



Ettie Zilber

## The novice: "Dump in a log"

by  
Ettie  
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As a  
novice  
director,

I seek out and accept advice from those more experienced. A tip I received from a friend and colleague on the eve of embarking on my first administrative position has held me in good stead. "Keep a log," she said. "It will always help you." I started it then and I continue to this day - religiously.

While this may sound totally obvious and/or completely impossible for busy administrators, I would like to emphasize its importance and value to me.

What keeping a log helps me to do:

1. Keep track of what I do all day.

Many of the activities in which an administrator engages go unnoticed and unrecorded but are a vital part of the job. They ARE the job. At the end of a 10-12 hour work day, I may have nothing seemingly tangible to show for that period of time and I may begin to doubt my time management skills or my efficacy. Having a written record of all the transactions in a day's work helps me assess the innumerable activities in which I engage on a daily basis.

2. Document all activities and situations, including telephone calls, meetings, classroom "walkabouts," document preparation, impromptu hallway exchanges, etc.

I have learned very quickly

that I can never know when I might need detailed documentation to describe and present the development of a "situation" or prove/disprove an issue. The log is my evidence, if needed, for collecting the information and making a presentation.

3. Plan and report events.

Looking back through the log gives me the opportunity to see patterns and pressures in the schools activities. If I need to present a report to teachers, parents or school board, I have all those dates and facts at my fingertips.

4. Simply remember and keep up with all the "stuff."

Just to avoid the mere suggestion that I am losing my mind because I can't keep track of all the details, the log is a great prompt.

5. Reflect upon and analyze problems.

When re-reading circumstances that led up to "situations," the log helps me see the sequence of events more clearly. It also helps me backtrack in history and to see patterns that have formed over time.

6. Keep my sanity.

At times I feel frustrated, angry, confused and/or simply paranoid. Back-tracking through the log to see the sequence of events helps me understand where those feelings may be coming from. Reading over the events after a period of time is an enlightening trip down memory lane. So many details are quickly forgotten. It helps me focus on patterns of behavior, (mine or others) or patterns

of events. It really helps to know that I was not paranoid - i.e. sometimes they were really out to get me.

The logistics of keeping a log:

1. The log is kept in a hard bound ledger-type notebook and in chronological order to maintain credibility as well as the pages. Ledger volumes are numbered and dated for access.

2. During the day keep short-prompt notes in a spiral notebook. You might not have time to write up the entire interchange immediately, thus, write only key prompt words like mother/John Smith, angry, janitor, suspension, meeting/Susan, emotional, etc.

3. At the end of the day/week, or during the rare lull in the storm, transcribe the information from the short-prompt notes to the ledger. This act prompts your memory for issues that you might have forgotten. This also helps you follow up on issues. I find it interesting how much I remember about various details, but I also find it amazing how much I forget.

4. Keep the descriptions short but capture the essence of the interactions.

5. Underline/highlight the key names or issues for easy future access. This organizational strategy might sound over-the-top, however, the time it takes to maintain the log is worth it.

The tip I received 10 years ago has proved valuable time and again. I hope it works for you, too. I offer it to you as a School Year's Resolution. (Pardon the pun.)

*Ettie is the head at the American School of Barcelona, Spain.*

## The Head's Corner x 2:

### The veteran: "Hanging up .

by Alex Horsley

I have just "hung up me boots" after 20 years as a school head, including 16 years in international schools. Sounds great doesn't it? No more complaining parents, no more spats with teachers over housing, no more difficult board meetings, no more interminable faculty committee or PTA meetings, no more student behavioral situations - you name it, I'm away from it.

I'm riding my bike and golf cart into the sunset at the tender age of 57. Well not quite, as I have joined the ranks of consultants and expect to be working on a different plane from now on. But the bike and the golf cart will definitely play a much greater part of my life in the future.

I wish I could say that I've enjoyed EVERY minute of the last sixteen years. However, I can genuinely say that I enjoyed 90% of those minutes, and that I have obtained incredible professional and personal satisfaction from my time serving international schools.

I could say that my satisfaction comes from such achievements as being the founding head of Atlanta International School, or being recognized for the development of dual-language programs in international schools. However, by far the greatest satisfaction comes from working with students from all over the world and helping them with their dreams and ambitions. I will also say that the

are other international school heads, which is why attendance at regional conferences and a subscription to the AAIE headnet are so important. This lack of peers makes for some professional loneliness, especially when the going gets tough. A thick skin and a sense of humor are needed to combat this phenomenon. You cannot be a successful school head (international or otherwise) if you are not prepared to accept full institutional responsibility. This does not mean that you have to make every decision yourself - far from it.

School heads in mid- to large-sized schools should ensure that there is a decision-making process in place which gives opportunity for all relevant parties to feel part of the institution. However, the buck ultimately stops with the head, who will eventually carry the can if decisions go wrong.

Secondly, international school heads generally have to deal with boards which are difficult, often composed of short-term members who are expatriates in the community. The vast majority of international school boards are dominated by parents who have a short-term agenda for the school. This is totally different from Boards of Trustees of independent schools in the USA or UK, where the boards consider themselves to be stewards of the school assets and have a vested interest in guaranteeing its long-term growth and prosperity.

International school boards