

Tips for Administrators on Setting Boundaries

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At the administrative level, there are many tasks that are both expected and unexpected that require your attention on a daily basis. In addition to the tasks that are often inexplicably handed to you, there are also tasks of the staff in the building that you oversee as well. But overseeing these tasks and ensuring their completion with quality, does not require you to “run a tight ship.” Nor does it require things to be “smooth sailing.”

When you take into consideration all that makes you and your staff who you are, approaching leadership in those ways is challenging to implement and sustain in a healthy way. After all, a tight ship and smooth sailing do not account for the space and room we need to grow and the rough currents we will need to navigate to get there.

I encourage you to dock the boat that is holding unrealistic expectations (and precious cargo - the staff, students, and families your school serves). Then, I urge you to come ashore to traverse the land of “where you are now” to get to “where you’re trying to go” in a new way.

So, how do you do that? How do you set realistic expectations for yourself and for others? Well, you call a **C.A.B.** (Conversations, Advocacy, and Boundaries).

Conversations

- When an expectation is set, engage in conversation.
 - Ask yourself where did this expectation come from?
 - Did it get passed down to you from someone in a higher position?
 - Did it come from an expectation you’ve quietly (maybe subconsciously) placed on yourself?
 - How have those expectations influenced the expectations you have of your staff?
 - If it is an expectation that was passed down to you,
 - Schedule a meeting to chat with that person.
 - Present questions that help you clarify the expectation(s) and/or to push back if needed.
 - Follow up about how the process went to meet the expectation.
 - Discuss if something needs to change moving forward, and within your means, change it.
 - If an expectation is one you’ve set for yourself or others,
 - Engage in a conversation with yourself about where it came from.

- If it is an expectation of yourself, list your daily responsibilities and duties and mark off what's doable within your scheduled workday.
 - Where will this new expectation fit?
 - Can something be replaced?
- If it is an expectation of others, think about if it's necessary and why.
- Speak with your staff about how this new expectation or already set expectations will impact them. Then, follow up about how the process went to meet the expectation. Does something need to change moving forward? If so, change it within your means.
- Learn how to give and receive grace (through words and actions) for all the things you are not able to accomplish within the workday.

Advocacy

- Permit yourself time to reflect and time to make adjustments. If this involves advocating for yourself to someone else, don't ask for time, but instead, state it.
 - Be firm in your advocacy. For example, you can say, "I need (a few minutes/1 day/1 week, etc.) to process this information. I will contact you as soon as I've done that."
- Recognize and acknowledge when you are tired.
 - Speak it to yourself. Speak it to someone. The more you acknowledge this need for yourself, the more you can recognize it and honor it for others.
 - Make rest part of your school culture by implementing a "relaxation" period for a few minutes per day or a few times per week for all grades, not just earlier grades.
- If a teacher meets an expectation and admits to staying up all night to do it, while caring for a family member, or nursing themselves back to health, don't reward the behavior with praise.
 - Instead, advocate for that staff member to get rest, take care of their family, or take care of themselves. Praising someone when they are sacrificing their livelihood reinforces the problem that we are attempting to eradicate.

Boundaries

- At least one day per week set a time to leave and leave.
- Limit or avoid scheduling lunch meetings. If it's too difficult to navigate, choose one month (does not have to be consecutive) where lunch meetings are avoided.
- Limit or avoid scheduling after-school meetings. If it's too difficult to navigate, choose one month (does not have to be consecutive) where after-school meetings are avoided.

In the end, if you are doing your part in calling a **C.A.B.** more often than trying to be the captain of a tight ship on a smooth sea, then maybe, just maybe, it'll ultimately carry us from where we are now to where we're trying to go in education. To a place that requires less magic and more real. To a place where administrators are healthily and effectively rewriting and living out the new narrative of setting and meeting realistic expectations in education.