

The Superintendent's Biggest Mistakes

Want to keep out of trouble? Here are the top thirteen items which have put superintendents' jobs in jeopardy over past years. (Iowa Assoc. of School Administrators)

1. **Tolerating weak principals.** A weak principal or other assistant administrator consistently passes the buck to you, and consistently makes embarrassing decisions and actions. Terminate, don't tolerate!
2. **Shaky grasp of the operation.** You've got to be knowledgeable and give leadership in all areas of your school's operations: budget and finance, bargaining, curriculum, personnel relations. Delegate, but keep informed. If you don't know, they'll find you out!
3. **Indecisiveness.** The superintendent who agonizes over decisions, waivers and backtracks soon loses the respect of staff, board, and community. There finally comes a time when you must decide and act. Do it!
4. **Unapproachable.** If they don't know you, chances are they won't like you. Your smiling face and constantly reassuring presences are your best selling points. Say hello to everybody on the street. Shop locally whenever possible. Join service clubs. Keep the office door open as much as possible.
5. **Partiality.** Don't play favorites. Don't have pets. Be open and equally fair to everybody. The person who is shunned or discriminated against will get you!
6. **Gossiping.** Never talk about anybody, except in the most glowing terms to anyone. Any backstabs you make will return to haunt you!
7. **Bluffing.** It's no disgrace to say "I don't know." Once you get caught bluffing your credibility rating goes to zilch and usually stays there.
8. **Blind to the handwriting on the wall.** The first impulse of the administrator in adversity is to close himself/herself in, insulate out the bad news, and associate only with supportive friends. To get out of trouble, you've got to circulate, read the bad news between the lines, get help, and then respond appropriately and positively.
9. **Millstone family.** The spouse who is disliked in the community, the son who is on drugs, the daughter on the streets can lose you your job --indirectly, of course.
10. **Nepotism.** A family member or relative who works for you in the same system is always a potentially vulnerable mark.
11. **Mixing school and personal business.** Buying personal products through school suppliers or from the school, hiring the woodworking student who needs a project to make you something, or having your car tuned in the auto shop class will make you trouble. Trade outside, even if it is more inconvenient.
12. **High living.** Don't have affairs, get drunk at the country club, or drive a bigger car than the banker. In the eyes of your community, a playboy image is not befitting the superintendent.
13. **Sloppy personal affairs.** An overdrawn bank account, a broken-down sofa on the front porch can tarnish your image. Keep things neat, personally, financially, and physically.