

APA DIVISION 15 PRESENTS

► ONE TIP

JANUARY 2019 ISSUE:
"CROSSING OVER TO THE DARK SIDE: SHOULD I
BECOME AN ADMINISTRATOR?"

By Dr. Eric Anderman

When I decided to enter the field

of educational psychology, I had a clear set of professional goals. I was going to teach high school for a few years (check), get a PhD (check), get a job as an assistant professor and get tenure (check), and live happily ever after as a tenured professor. But then something happened...

I was on the faculty at the University of Kentucky, and our college's Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies announced that he was stepping down. I had never aspired to a leadership role, but when that announcement came out, I started to consider it. I decided to apply to see what would

happen, and I got the job; that led to other leadership positions. I'm currently in my 10th year as the Chair of the Department of Educational Studies at Ohio State, and I've also held leadership roles in APA and AERA.

There is much to consider about taking on leadership roles in academia. I've learned a lot, and I've made mistakes along the way. Some of you may be considering leadership positions, and some of you may not, but you might be asked to consider such roles in the future. I'd like to share some advice if you're thinking about (or not yet thinking about) a leadership role. These are things I've learned along the way.

1. **Wait until you have tenure.** This is essential! Leadership positions take more time than anyone thinks. That is time taken away from other activities, and writing/research is often what goes first. Sometimes there is pressure (either explicit or implicit) for junior faculty to move into time-consuming leadership roles. You need to resist this. If you have a strong support system and good relationships with administrators, you should be able to avoid moving into leadership too soon.
2. **Only take on a leadership role if you really want to**...you need to really think this through. Talk to others who have served in leadership roles at your institution...ask about what happens behind the scenes. Despite what you think about how efficient you are, you probably don't realize how many meetings you'll have to attend, how many reports you'll have to write, and how much time you will spend on email. Your time is no longer your own...you can't just say "No I won't attend that meeting" as easily as you can in your faculty role.

3. **Have a good support system.** I always have a small group of trusted colleagues who are in administration whom I can talk to...an informal support group of sorts.
4. **Your mantra should be "students first."** You'll quickly learn that there are many competing "special interest groups" who will vie for resources, all trying to convince you that theirs is the most important issue to arise since the beginning of time. Academic leaders have to balance requests with fiscal realities and institutional policies. One of the best pieces of advice that I ever received is to *always consider students first*. We are here because of our students; so I always try to come back to that in making decisions – will this benefit our students? If the answer is yes, I'm more inclined to find a way to support a request.
5. **Value your staff.** Probably the most important lesson that I have learned is that the staff are the ones who make everything possible. Staff work incredibly hard, yet often are not appreciated or well paid. Treat your staff well: respect their work, their lives, their time, and their efforts. And do some extra things to support the staff – everything from providing professional development opportunities down to simply taking five minutes to informally chat.

Administrative leadership roles can be rewarding and enjoyable; yet many see becoming a leader as joining "the dark side." It doesn't have to be that way though. Just don't go into it blindly – wait until the time is right, when you can honestly say to yourself and your colleagues that you are becoming a leader for the right reasons.



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