

# Twenty Valuable Tips for New Principals

Being a new principal is always a time of mixed emotions. There's excitement about taking charge of your very own school, but also fear of the unknown that may lie ahead. As I complete my 20th year as principal, I offer the following 20 tips to new principals to help them ease into their new role.


1. **Beware of teachers who approach you or accept you first—they may not be all they seem.**
2. **Don't think the teachers want you as their friend.** They don't need any new friends; they need someone to make sure the school runs well.
3. **Sit down with the teacher leaders (selected by the teachers) immediately and design a schoolwide discipline plan to which everyone agrees on who will handle what, and what will be the penalties for a range of behavior infractions.**
4. **Don't change anything the first year.** Concentrate on developing relationships. Know who is who and what is what. Teachers really resent change, so any change better be warranted, and accepted and acknowledged by most as needed. (Don't ever forget you have a job to do to sell change.)
5. **Meet with your teacher leadership team regularly.** Tell them that they must converse with other members of the faculty to see what the concerns are in the school. Insist that no one can come with a problem unless he or she also has a solution. You may not go along with the solution, but at least it doesn't leave all the problem-solving to you.
6. **Meet with your faculty regularly.** Often, new principals don't have routine meetings because they know how much they hated faculty meetings when they were teachers. Don't ever forget that you can't develop a positive climate and culture without making sure everyone is there and participating. Make the meetings short, let everyone know what is going to be discussed (in advance), and respect people's time.

7. **If a parent comes to the principal's office angry about a teacher's action,** advise the parent to speak with that teacher first. Also tell the parent that if the problem is not resolved after talking to the teacher, to contact you to help improve the situation. Ninety-nine percent of the time, you will never hear from the parent again.

**"If a teacher cannot or will not improve, make sure that he or she understands that you cannot accept incompetence and give the teacher a chance to gracefully exit."**

8. **You never will be as well-loved as you hope.** Your bottom line as a principal should be to educate all the children in a nurturing environment that respects the rights of the teachers to teach and the students to learn.
9. **Consider instructional leadership to be the most important thing you do.** In school terms, that means that you must have a safe learning environment where kids behave and teachers are productive.
10. **Do not subject your teachers to structured professional development.** Make certain

that you involve teachers in their own training and that anything presented to them is worth their time and effort.

11. **Respect teachers and expect their respect in return.**
12. **Keep current with your professional organizations.** Nothing is worse than a has-been—except a might-have-been.
13. **Don't go drinking with your teachers.** Students want teachers they can respect, and teachers want administrators that they can respect.
14. **Accept that you are imperfect and that others are imperfect, too.**
15. **Never mistake supporting teachers with the concept of unconditional support.** If someone is wrong, find a way to help him or her save face. But never "cover" for inappropriate or unprofessional conduct.
16. **If a teacher cannot or will not improve,** make sure he or she understands that you cannot accept incompetence and give the teacher a chance to gracefully exit. Some teachers need a fresh start, others need a different location. However, once you warn a teacher, you must follow through.
17. **Be positive.** No one likes moaners or complainers. You set the tone for the school just as a teacher sets the tone for the classroom.
18. **Do not be a workaholic and do not let your teachers be workaholics.** Insist that at the end of the day they go home to a balanced and healthy life.
19. **Write notes of appreciation on a daily basis.** Thank folks who do a good job.
20. **Accept that technology is here to stay and you must be a leader in it.** 

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