



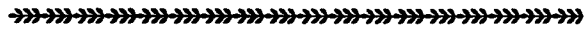
THE ART OF ADMINISTRATION

*A Guide for
Academic
Administrators*



KENNETH E. EBLE

The Art of Administration



A GUIDE FOR
ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATORS



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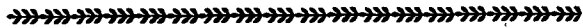
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Preface



This book is quite simply a handbook for administrators, particularly for those who are entering administration for the first time. I have chosen to call it the *art* of administration deliberately. College and university administrators, most of them former and future teachers and researchers, often take too little pride in successful administration and receive too little credit for administering well. If calling administration an art exalts the activity more than it deserves, it does so for good cause. Surely the complexities and subtleties of working with people, the skill and sensitivity necessary to doing it well, and the fulfillment of one's vision largely through other people deserve to be regarded as an art.

This book is a companion piece to my earlier book *The Craft of Teaching*. In calling administration an *art*, teaching a *craft*, I am not attempting to raise the status of administration above that of teaching, nor to shift attention away from the details vital to good administering. I wanted to call it "The Grubby Book," for that is

often how both faculty and administrators think of administrative work, but other heads prevailed. The main point of the book is that good administration is very useful—if not essential—to good teaching, somewhat as good teachers are useful—if not essential—to good students. Both are useful to the advancing of knowledge and furthering of learning that define the ends of education.

Amidst the general outpouring of books on college and university administration, what purpose does another book serve? First, it serves the purpose of addressing many of the problems, vexations, frustrations, and satisfactions college administrators face. The point of view is personal but representative, I think, of faculty both drawn to and suspicious of administrative careers. Second, the book adopts a common tongue rather than the language of specialized scholarship. Increasingly, within the university, people don't speak the same language, adding to the difficulties faculty and administrators have in understanding each other. Third, as the book uses a common tongue, so I hope it addresses common purposes—not faculty against administrators nor administrators ruling over faculty but all working toward higher ends than daily chores often permit either to see. It places before all of us, whether our discipline is chemistry or education or English or business, a set of observations that may be useful to systematic efforts to prepare some of us for administering the important work in which we all are engaged.

This book makes no claim to explore the aims of higher education, or the current state of academic governance, or the ramifications of public support and financial planning and the like. Nor does it take up such important issues, both chronic and current, as the scarcity of women in administrative positions. Although its attention to the details of administration has wide application, no attempt is made to identify and discuss all the variety of managerial and supervisory activities to be found in academic bureaucracy. At its widest range, it gives advice to any individual expected to exercise administrative duties, but its examples and illustrations are drawn from the academic side of administration, and its aims are to keep the details of administrative functioning in close touch with scholarship and learning.

In preparing this book, I have had a chance to read and

reread many books and articles dealing directly with college and university administration. I have even dared to use the title *The Art of Administration* and risk confusion with Ordway Tead's book of 1951. For that book, as excellent now as when it was written, surveys the art of administration from a perspective and toward ends different from mine. In addition, I have used the occasion to range outside higher education into the scholarly and professional literature of business management. To a humanist peering into another discipline, it was a pleasure to find so much human concern manifested there. The bringing to bear of behavioral science upon business management and the current emphasis upon the human dimensions of management seem as natural as they appear to be fruitful.

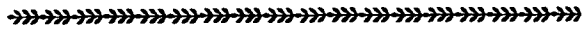
I hope I have used this material well. For, though it has as many dreary patches as the literature of any field, it has its moments of enlightenment, too. One might as accurately be describing a novel as describing a sober book on management—Chris Argyris's *Management and Organizational Development*—in a sentence that reads (1971, pp. xiii–xiv): “The book is filled, perhaps repetitively so, with struggle, conflict, groping, bewilderment, anger, frustration, and above all the continual amazement and dismay of the participants.”

Most of the material in this book comes from personal experience. Almost half of my twenty-five years as a college professor have been spent in administrative positions, and seldom during the other half have I been able to keep from observing administrators or from pondering the effects of administration. Long before that, my coping with education administration began with the desperate need to convince a junior high school principal that writing *shit* on the school sidewalk was not a capital offense. This book is a plea to all administrators to believe that the business of life is more important than the management of personnel, that civility and compassion are as important to administering as regulating and enforcing, and that one can find in administration joy, or, if not that, the great satisfactions that come from being able to contribute to the joys and satisfactions of others.

Salt Lake City, Utah
August 1978

KENNETH E. EBLE

The Author



KENNETH E. EBLE (1923–1988) was professor of English and University Professor at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City. He received his B.A. (1948) and M.A. (1949) degrees from the University of Iowa and his Ph.D. degree (1956) in English from Columbia University.

Eble began teaching at Upper Iowa University in 1949, and he taught at the Columbia School of General Studies (1951–1954) and Drake University (1954–55) before joining the faculty at the University of Utah in 1955. He served as visiting professor of American studies at Carleton College (1967), directed seminars in college teaching for the Columbian Ministry of Education (1975) and the Kansas City Regional Council for Higher Education (1976), and was Visiting Robinson Professor at George Mason University (1986).

From 1964 to 1969, he was chair of the English Department at the University of Utah, taking leave from 1969 to 1971 to direct

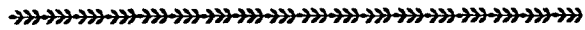
the Project to Improve College Teaching, cosponsored by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of American Colleges (AAC) and funded by the Carnegie Corporation. He was awarded an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters by Saint Francis College (Biddeford, Maine) in 1973 and was Distinguished Visiting Scholar for the Educational Testing Service in 1973–74.

For more than twenty years, Eble was a guest speaker and consultant on teaching and faculty development at more than two hundred colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. He served in many official positions within the AAUP, the Modern Language Association, the National Council of Teachers of English, and Phi Beta Kappa. He served on the board of directors of the American Association for Higher Education from 1983 to 1986 and was named to the advisory board of the National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning in 1986. He was one of ten finalists for the Council for Advancement and Support of Education's Professor of the Year in 1985.

Eble's writing embraced not only education but American literature, the humanities, the history of ideas, and popular culture as well. In addition to *Professors as Teachers* (1972), *The Aims of College Teaching* (1983), *The Art of Administration* (1978), *Improving Undergraduate Education Through Faculty Development* (1985, with W. J. McKeachie), and *The Craft of Teaching* (2nd ed., 1988), Eble's books include *William Dean Howells* (1982), *F. Scott Fitzgerald* (rev. ed., 1976), *The Profane Comedy* (1962), *A Perfect Education* (1966), and *Old Clemens and W.D.H.* (1985). He edited *Howells: A Century of Criticism* (1962), *The Intellectual Tradition of the West* (1967), and *F. Scott Fitzgerald: A Collection* (1973). He was a field editor for the Twayne United States Author Series and edited *New Directions for Teaching and Learning* for Jossey-Bass from 1980 to 1988.

In addition to consulting, writing, and teaching a full schedule of classes, Eble hiked in the mountains, played tennis, and skied. Married to Peggy Leach, Eble was the father of three children—Melissa, Geoffrey, and James.

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Chapter 1

Exploring the Territory



Simon Suggs, one of the craftiest rascals to be found in American frontier humor, lived by the motto, "It is good to be shifty in a new country." Simon's shrewd ability to feel out a new territory was a necessity for survival on the American frontier; being quick on one's feet and adept at sizing up friend and foe may be as useful to professors newly arrived at administration. Some administrators, as I have observed them, combine boldness with dexterity. But boldness is less common than cautious shrewdness, well short of that kind of resourcefulness which both expands frontiers and builds superior institutions.

The ability of college professors—for almost no one else becomes an academic administrator—to adapt to new responsibilities covers a range of adaptive behavior, from the general equivocation with which administration is regarded to specific evasions that go with trying to please one's administrative superiors and former colleagues. Administrators may not practice shiftiness

by nature, but academic life is often intensely political and tact and diplomacy are necessary, even as they may be hard to distinguish from subterfuge and guile. Administrators who are too shiftily are commonly judged harshly. But those may serve no better who lack quickness and flexibility.

Regarding administration as too new a country also has adverse effects. It increases the seeming separation of the academic from the administrative when they are actually and necessarily intertwined. It magnifies the distances between an administrator and former faculty colleagues which increase over time and as one rises in the administrative ranks. It can result in faculty and administration occupying separate territories, each jealous of its rights and seldom hospitable even to friendly visits. All of these are reasons for urging faculty members who enter administration to do so in a more roguish spirit, to set out with a spirit of adventure, and to keep in touch with the folks back home.

If we are to have institutions that provide experiences consonant with the high expectations of each year's students, administration must see itself, too, as an exciting and renewing experience. And if the frontiers of knowledge are to exist as more than university rhetoric, administrators must have a part in creating and sustaining a climate which has something of the openness, daring, and boisterousness even of the frontier.

These preliminary remarks are part of this chapter's intent to set forth some of the major concerns of this book and to indicate its organization, tone, and emphasis. The attitudes that individuals hold toward administration and the climate of opinion that influences administrative conduct are obviously important. The personal qualities of administrators and the skills they acquire are worth much examination. The carrying out of routine tasks without impairing one's ability to realize larger aims is an inescapable duality of administrative work. Resourcefulness may be the quality most necessary to effective daily operations. Firm principles as to what administration at its highest can accomplish underlie the realization of larger aims.

The root and body of the word *administer* is *to serve*. Within colleges and universities, that simple, vital meaning is often obscured. Faculty and students are not easy constituencies to

serve, and governing boards, sources of support, and alumni have their own ideas about administrative service. Administrative structures stand uneasily between a hierarchical model, in which one person serves another in a pyramid of authority, and the model of shared governance, in which chronic uneasiness exists about who serves whom. Neither individuals nor structures have met the array of administrative problems created by the diverse services expected of higher education institutions, particularly those very large institutions that characterize our higher education system.

In the abstract, most faculty and administrators recognize they are in service to others: to students and colleagues, to institutional and disciplinary aims, and to ideals that embrace both future and past. But in the daily functioning of an institution the ideals of service and the power to motivate actions may operate at a low level. Raising that level might begin by renewing the concept of college administrators as public servants and administration as public service. Peter Caws, in *The Bankruptcy of Academic Policy* (1972, p. 10), writes: "The *raison d'être* of all the institutions of a democratic society is the service of the people. . . . Insofar as the university is an institution of its society, its responsibility is to ask itself how it can best serve the people." The prime responsibility of an administrator may be to ennoble and invigorate the idea of service and to handle the minute and multitudinous details through which others may serve and be served.

There is a paradox here. The acts of leadership may at a glance seem contrary to those of service. The attributes of one who leads forcefully may seem at odds with the ideals of service. Yet the paradox diminishes if one views teaching and learning—the principal justification for having college administrators—as intimately related activities. Teaching and learning are not acts in which one person in authority exercises power over another. They are acts in which teacher and learner serve each other, both contributing to the *leading out* that is the root meaning of the word *education*.

Robert Greenleaf has devoted his recent book, *Servant Leadership*, to the many complexities that reside in *leading* and *serving*. His concerns (1977, pp. 5–6) are "for the individual in society and his seeming bent to deal with the massive problems of

our times wholly in terms of systems, ideologies, and movements" and "for the individual as a serving person and the tendency to deny wholeness and creative fulfillment to oneself by failing to lead when there is the opportunity." He argues (1977, p. 7) that "*the great leader is seen as servant first*" and that the real contradictions that exist between serving and leading are resolved in the presence and acts of truly successful leaders, not only in education but in all our institutions.

Greenleaf's words state well the overarching premise on which this book proceeds. The harmonizing of the ideals of serving and leading is no less important than the daily carrying out of acts that both serve and lead. College professors are jealous of their independence, proud of their specialized competences, not easily led, and suspicious of being told what or how they serve. And yet, I think the commitment to college teaching begins in a sense of service. However experience and conditions may dull that sense, it is rarely altogether dimmed. Faculty members remain responsive to signs that important services are being rendered—both from their own teaching and research and from the institutions they are part of. And since their attention is most often focused upon serving the aims of learning in specific contexts, they may welcome leadership that helps make their efforts a part of the larger service.

All administrators share in these responsibilities for both serving and leading. Department heads, chairpersons, and directors of the smaller academic divisions have particular responsibilities. Because they work directly with faculty and students, they are key figures in how an institution actually functions as a center of learning. Roach (1976, p. 13) estimates that 80 percent of all administrative decisions take place at the department level. Furthermore, this level is also the entry level for most academic administrators, though in large universities service in subordinate administrative jobs within a department or division may precede chairing a department or directing a division. A comprehensive survey of deans (Gould, 1964, p. 94) revealed that 64 percent of them were chairpersons before they became deans. Experience in a deanship figures prominently in the qualifications for higher academic positions.

Attention given to the lowest level of administration in this book is therefore applicable to administrative functioning and to

considerations of leadership and service at all levels. The separate chapters do not attempt to define a chairperson's specific duties or the role of deans, vice-presidents, or presidents. Useful literature exists on all these subjects. For example, books by Gould (1964) and Dibden (1968) include formal studies of the academic deanship, anecdotal material and reminiscences, and thoughtful opinion pieces. Extensive bibliographies are to be found in both books. The department chairmanship has been less studied, but Brann and Emmet (1972) have compiled a useful set of readings growing out of a series of in-service institutes for chairpersons from 1969 to 1971. Eells and Hollis' annotated bibliography of the college presidency (1961) runs to 129 pages; their 1960 annotated bibliography of administration of higher education runs to 370 pages and 2,708 items.

This literature defining the various roles and responsibilities of college administrators is supported by an even larger literature in the general field of administration and management. Drucker (1970, p. 149), writing in 1958, noted that "the literature of business management, confined to a few 'how to do' books only fifty years ago, has grown beyond any one man's capacity even to catalogue it." That abundance has been catalogued, however, and any college administrator or would-be administrator can go to the library and browse for months, years even, among the many books, carefully organized into dozens of categories, all having to do with administration. Books on various aspects of college and university administration are a large category in themselves.

Little in the contents of these books, however—perhaps somewhat more in the periodical literature—concerns itself with details of administration, with *how* administrators might carry out their many duties and responsibilities. Because of this lack, this book places its emphasis upon what I shall call the *functional* as against the *substantive* aspects of university administration. The substantive are those large, important matters everyone in academia deals with, most often in the abstract: the aims of higher education, or the current state of academic governance, or the ramifications of public support and financial planning, or the upgrading and maintaining of standards, and the like. The functional tend to be the dirty work: the engagement with getting things done and

attending to details through which others are assisted in performing their jobs.

As leading and serving are vitally intertwined, so are the substantive and functional aspects of administration. Successful administrators have to keep in mind the lofty aims that reside in teaching and learning but bend to carrying out humble tasks that assist others in realizing these aims. The first five chapters of this book are firmly focused upon administrative details, small and large, often the hardest part of administrative work to face and yet both vital and unavoidable. The last chapters focus upon getting the most out of people, the most demanding and most rewarding of an administrator's tasks.

How successful an administrator is in working with others depends greatly upon the administrator's understanding of the psychic as well as material needs that motivate human beings. Success in understanding others begins with understanding oneself. Inasmuch as certain individuals are given large responsibilities for furthering and giving coherence to the work of others, they must be extraordinarily aware of their own motivations and sources of satisfactions, the nature and effects of their own ego drives among the ego drives of others. "We convince by our presence," Whitman wrote. McGregor's *The Human Side of Enterprise* (1960) may be the best of the books, by now dozens in number, that apply behavioral science and humanistic perspectives to the behavior of administrators. This persuasive body of theory and closely examined practices applies as fully to college administration as to business management. It applies with particular force to the constant interactions among members of a group trying to carry out a complex and important *human* enterprise.

As defining the focus and limiting the scope of this book have created problems of emphasis and organization, so has the subject matter created problems of striking the right tone. It is easy for faculty members to be satirical about college and university education. It is almost impossible for them not to be critical of administrators. Max Marshall, a microbiologist, son of a dean, and faculty member under sixteen deans, strikes a familiar satiric tone. "It is high time," he writes, in "How to Be a Dean" (1956, p. 636), "that someone told deans how to play their roles. Except the deans

themselves, everyone knows how to be a dean, but nobody is sufficiently forthright to say so in public, permitting existing deans to get at the rules or coming deans to learn the art." Deans seem to take a disproportionate amount of abuse, from John Ciardi's "Education is too important a business to be left to deans" (Dibden, 1968, p. 185) to the anonymous definition of a dean as a person too dumb to be a professor and too smart to be president. Another jibe covers a wider territory: "The faculty's job is to think for the university, the president's to speak for it, and the dean's to make sure that the faculty doesn't speak or the president think."

As much as I am attracted to the spirit and tone of such utterances, I have chosen to temper my own satirical bent. At the same time, I have not backed away from drawing upon personal experience nor from employing the first person pronoun as it seemed useful. Thoreau spoke best on this matter. "In most books," he writes at the beginning of *Walden*, "the I, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking." As regards this book, the use of the first person is a decided aid to clear and direct expression as well as an assertion that someone is taking responsibility for what is being said.

Ideally, presidents and deans and faculty should all think and speak and act wisely. And, though there is no sure path of development to those ends, surely there should be more definable means of preparing and training college administrators than now exist. Thomas Emmet (Brann and Emmet, 1972) claims to have established the first consulting firm presenting in-service institutes to middle management and faculty in higher education in 1967. My examination of the literature identified an Institute for Administrative Officers in Higher Education at the University of Chicago in 1923, though it was restricted to college presidents, deans, and personnel officers. The Phillips Foundation Program of Internships in Academic Administration began only in 1962; the American Council on Education's Academic Administration Internship Program in 1964 (Phillips, 1969). Sally Gaff (1978) sums up the present situation thus: "Most [college and university administrators] have not been trained in the skills demanded of them as educational