

Administrative philosophy

It is difficult for me to characterize my administrative philosophy. I tend to be rather atheoretical; I don't think about what motivates me to do something, or how what I do and how I do it is shaped by the philosophy that led me to do it in the first place — I just do it.

That said, I am most inspired by an administrative model based on the notion of “hospitality leadership,” as detailed in John Bennett’s book *Academic life: Hospitality, ethics, and spirituality*. Writing specifically for academic audiences, Bennett notes,

Being a hospitable leader means recognizing that colleagues and students have different contributions to make to each other and to the classes and groups of which they are members. Practicing this kind of leadership means modeling and enabling contributions that are thoughtful and sensitive to the humanity of the other; that are respectful of individual dignity, even though that respect may not be initially returned. Perseverance as well as integrity is required. Hospitality cannot be reduced to quid pro quo arrangements. Such reductions empty hospitality of reciprocal openness to the new relationships for which it is calling. Truly practicing hospitality means working toward a mutuality of connections and conversations that advance the good of each individual involved as well as the common good of all.¹

Throughout my administrative and academic career, I believe that I have been working towards an administrative style that fits this ideal. Several years ago, after reflecting on my work as an entry-level academic leader, I wrote down a set of guidelines based on both my practice and my goals. Looking at them now, I not only see elements of Bennett’s model, but I also can recall times in my administrative career in which I have put into practice these precepts:

1. BE AVAILABLE and LISTEN.
2. Make sure faculty have the resources (broadly defined – that is, not just money) to do their job to the best of their ability.
3. Make sure other people get credit for what they accomplish.
4. Small annoyances can disproportionately detract from the quality of the work environment; do what you can to eliminate them.
5. The best innovations come from common sense.
6. The best changes come from consensus.
7. If you propose something new, and it is adopted by the community, then you are responsible for seeing to it that it gets done (even if you have to do it yourself).
8. Do what you can to mentor new faculty and to recharge (if necessary) experienced faculty.
9. If you are responsible for running a meeting, arrive organized.

¹ John Bennett, *Academic life: hospitality, ethics, and spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2008), 168.

10. If you are not running a meeting, and it is not organized, do what you can to help get it organized (if you can do so without alienating someone).
11. If you delegate a person to do something, make sure that he or she has the resources to do it.
12. The impact an idea has on your listener is inversely proportional to the length of the statement that expresses that idea; in short, be succinct.
13. When your job requires you to enforce an unpopular policy, do it with as much sensitivity as possible.
14. To resolve disputes, find common ground (even if it's only a very small piece).
15. Don't get involved in other people's conflicts unless you have to in order to advance the needs of the institution. Then, be as impartial as possible, and make sure others perceive you that way.
16. Tell your supervisor what he/she needs to know in order to make an informed judgment.
17. Keep confidences.
18. If you disagree with your supervisor, do so only behind closed doors. In public, his or her decision is final, and your job is to support it.
19. Treat everyone with respect and courtesy – even if they do not reciprocate.
20. You can disagree with your friends – and still keep them as friends.