



The Presidents' Panel

At the November 2019 BCPVPA Chapter Council meeting,
we convened our first Presidents' Panel and posed the question
"What advice do you have for new Chapter Presidents?"

Darren Danyluk, President, Rocky Mountain Chapter

"As the President for the Chapter, your members will turn to you when seeking answers on any number of things. Having a working knowledge of District policies, and staying abreast of policies under review, will help to provide guidance. I strongly recommend you become as versed with your contracts as is your Contract Chair.

As the Chapter President, I recommend that you connect regularly with your Superintendent and the leadership team, and that you understand their expectations of your role, and are prepared to educate them on some points. Invite clarity. For example, during a Chapter visit by the Association President, are there protocols your senior leadership team expects? Find out.

The Chapter President does not have to be the one with all of the answers but be prepared to find out. Never hesitate to pick up the phone and connect with Member Services, or any BCPVPA department."

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Scott Sieben President, Central Okanagan Chapter

"The number one bit of advice to a new President of a BCPVPA Chapter would be to listen and empathize. Within your Chapter, each member has his or her own situation and brings his or her own backgrounds, skills, and expertise to the position of Principal or Vice-Principal. As people approach us with issues, or bring things forward, we must be understanding and look at the big picture of how circumstances may affect those people in their roles.

As well, challenges vary from student to student and school to school. Everyone wants to be understood, valued, and affirmed, and by listening and empathizing, you create a more beneficial and trusting relationship which will help your Chapter run more smoothly knowing that it has a President who cares about the members in that Chapter."

Verena Gibbs, President, Haida Gwaii Chapter

"Our job is challenging, deeply rewarding and oftentimes isolating and stressful. My advice to Chapter Presidents is to find the time to connect with colleagues. Whether it's a call to check in when you know someone is managing a challenging situation, a funny text to lighten someone's day, or a get together for a meal, these often help to make a little room for well-being. I don't pretend to have all the answers but I do try to show up authentically. I reach out when I'm stuck and I show that support is a two-way street because modelling this helps create connection. I also encourage people to reach out to the BCPVPA with any questions or concerns - know that in your role, you are well supported.

What has helped me in my role as Chapter President is my belief that every person is doing the best with what they know. When I was a teacher, I made it my practice to find something that I loved about each of my students, so that was what I saw when they walked in the room. I now apply that same practice with my staff, as well as my colleagues and District staff. We each have a gift we bring to our District and so I try to create the space for that to come through. I see this role as having a heart and a mind. On the one hand, my job is to effectively communicate what is happening at the provincial level and to represent the voice of my Chapter. It is also to build relationship among our team, to advocate locally and to make sure my colleagues have the supports in place to manage and thrive at a challenging job. Wellness is key and so at the end of a busy day, week or month, what are the resources to keep us re-fueled and balanced? Who do you need as your pit crew? It might include a colleague, close friend, partner, counsellor, mentor – whoever you choose to be there to support you through the tough times and to celebrate the successes."

Carol Sedgwick, President, Alberni Chapter

"My advice to new Chapter Presidents would be take time to learn who your members are connected to within your local Chapter. This may require Co-Presidents, Vice-Presidents, and Past-Presidents sharing this responsibility in larger Districts.

You cannot do this job on your own. Most of the calls I get from members are them seeking advice for themselves, or from members concerned about fellow colleagues. In some cases I can provide advice in the moment, and in other situations a member may need ongoing support from a caring colleague they trust. If a member requires ongoing support in sensitive matters I may not always be the best fit, so knowing who I can call on within my local Chapter to help support is vital. And in some cases we need to advise members to call BCPVPA directly and then follow up with them. It is important to remember that we have very caring and knowledgeable staff at BCPVPA to call on when we are not sure how to support members. You are not expected to take all of this on alone."

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Aaron Akune, President, Delta Chapter

"It is extremely important to get to know the members within your Chapter. Open up the lines of communication with them so that they see you as approachable, and someone they can turn to for advice. Let them know that they can ask their questions and share their challenges.

Meet regularly with your Superintendent and Senior Leadership Team. Establish trust so you can feel comfortable sharing with them a balance of what's working well, and where there are challenges.

Be visible within the District. As a Chapter President, you represent the ideas and views of your colleagues. Your presence at District meetings, Board meetings and professional learning workshops will provide you with a greater perspective, and will communicate to partner groups that Principals and Vice-Principals are willing to work collaboratively and are highly invested in the initiatives/directions of the District."