



People who visit the church office

TN102 Training Notes series: Administration

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What follows has been written primarily for those who staff a church office and for those who manage them.

Administrators are thought to be soul-less beings who deal with stationery stocks, spreadsheets, accounts and emails. But most Church Administrators work from the key point of reception for a church. You are the face of both the church and the Christian faith to those who 'visit' midweek, whether in person, by phone or through email, web or social media.

So here is a set of review questions to check out your responsibilities for different groups of people. It is not so much that there are right answers – the questions are designed to raise issues. Select the points that apply to you.

'Reception' as the key concept

Article A33 on this website, *Roles for a church office*, starts with the idea of Reception for the reason that this is often ignored when drawing up an Administrator's job description.

Any Church Administrator, working from a church hub be that office, reception desk or virtual centre, is the first point of contact for actual visitors, those who phone or text the church, and those who respond off the church website or via social media.

What follows is a simple analysis of the kinds of people that Administrators engage with in some way, whilst at the same time fulfilling their organisational responsibilities.

Use these notes:

- for you as Administrator to use for self-review;
- as a checklist for your manager for appraisals of any kind;
- to help those who employ Administrators understand what the job entails;
- to get the idea of 'reception' firmly into job descriptions.

Five groups of people Church Administrators relate to

1 Yourself and your interruptions

Before considering those who, perhaps, 'interrupt' your deskwork, it's well worth starting off by looking inwards and analysing yourself – as best you can and perhaps with the help of close friends who are prepared to be honest.

- 1.1 What is your real, underlying role, and what is it *supposed* to be if that is different? Are visitors to the office an 'interruption' to this work, or are they what your post is all about? Would your manager agree with your answers?
- 1.2 How adequately does your job description cover your reception duties within your overall role? And your person profile likewise (if you still have it)? If "not enough", what needs to be done?
- 1.3 To what extent is there a realisation by the church that reception work will take a significant part of your working time, and possibly clash with some other aspects of your work? Do they need to appoint other receptionists to protect you in any way?
- 1.4 How do you cope with the conflict of seeking to produce meticulously accurate work if people are constantly interrupting you? Are you able to complete the task work in the hours allowed, after interruptions, or do you take work home to complete?
- 1.5 How do you and others rate your emotional intelligence? How self-aware are you and how well do you appreciate the way you come across to all who visit the office? If you have 'problem callers' is the problem them or you?

2 The Minister

This assumes that your Minister is your main point of contact and your line manager – this will not always be the case.

- 2.1 To what extent is your role to protect the Minister and so release them from interruptions so they can focus on priorities? Can you take encouragement from that?
- 2.2 How can you help your line manager in the way they manage you if they do not do this well? How well do they understand your role and the pressures you are under, especially in the time taken up in reception duties?
- 2.3 How do you keep the relationship of Minister and PA or Administrator professional but not cold in a church context?
- 2.4 How do you cope when you work closely with your Minister but your personalities and/or giftings are very different?
- 2.5 Is the amount of direct contact that the Minister has with the church office too much, too little or about right? Do you feel you have enough of their time and interest each week? What can you do if you are unhappy about the current position?

3 External visitors

Some church offices are tucked away out of sight and so most external 'visitors' are by telephone or email. Others are at a busy church centre's entrance and so attract considerable footfall each day. Adapt these and all other questions to fit your position.

- 3.1 What is your agreed role as the first point of contact between your church and visitors and callers from outside the church? In what senses are you expected to be a witness to them?
- 3.2 How much work do you put into first impressions created by your voicemail message, website when it engages with outsiders, and your first words and looks on the phone or in person?
- 3.3 How can you come across as welcoming and helpful when under considerable deadline pressures, especially when you work part-time and cannot leave late?
- 3.4 What is your particular role when greeting the postal workers, maintenance engineers and delivery drivers that come to your office?
- 3.5 Are you happy that your work-base is reasonably safe so that you feel secure and at ease with visitors? Does your church have a Lone Workers' Policy if you do work alone, and do you have a good idea of how to tackle a difficult visitor?

4 Internal visitors

Many Church Administrators find that their problems are not so much with people outside the church's membership, but those in the congregation – and, in particular, some office-holders.

- 4.1 How do you seek to be the communications hub for the church by being aware of everything that is happening? Is there a conflict with what is confidential and what is not? Do church members pass on to you messages to the Minister they do not want to give to him or her personally?
- 4.2 Can you recognise and then cope with church members who, in effect, are simply wasting your time? What if older or lonely members see you as their one point of real company when passing on their way to the local shops?
- 4.3 Are you, naturally, a pastor or an administrator? Does either of these need strengthening or lessening in your present role and, if so, how?
- 4.4 How do you cope with any members of the congregation who either seek to control you (by expecting you to do work that is not your responsibility) or even bully you? Is it clear who can give you what kinds of work and what level of priority each should have?
- 4.5 Do members of your employing body (Trustees, PCC, or whoever) visit the office at all, encourage you in your work and take trouble to understand the time taken in reception work and the 'feel' of your job? If not, what might you do about this?

5 Volunteer workers and church staff

Having volunteers to work for you can cut either way: some are brilliant as receptionists and allow you to get on with other work, but some need hand-holding and may not give much added benefit.

- 5.1 If you have volunteers who help you, to what extent can you properly line manage them (eg. reprimand them for a job that is not at the required standard) when (a) they are volunteers and you are paid, or (b) they are your church friends or small group members?
- 5.2 If volunteers help you, how do you maintain standards of quality if they cannot manage what you require, when you feel you cannot dismiss them? If they work on a reception desk to protect you, how do you train them so that they do not bring every query back to you?
- 5.3 If other staff work from the office but have different standards of tidiness or efficiency from you, what do you do? What can you do if you feel they let you down by their lack of concern for customer care? How can you make them aware of any problems for you without jeopardising team relationships?
- 5.4 If other staff visit the office but, in effect, waste your time or interrupt you unnecessarily, how do you cope? What can you do about this?
- 5.5 If you work in an administrative team or job-share with another Administrator, what systems do you have in place to give a consistent response to all callers?

Visitors as a delight

These 25 points have focused on potential difficulties. But that is only one side of the coin. What do you regard as the main delights and privileges in working with any groups of people in the church office? What gives you greatest pleasure in this aspect of your work?

Conclusion

There may well be other categories of people who visit the church office that are issues for you. But from all the questions asked, which few issues might you select to take action on now to make a difference? There may need to be change in you, but perhaps also in your manager, other church leaders, or members of the congregation.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN102.

See also Articles A33/34, *Roles for a church office*, and A42, *What do Church Administrators do?* Also Training Notes TN31, *Affirming volunteers*, TN40, *Appointing an Administrator*, TN60, *Administrator types*, TN85, *Preparing a Lone Worker Policy*, and TN86, *Customer care for churches?*

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of consultancy in the field of Church Administrator appointments and church office work.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN102 under Administration.

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