



Are You Ready to Be an Administrator? A Self-Assessment to Help You Manage Expectations When Assuming a New Role

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Abstract: As a county agent is successful and matures, it is natural for him or her to seek advancement to an administrative position. However, such a role likely has more complex duties related to managing people than the faculty member may have experienced or been trained to address in his or her program assignment. This article outlines some of the differences in duties and perspective that may be encountered when changing from a program-driven faculty member position to one with administrative leadership duties in the form of a self-assessment that may help determine whether you're ready to serve in an administrative role.

In Pursuit of Professional Advancement

As a county agent is successful and matures, it is natural for him or her to seek advancement to positions such as a county director, regional director, etc. However, such administrative roles likely have more complex duties related to managing people and teams than a county faculty member may have experienced or been trained to address in his or her program assignment. Indeed, "Few Extension administrators are professionally trained in the field of management, rather they have been promoted to administration because they excelled in their subject matter discipline." (Patterson, 1997) and yet, in "many states, the county Extension director is now fully responsible for managing all county Extension operations" (Whiteside & Bachtel, 1987).

This may result in a surprising level of frustration and stress because of either a lack of preparation or simply a misunderstanding of the unwritten duties and expectations that are typically part of leadership roles. In other words, becoming an administrator often requires an adjustment in attitude as much as a change in duties. A 2004 survey (Campbell, Grieshop, Sokolow, & Wright, 2004) revealed some of "the administrative workload, satisfactions, and frustrations" of county directors. A self-assessment can help you be aware of these in advance and decide how they may affect you.

Am I Ready for the Transition?

To help you determine whether you're ready to assume an administrative role, it is important to recognize some of the differences in duties and perspective that may be encountered when changing from a

program-driven faculty member position to one with administrative leadership duties. The following self-assessment* (Figure 1) is in the form of a list of those possible differences. Some are more applicable to certain roles than others (e.g., county director, regional director, or statewide administrator), some apply especially to a position that combines programmatic and administrative duties (less than 100% administration), and rarely will the entire list be true all-at-once.

Figure 1.
A Self-Quiz

Directions: Review the list below and check those items with which you have minimal experience or feel least comfortable in facing:

- You will more often be promoting and enjoying the success of others or contributing to a team instead of working independently and being credited as an individual.
- You may need to take responsibility for unpopular but important decisions that are for the good of the total organization even when they may be not as good for you, personally/professionally.
- You will need to entrust others by delegating work instead of adhering to the belief that "To do something right, you need to do it yourself."
- One personnel problem can change your entire day, week, or more.
- Any problem in the office may become your problem, even if you didn't directly cause it.
- The overall Extension office/programming will become as important as your own specific program responsibility.
- Some people will disagree with you or your decisions.
- You may need to learn how to accept criticism without taking it personally or reacting emotionally.
- Some people may not like you.
- Some distance may develop between you and the employees you now supervise who may previously have been considered your friends and peers.
- Administrative duties will almost always compete for time and energy you might prefer to invest in programmatic work.

- Seeing that others get the tools they need (computers, training, etc.) to get their jobs done may substitute for the time you may have devoted to building your own skills or seeking support for your own educational programming.
- Serving as the office representative of Extension Administration (i.e., "campus") will sometimes come in conflict with being an advocate for your own county's problems, issues, and needs.
- You may now be viewed as one of "them," or having gone to the "dark side" (a.k.a. "Administration").
- More people (or at least some different ones) may be watching and judging you (employees/co-workers, clientele, media, Extension Administration).
- You may no longer have control of your calendar/schedule.
- There will be increased expectations that you'll be readily accessible, always-connected, and in-touch ... for real or perceived emergencies. Therefore, your cell phone may become a "crackberry."
- Being people-oriented may overshadow your desire to be task-oriented.
- Your decisions will likely affect more people.
- Leading by example will be more important than ever.
- You may not have the "power" you thought you'd have.
- You may have to defend the things that you used to complain about (e.g., reports, policies, administrators, etc.)
- Administrative duties may interfere with your personal time.
- You may have to engage in "politics" with elected officials and other key leaders at the local and/or state levels, including campus.

- Supervising some individuals may require a leadership/supervision style that is not your natural style.
- You may have more responsibility than authority.
- In a tenure-track system, administrative duties may interfere with your ability to be tenured or promoted or, at least, may not contribute highly to your dossier.
- You may be blamed for problems and failures that were beyond your control but not necessarily credited for your actions and decisions that clearly led to a successful outcome.
- Financial compensation may or may not make up for all of the above.

What Do the Results Tell Me?

Although the above checklist is not meant to be all-inclusive nor is it likely to be an absolute predictor of success or failure, it does provide an awareness of what may be encountered in an administrative role, and some shifts in your outlook that may be needed. If many items make you uncomfortable, that may very well be an indicator that you're not yet ready to assume an administrative leadership position. Or it may give you a better idea of training that will help you be successful as you transition to such a new level of responsibility. Godwin, Diem, and Maddy (2010) offer "essential management techniques and concepts to help faculty gain perspective and build a foundation for success in an administrative assignment," and a variety of books and training can provide needed knowledge and skills.

On the positive side, serving as an administrator can put you in a position to achieve amazing personal and professional growth, sharpen your skills, test your patience, allow you to work with a variety of other people who may be able to use the guidance and inspiration you can provide, and gives you the capacity to lead the organization to be more efficient and effective due to your contributions. Sometimes, it can even be enjoyable. Lead on!

Acknowledgments

The original version of the Self-Quiz was created by the author for distribution at the "Best Management Practices For a Successful Transition into an Administrative Role" seminar at Galaxy III conference, by Derek Godwin, Keith Diem, and Debbie Maddy. Indianapolis, Indiana, September 17, 2008.

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