

Experiential Background and Administrative Values

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"WHAT do you expect? He used to be a coach!"

This comment ought not to shock anyone with an assumption that it has never been heard before. Moreover, it can be interpreted as negative or positive, depending upon how one perceives the situation. Perhaps the real question is: "Are there any real differences between the ex-coach administrator and the non-coach administrator?"

First, one acknowledges that coaches do become administrators. In a recent survey of experiential background in New Mexico, 55 percent (322) of the 582 respondents (77 percent of the current administrators) were ex-coaches. To describe the responding sample, Table 1, "Characteristics of Administrators by Role," is presented. An assumption is made, for purposes of analysis, that these characteristics are typical for administrators. Sidelights to these data that lend credence to the representativeness of the sample include the fact that 46 percent of the ex-coaches are employed in the "less than 5,000" population communities, and 32 percent of the ex-coaches are in the "over 20,000" sized communities. Moreover, the superintendents' "years of experience" range from 2 to 39 years, and the principals' range from 1 to 40 years of experience.

If these data describe the administrators in the public schools, what one can expect of the administrator may rest upon the values the educational leaders profess and

the skills which they possess. These administrators were asked to select the "most important skill" needed in administration and to designate the "highest level skill" possessed. If these reports were exactly parallel and if there were no differences between the ex-coach and non-coach administrators, one could assume that not much can be said about the responses. It is in the differences that pertinent information emerges.

To delimit the range of potential responses, the administrators were given six choices of administrative functions from which to select. Five were named and the sixth choice was open to description by the respondent. The named choices were: (a) supervision of teacher's instruction; (b) constructing curriculum; (c) community public relations; (d) financial management; and (e) teacher, board, administrative arbitration. These same task categories were used for both the "most needed" and the "skill possessed" responses.

In Table 2, "Skills Needed and Skills Possessed by Administrative Role," the responses of administrators are presented in terms of the educational assignment. It is quite clear that what the job demands of the

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Role	Total	Ex-Coaches	Non-Coaches	Modal Age Range	Mean Years Exper.	% in Size Community		
						Under 5,000	5,000-20,000	Over 20,000
Elementary Principals	285	146	139	40-49	10.3	34	22	44
Secondary Principals	111	71	40	40-49	9.0	42	23	35
Multilevel Principals	39	24	15	40-49	9.8	74	4	22
Administrative Assistants	62	29	33	40-49	11.7	7	53	40
Superintendents	79	52	23	50 plus	13.7	64	22	14

Table 1. Characteristics of Administrators by Role

administrator is reflected in both the value that is assigned to the administrative function and, to some extent, in what the administrator describes as his best skills. For example, superintendents and administrative assistants to superintendents assign a priority to the financial management category. Moreover, they claim that this area is the area where more of them possess skills. Almost 40 percent of the superintendents say this is their top skill. Twenty percent place public relations in a quantitative second place.

Supervision is the only specific category in which more superintendents described the function as a top-ranked need and a lesser number claimed they possessed this top-ranked skill. The superintendent's role, and in many instances the administrative assistant's role, probably dictates the "need" recognition that was indicated. Successful superintendents and their assistants would likely feel that they were providing a satisfactory financial management.

The strong responses in both the supervisory and curricular areas by principals represent another example of values and skills being closely allied to the assigned task. While 289 administrators made "supervision" the most needed of all the skills, the responses by the 257 principals (89 per-

cent of the total) made this true. While only 67 percent of the respondents claimed they possessed the skill they needed most when they made "supervision" the top-ranked function, a reversal was true in the public relations category. Only 71 administrators described PR as "most needed," while 186 claimed this function as the highest level skill possessed.

Since the "other" category, although only a small segment of the total sample made this choice, has not been defined, it can be briefly described by the responses as several different combinations of the five specified choices.

Has the extensive representation of ex-coaches in this administrative sample skewed the results in the "most needed" and "most possessed" analysis of administrative functions? The answer to this question turns our consideration to whether one should expect something different of the person who "used to be a coach." The question then is: "Do administrators who are ex-coaches really perceive their responsibilities differently than do administrators who have never coached?"

Table 3, "Ex-Coaches and Non-Coaches Rank Order of Skills," permits a quick insight into similarities and differences between these groups. Both the ex-coaches and the

Role	Supervision		Curriculum		Pub. Relations		Finance		Arbitration		Other	
	Need	Poss.	Need	Poss.	Need	Poss.	Need	Poss.	Need	Poss.	Need	Poss.
Superintendents	14	6	9	11	14	16	26	32	8	10	5	4
Admin. Ass't.	18	17	12	10	3	9	23	22	2	2	7	5
Sec. Principals	71	44	29	22	8	37	2	5	2	3	7	7
Elem. Prin.	171	117	51	39	41	107	10	11	12	10	8	7
Multilevel Prin.	15	10	9	9	5	17	5	3	3	2	4	1

Table 2. Skills Needed and Skills Possessed by Administrative Role

Skills Needed				Skills Possessed			
Coaches Order	Percent Ranking	Non-Coaches Order	Percent Ranking	Coaches Order	Percent Ranking	Non-Coaches Order	Percent Ranking
Supervision	47	Supervision	50	Public Relations	33	Supervision	33
Curriculum	16	Curriculum	21	Supervision	32	Public Relations	30
Public Relations	14	Finances	11	Finances	13	Curriculum	19
Finances	12	Public Relations	10	Curriculum	12	Finances	12
Other	6	Arbitration	4	Arbitration	5	Arbitration	3
Arbitration	5	Other	4	Other	5	Other	3

Table 3. Ex-Coaches and Non-Coaches Rank Order of Skills

non-coaches ranked "supervision" and "curriculum" as numbers 1 and 2, with approximately the same percentage of the sample describing these functions as their choice of most needed skills. In the same "most needed" realm, the third and fourth ranking areas were public relations and finances for both groups. The non-coaches reversed the order from the ex-coaches, but the percentages of administrators making the designations were too nearly alike to describe these variations as significantly different.

When one turns to the variations in "skills possessed" for the two groups, the ex-coaches rank "public relations" functions as their most frequently possessed skill. The non-coaches rank the same function, "supervision," that they had said was "most needed," as the "most possessed" skill. The non-coach administrators ranked public relations as a strong second. The ex-coaches ranked "supervision" nearly the same as the first place "public relations," so there is not much basis for minimizing their attention to this factor in claimed administrative skills.

Both groups evaluate "curriculum" at a higher level in the skills needed hierarchy

than they do in the skills possessed rank orders. Both groups rank "public relations" lower in the skills needed than this variable appears in the skills possessed designations.

The specified "arbitration" function attracted a weak 5 percent of the sample for a top rating by any group in either of the "needed" or "possessed" evaluations. It could be that this function has been eclipsed by the much stronger evaluations given to public relations and these administrators see public relations as a positive means to meet arbitrate needs.

"What can you expect? He used to be a coach!" These administrators have said you can expect about the same when they value the skills needed and very little difference when they describe the skills they possess. You can expect the job they perform to influence their judgment of what is most valued and where they claim the most skill. In this respect they are not likely to be unique. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of all these data is the standing among administrators of the "public relations" function. When the human relations factor is so vital, who is surprised that this is so?

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