditions. Victory is assured to those who can fight imitating the images of wind, forest, fire, mountain, darkness and thunderbolts."

## **Administrative Capability**

In short, if a person wants to be a good administrator, he should have the first required ability to be quick at understanding the nature as a teacher sometimes trying to teach him an administrative lesson. Yet, this is not enough. In addition, a good administrator should have three more important skills. Important skills for an administrator In my view, I agree to Katz's idea (1955) saying that to be a good administrator, a person should have at least three types of important skills: (job-related) technical skill, human (understanding) skill and (world view) conceptual skill. As used here, a skill implies an ability which can be developed, not necessarily inborn, and which is manifested in performance, not merely in potential. So the principal criterion of skillfulness must be effective action under varying conditions. Actually, these three types of skills are interrelated to each other, but there may be real merit in examining each one separately, and in developing them independently.

In the following sections, an attempt will be made to define and demonstrate what these three skills are; to suggest that the relative importance of the three skills varies with the level of administration responsibility; to present some of the advantages and implications of this variation for selection, training, and promotion of administrators; and to propose ways of developing these skills.

### **a. Technical skill**

Technical skill is an understanding of, and proficiency in, a specific kind of activity, particularly one involving methods, processes, procedures, or techniques. It is relatively easy for us to visualize the technical skill of the surgeon, the musician, the accountant, or the engineer when each is performing his own special function. Technical skill involves specialized knowledge, analytical ability within that specialty, and facility in the use of the tools and techniques of the specific discipline.

Of the three skills described previously, technical skill is perhaps the most familiar since it is the most concrete, and, in our age of specialization, it is the skill required of the greatest number of people. Most of our vocational and on-the-job training programs are largely concerned with developing this specialized technical skill. Any person wanting to be a good administrator should have such a technical skill mentioned

above so that he can be a person of specialization in a certain field especially in contemporary technology.

**b. Human skill**

Human skill is the administrator's ability to work effectively as a group member and to build cooperative effort within the team he leads. As technical skill is primarily concerned with working with "things" (processes or physical objects), but human skill is primarily concerned with working with people. This skill is demonstrated in the way the individual perceives (and recognizes the perceptions of) his superiors, equals, and subordinates, and in the way he behaves accordingly.

Naturally, a person with highly developed human skill is aware of his own attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs about other individuals and groups; he is able to see the usefulness and limitations of these feelings. By accepting the existence of viewpoints, perceptions, and beliefs which are different from his own, he is skilled in understanding what others really mean by their words and behavior. He is equally skillful .in communicating to others, in their own contexts; what he means by his behavior.

Such a person works to create an atmosphere of approval and security in which subordinates feel free to express themselves without fear of censure or ridicule, by encouraging them to participate in the planning and carrying out of those things which directly affect them. He is sufficiently sensitive to the needs and motivations of others in his organization so that he can judge the possible reactions to, and outcomes of, various courses of action he may undertake. Having this sensitivity, he is able and willing to act in a way which takes these perceptions by others into account.

Real skill in working with others must become a natural, continuous activity, since it involves sensitivity not only at times of decision making but also in the day-by-day behavior of the individual. Human skill cannot be a "sometime thing." It has to be applied naturally and habitually because everything a good administrator says and does (or leaves unsaid or undone) has an effect on his associates, his true self will, in time, show through. Therefore, to be effective, this skill must be naturally developed and unconsciously, as well as consistently, demonstrated in the individual's every action. It must become an integral part of an administrator's whole being.

The importance of human skill can be supported by a study done by Wullop Teinsant (2001) who found that Interpersonal Communication of teachers in technical colleges all over the country carried the heaviest factor loading of 0.92 whereas Participatory Leadership carried factor loading of 0.88.

### **c. Conceptual skill**

Conceptual skill is the ability to see the enterprise as a whole. It includes recognizing how the various functions of the organization depend on one another, how changes in any one part affect all the others, and it extends to visualizing the relationship of the individual functions to the whole organization, the community, and the political, social, and economic forces of the nation as a whole. Recognizing these relationships and perceiving the significant elements in any situation, the administrator should then be able to act in a way which advances the over-all welfare of the total organization. Based on the above concept, it is not too difficult to understand that a success of any decision depends on the conceptual skill of the people who make the decision and those who put it into action. When, for example, an important change in educational policy is made, it is critical that, the effects on students, teachers, parents, communities, the country, finance, research, and the people involved be considered. And it remains critical right down to the last person who must implement the new policy. If each administrator recognizes the over-all relationships and significance of the change, he is almost certain to be more effective in administering it. Consequently the chances for succeeding are greatly increased. Actually, an organization does not depend on only the effective coordination of the various parts on the conceptual skill of the administrators involved, but also on the whole future direction and tone of the organization. The attitudes of a top administrator color the whole character of the organization's response and determine the "corporate personality" which distinguishes one organization's ways of doing from another's. These attitudes are a reflection of the administrator's conceptual skill (referred to by some as "creative ability" --- the way he perceives and responds to the direction in which the organization should go, organization objectives and policies, and stakeholders' and subordinates' interests.

### **Characteristics and Duties**

Then, what make a person a good educational administrator? Now, comes specifically what make a person a good educational administrator. I believe that generally speaking, a good educational administrator should have the good understanding and the three skills mentioned previously above and some other typical characteristics and duties. This is because his role is different from other administrators. The main role of an administrator in an educational environment is to facilitate the learning, growth and effectiveness of faculty, staff and students. This definition goes beyond traditional academic administrative roles and is more entrepreneurial and managerial. Here are some of his important characteristics and duties:

A good administrator should be democratic and egalitarian and work to gain the support (or at least the understanding) of his constituencies for major changes rather than arbitrarily making change.

A good administrator should be also a leader who makes decisions and hard choices as necessary and takes final responsibility for them, but makes those decisions and choices with real input and advice from those for whom the decision will have the most impact.

A good administrator should evaluate the processes and systems (human, administrative, financial and technological) currently in place and works to improve their effectiveness and efficiency, so that they will enhance the procedures they are for, rather than becoming roadblocks or ends in themselves.

A good administrator should delegate tasks and assigns responsibilities to others in a way that provides clear expectations, guidance, opportunities for growth and rewards for good effort, without micro-managing or punishing for making mistakes in the course of that effort.

A good administrator should also publicly acknowledge and celebrate the successes of her staff and faculty team and program students, and build on these successes to strengthen program visibility and resources within the institution's hierarchical structure.

A good administrator should enhance multidirectional communications, work to reduce unproductive discord, facilitate consensus-building in the community, and work to



ensure that faculty and staff have the training, support and resources needed to do their work, which is the work of educating students, as well as enhancing, creating, discovering and transmitting new knowledge for the larger world.

A good administrator should forge and/or strengthen partnerships with the business, government and nonprofit sectors so that students will have opportunities for service learning and internships, and faculty will have increased opportunities for professional growth and practice.

A good administrator should build bridges to other campus schools and departments, to encourage the development of new programs and classes.

A good administrator should seek out and implements new methods and technologies that are appropriate, cost-effective and useful, without sacrificing useful older methods and tools for teaching, learning and research that are still worthy of continuation.

A good administrator should actively market his program to the outside world through a variety of methods, including presentations to high schools, colleges and community institutions such as religious, service and social groups; active participation in relevant internet news groups; overseeing development, maintenance and some other means.

A good administrator should keep abreast of developments in his own fields, as well as major developments in the fields of those in the other disciplines for which he has responsibility, for example, cutting-edge technology, intra-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary collaborations, explorations and learning experiences.

An administrator should also remember that teaching is at the heart of a good college or university, and should regularly teach, as well as continue to be involved in his own professional development for research, creative and professional practice activities, community service and wellness as a whole person with a balanced life.

Finally, a good administrator should build or strengthen an organizational culture that shares these whole-person lifelong-learning-and-growth values, so that faculty, staff and students can approach their work, learning and lives with balance, wellness and a sense of joyous discovery and adventure Conclusion

Therefore, based on some figurative examples mentioned earlier, it can be concluded that if a person wants to be a good administrator, he should have at least one understanding and three skills, namely nature understanding, job-related technical skill, human understanding skill and world view conceptual skill. The nature can implicitly teach us, especially those who are administrators, many administrative lessons. Truly, it is a great teacher and the father of all. If an administrator would like to be a better one, he should frequently keep an eye on any natural phenomena happening around him and be quick at learning a lesson. Maybe the nature is trying to teach him a major breakthrough or a complicated lesson. In addition, he should have three more very important skills, namely (job-related) technical skill, human (understanding) skill, and (world view) conceptual skill. If he wants to be a good educational administrator, he should have some other typical characteristics and duties. All mentioned components can be learned through various kinds of trainings. In other words, "a professional administrator" does not have to be born with them. Therefore, you can be one of them, can't you?

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