



Administrator wisdom

TN77 Training Notes series: Administration

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Earlier this year I asked a Church Administrator, who was retiring from her post in a busy Baptist church, to write about what she had learnt in her time in the job.

She came up with a list of highly memorable points, some funny, some poignant, that were then published in the bimonthly mailing sent to members of the UK Church Administrators Network (UCAN). They struck a chord with many.

What follows is a longer listing that includes those original ideas, additions that were sent in by other Administrators who identified with what was described, and some of my own based on what those who work in church offices often tell me. I have then edited and ordered the list into the form you see it in here. I am aware that there are many other points that could be added.

These Training Notes have at least two applications.

First, they are written for anyone who works in a church office. The idea is to encourage you that your experiences are shared by many others. The notes are also written to give you ideas to ponder and to help you cope with the stresses of what can be at times a bewildering job. See them, perhaps, as a kind of Proverbs chapter 32.

But, secondly, these notes are also designed for Ministers, church staff and all users of church offices. Your Administrator may just forward you the pdf or print this out and leave it on your desk anonymously. Please read it and seek to understand that even if it's "the best job in the world", it has pressures and frustrations that you only grasp when you sit where your Administrator sits.

Foundations

- God will **always** love me and not **ever** let me down.
- I knew before – but now am certain – that nobody is perfect, not even me!
- People **are** more important than things.
- I am only doing this task because I serve the people behind it.
- God can use me whoever I am and however old I am – even I have gifts.
- It's not a weakness to say sorry, even when it wasn't my fault.
- God's grace is utterly amazing if he has to put up with all I see here.
- At the end of the day, it's only God's assessment of my work that matters.
- The job is **never** done! But it is the best job in the world.

Role

- The congregation will never understand what it's like to sit where I sit.
- The job description is just a starting point; I serve and do whatever is needed.
- When it says 'and any other tasks as necessary', that may well include unblocking loos.
- If my job description wisely includes things not to be done, it can be framed and quoted.
- I cannot know everything about everything, or even everything about one thing....
- but I can know at least something about more things than most other people here.
- A few toys in the office are vital for when a youngster is suddenly dumped on my lap.
- Flexibility, flexibility, flexibility.
- The job is simply to 'make things happen'.

Stress

- It is best to complete a job then delete it from memory or my brain bursts.
- My stress is directly proportional to the number of loose ends. I need to tie a few up.
- Some things **can and must** be left until tomorrow.
- My bedside notepad and pen are musts for that 2.00 am. sudden thought.
- Christmas comes only once a year; but it starts in September.
- My annual clear-out day must have priority. The place feels so much better afterwards.
- It's OK to have a frivolous trip out for the office staff – nothing holy!
- My young child is praying that I will be at the school gate on time today.
- Beans on toast for tea is OK once in a while.
- Occasional tears in this job are nothing to be ashamed about.

Sundays

- Never, ever try reading the service/notice-sheet on Sunday while at church.
- My smartphone is holy. It has Sunday off.
- If I say 'yes' to everyone at church, I automatically say 'no' to my family or myself.

- I really don't need to be 'nice' when approached unnecessarily just before the service.
- If only I could stay on my knees with eyes closed for 20 minutes after the service ends.

Systems

- Systems are vital but sometimes it is best to 'step sideways'.
- A good line manager is essential. If they are bad, I need to train them to be good.
- Others need to be available to call on when people with problems turn up.
- Perfection does not have to be reached and is threatening: 95% is nearly always OK.
- Occasional errors are good for the soul. I should learn from them.
- Time spent training Minister/staff to use online calendars and Dropbox is worthwhile.
- I must stick to policy for what goes in the notice-sheet and what definitely doesn't.

Deskwork

- Why do I forget to print and read a draft before pressing the button for a long run?
- It's vital to double-check what the printer's actually producing very early in that run.
- I must write out 20 times, 'Never proof-read my own work if I can help it'.
- Printers only jam on Fridays just before I am due to leave.
- A tame techie on call 24/7 is a boon. Trying to sort problems myself wastes hours
- except that switching anything off and on again cures most electronic ills.
- It's nice to have a personal email address rather than just admin@.

Visitors

- I imagine Jesus is sitting by the office door helping me as I deal with each visitor.
- I need to remember that God made us all 'in his image'.
- A vital resource for a Church Administrator is to attend a formal 'listening course'.
- People in need are no respecters of time.
- It is vital to acquire a large dollop of patience.
- There is a finite number of rooms available and not even I can find another!
- I must get ahead. I never know who's about to turn up and take over my morning.
- My job is not necessarily to say 'yes' to everyone.

Congregation

- I may be a servant of Jesus Christ, but I'm not a slave of any church office-holder.
- Any expression of thanks for work done is to be cherished.
- All people are lovely, but some outstay their welcome.
- Every church has at least one person whose sole role is to find fault.
- Some volunteers help me, but it's the other way round for others.
- He who angers you controls you.

- Some minds are like concrete: thoroughly mixed up and permanently set.
- Many people, Christian or not, simply do not like anything new or different.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN77.

Sincere thanks to Sheila Randall, formerly Administrator at Lymm Baptist Church, for the original idea which has now grown, with her permission, into these notes. Also to other Church Administrators who provided further ideas. See also Article A42, *What do Church Administrators do?*, plus Training Notes TN40, *Appointing an Administrator*, TN60, *Administrator types*, TN68, *Administrators who miss the point*, TN102, *People who visit the church office*, and TN126, *The small-church administrator*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN77 under Administration.

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