

So, You Want to be a Vice-Principal?

I arrived at the school office on my first day in my new role as a Vice-Principal, and was met by the Senior Office Assistant. “Now,” she said, “You know that you will have to be much ‘tougher’ in this role.”

by
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Coming from a counselling position in the high school, and following a Vice-Principal whose nickname was *The Terminator 2*, I guess there was some concern that the necessary discipline for students may be in question with me in the role.

Yes, this was the late 90s, and I suspect the perception of the job of a Vice-Principal was somewhat different than today, but it caught me off guard nonetheless. While I understood that the relationship that I was to have with students would be slightly different as a Vice-Principal, I didn't then – and I still don't now – believe that the role required me to be 'tougher' than I was as a counsellor. Compassionate, empathic and 'firm but fair' made sense to me. As it turns out, it meant the same to my predecessor.

What became quite clear to me in the first weeks, months and year in the role was that prior to stepping into those shoes, I didn't know exactly what a secondary school Vice-Principal did each day. As a teacher, I was aware of some of the actions of the administrative team: of fulfilling the support that I needed with a student, of organizing fire drills and assemblies, of arranging the staff meetings we attended. But I didn't know the 'behind-the-scenes' intricacies.

As a counsellor, I worked closely with the administrative team and had a sense of the depth of support the Vice-Principals provided for staff, students, and families. I became more aware of the inner workings and complexities of constructing a timetable that worked for both students and teachers. But still, I didn't know exactly what each day would present, or that each day never looked the same. And I certainly didn't understand how leadership was actually an extension of my love for teaching, or fully grasp the lack of boundaries to time, effort and concern that lay ahead.

I'm not sure we can ever truly know the role of another until we have walked in their shoes. As such, there is an element of systemic trust required that allows us to rely on the expertise that each member of the team brings to the table, without knowing the complexities of their work. For the most part, this was my experience through the various roles that I have held in my career as an educator, and I believe that trust and reliance keeps us all supporting students and families in the world-class manner that we do in BC.

That said, there is value in some deeper advance knowledge when considering the life changes that come with shifting roles within the education

system. Consideration of the move to a leadership role – as a school Vice-Principal and possibly, later, a Principal – is a natural progression to some, and to others it comes through invitation and encouragement by current leaders. There are real, imagined, and false perceptions of what the role entails. There are assumptions made about the level of energy

required, and the level of impact that can be had. And there are important personal questions to be asked about the potential shifts and challenges to your family and professional life.

The BC Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association supports Vice-Principals and Principals at every stage of their careers, and we now plan to provide some insight to educators on the brink of making the move to school leader. **Essentials for Aspiring School Leaders (EASL)**, will be piloted in Spring 2021, reaching teachers who are interested in school leadership and curious about the underpinnings of the role.

Over four three-hour weekend sessions, participants will be introduced to the four domains

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Current Vice-Principals Share Their Thoughts

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what did you expect, and
what do you know now?

"I expected more instructional leadership, less administrative functions. I have learned that instructional leadership is best delivered from a teacher's perspective, and that admin must understand it to stay relevant and build connections with staff."

"I thought I would be working more with teachers and students in the classroom – the instructional leadership – but now I know that I need to schedule that in, and that it will only be a small portion of my time in a week."

what was your 'ah-hah' moment
as you began the role?

"This job is very important. I was always interested in leading, but had not considered the importance of the administrative role in a school and its impact on the school community."

"There is a lot of behind-the-scenes work that you will be doing – that you have never done before – in order to provide an environment for learning and teaching. You will be a life-long learner in this role."

what do you wish you knew
about the role before you started?

"You will feel like you know nothing for at least a few years in this role, and that is normal!"

"Your relationship with teachers and staff will change, and your support system will become other administrators (*who are amazing!*)"

of the BCPVPA Leadership Standards: Ethical Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Relational Leadership and Organizational Leadership. In each of these domains, participants will explore theoretical considerations, and be introduced to practical tasks and the implications for learning. They will learn how the necessary work of running a school requires leadership, and how the impact of the seemingly mundane is immeasurable in setting the conditions for learning.

Some may take this program prior to investing in a master's program, or perhaps in concert with leadership programs in their own district. Some may take it to solidify their interest in – and commitment to – this career path.

The virtually delivered program will be interactive, and small group discussions will be facilitated by practicing Vice-Principals.

The intent is to present in a clear and honest way the inspirational work that one can expect in the role of a Vice-Principal. For the BCPVPA,

it is part of our vision to offer support to the next generation of school leaders.

The pilot program of EASL is designed in collaboration with the BCPVPA and our members from across the province, with input from the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) and representation from the UBC Faculty of Education. It is intended to augment the many successful leadership programs that exist in some school districts, and to support a need in other districts.

Educators are learners, teachers, and leaders. Many teachers learn by example, and pursue a leadership role based on the encouragement of others; as current Vice-Principals and Principals,

we can inspire colleagues to consider advancement to leadership roles. *Remember looking around the desk for the Vice-Principal Handbook on your first day and not finding it?* Consider sharing this opportunity with those members of your staff who may be ready to explore a budding passion for leadership.

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