

Maintaining a Positive Relationship With Your Head of School

June 16, 2022

Erica Zematis, NAIS



'Stuck With You' by Huey Lewis & The News



SAIS: Institute for Administrative Assistants | June 16, 2022

© National Association of Independent Schools

Welcome!



Imagine your life as a book. What would be the title of your current chapter?



'Found Out About You' by Gin Blossoms

A look at relationships:

The Devil Wears Prada

[The Devil Wears Prada - YouTube](#)



Successful Relationships:



Communication

Respect

Trust

Miranda-Andy

How did the relationship between Miranda and Andy evolve?

- **Appearance:** in order to be taken more seriously, Andy needed to look more professional and buy-in to the industry. She needed to understand what the industry stood for and why it was important.
- **Learner:** Andy listened and learned. She proved herself to be adaptable, eager to learn, and teachable.
- **Reliable:** Andy was reliable, hard working, competent, and trustworthy.
- **Trust:** Andy earned Miranda's trust the more she became reliable, competent, and trustworthy.
- **Time:** relationships no doubt evolve over time. Relationships take time to develop.

A positive relationship can amplify job satisfaction



“Relationships with management are the top factor in employees’ job satisfaction, which in turn is the second most important determinant of employees’ overall well-being.”

McKinsey & Company study:
[The boss factor | McKinsey](#)

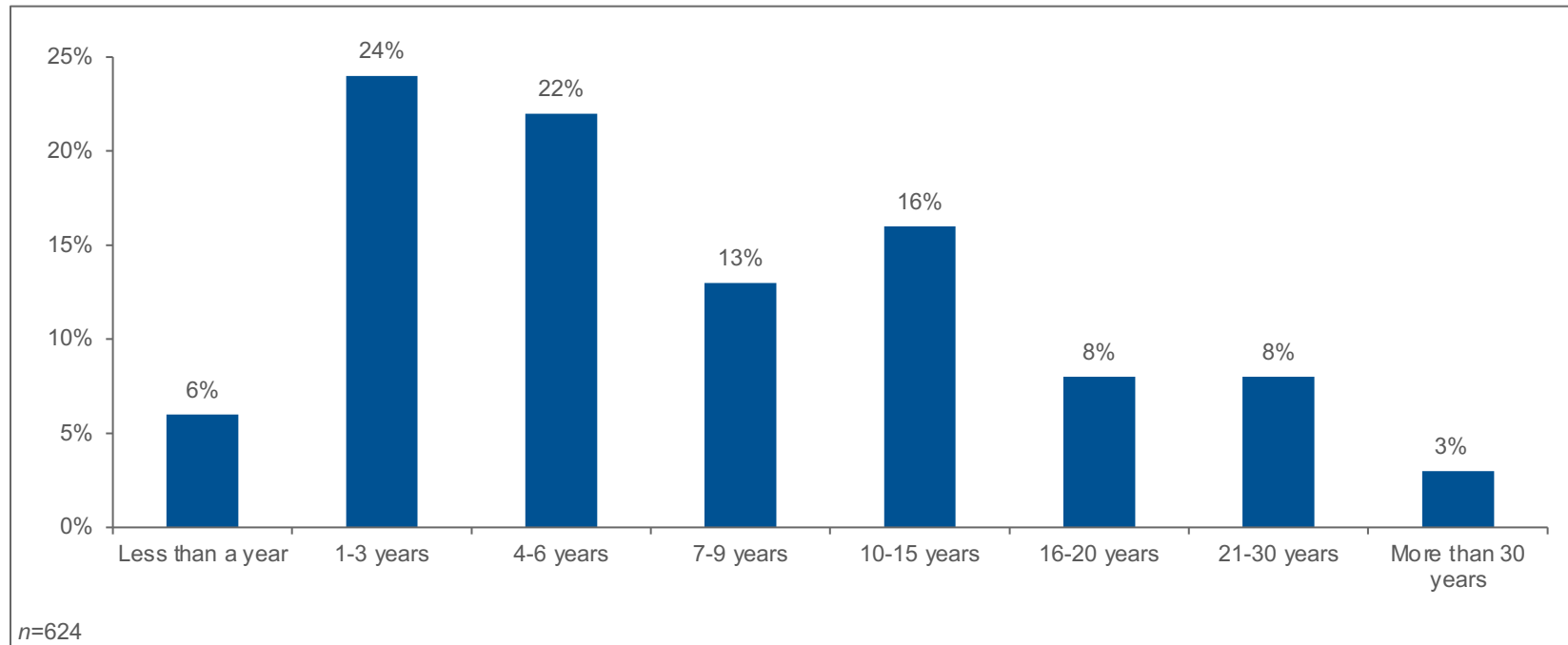
Miranda-Andy

Where did the relationship between Miranda and Andy go wrong?

- **Boundaries:** Miranda did not respect Andy's boundaries. And Andy felt that having boundaries would negatively affect her career.
- **Goals:** Andy's goal of being an editor did not align with the work of an Executive Assistant.
- **Giving others credit:** Recognize the contributions of others on the team. Andy success was at the expense of Emily's. The competitive nature did not lend itself to teamwork.
- **Personality:** Miranda had a reputation as being a devil of a boss. No matter how good of an assistant you are, sometimes personalities don't mesh well, and you deserve better!

Recent Executive Assistant survey: EA tenure

How long have you been in your current position at this school?

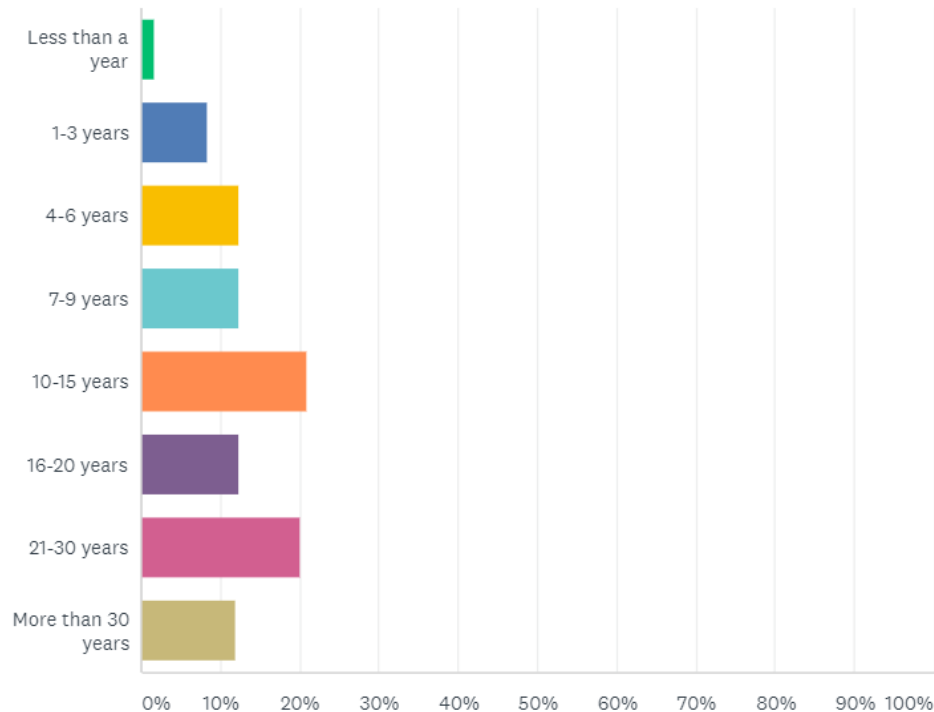


- Approximately 70% of EAs have been in their position for over 4 years.
- About 6% are new to the position (less than a year).

Recent Executive Assistant survey: EA experience

How many years of experience do you have in this type of role?

Answered: 624 Skipped: 1



- The majority of EAs have over 10 years of experience in their roles (65%).
- A large percentage have over 20 years of experience (32%).
- Less than 2% are new to the work of an EA.

Recent Executive Assistant survey: identifying challenges

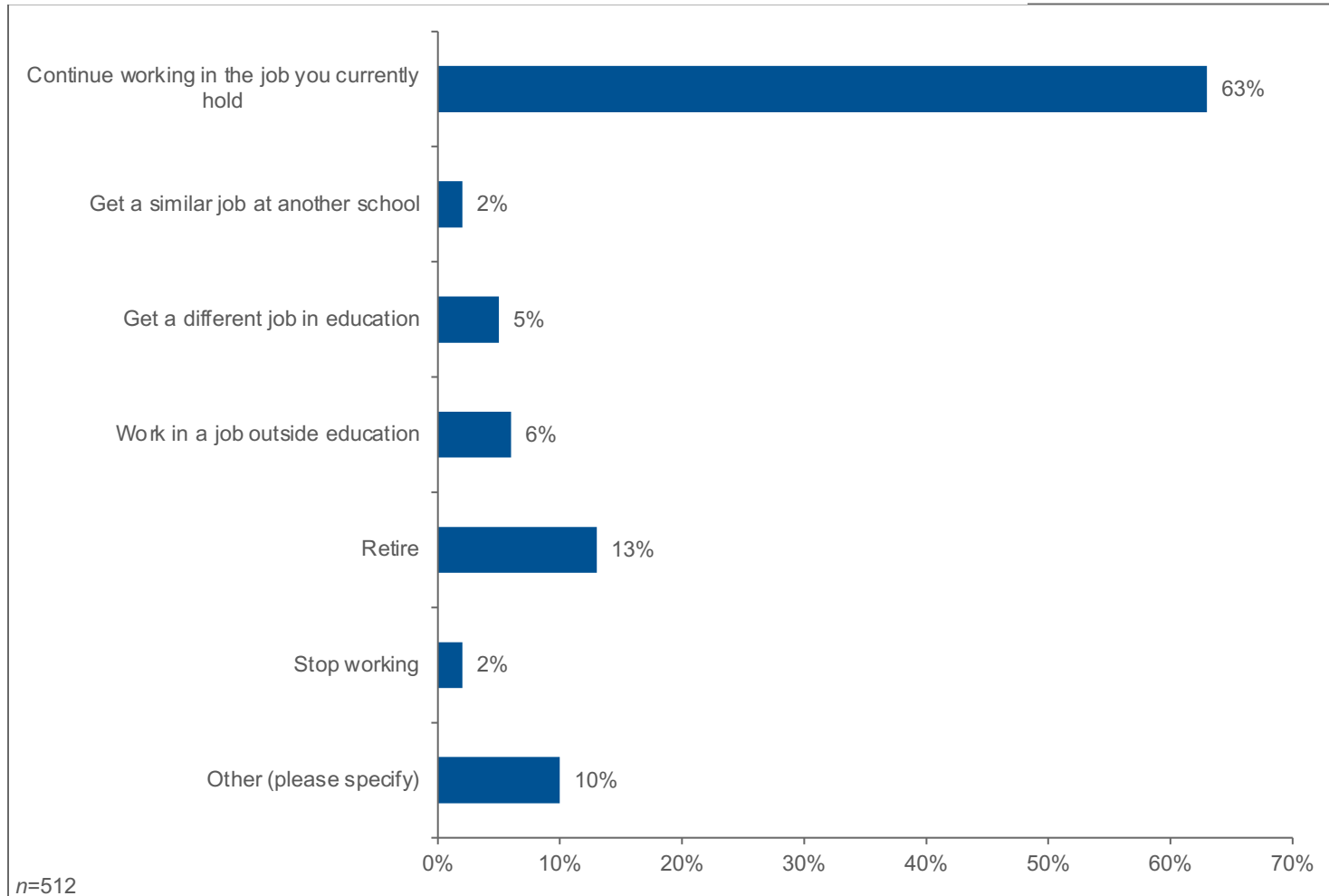
Where do you struggle the most? Please check all that apply.

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
None of the above	18.60%	96
Time management: too much to do or pulled in too many directions	54.26%	280
Time management: not enough to do and often feel bored	4.46%	23
Job satisfaction: the work is not challenging enough	9.88%	51
Job satisfaction: the work is too challenging	1.74%	9
Interpersonal relations: improving your relationship with the head	9.11%	47
Interpersonal relations: improving your relationship with faculty and/or staff	6.98%	36
Interpersonal relations: improving your relationship with parents	3.49%	18
Interpersonal relations: improving your relationship with students	5.62%	29
Conflict resolution: helping two or more people work through differences	11.82%	61
Taking meeting minutes	18.99%	98
Lack skills or knowledge in a particular area or with a particular program	11.43%	59
Other (please specify)	Responses	15.31% 79
Total Respondents: 516		

- The majority of EAs feel they struggle most with time management – too much to do or pulled in too many directions.
- Roughly 9% feel the biggest struggle is their relationship with their head of school.

A relationship worth investing in

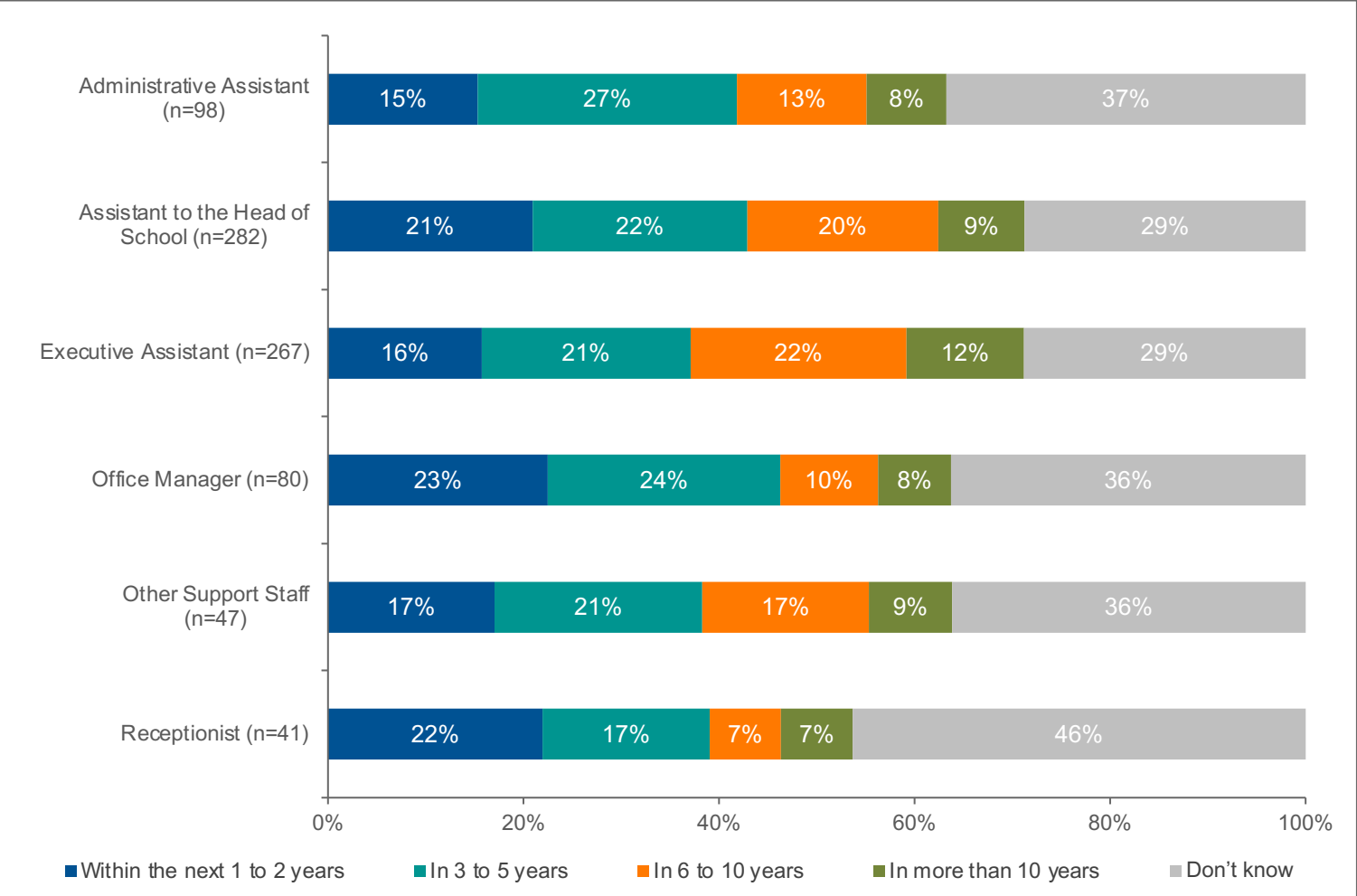
What are your career plans for the next five years?



- 63% of EAs plan to continue working in the job they currently hold in the next 5 years.
- About 15% plan to retire or stop working.
- When asked when they plan to transition from the position, only 17% reported within the next 1-2 years.
- 52% plan to stay for the next 3-10 years, and 30% are unsure.

A relationship worth investing in

Looking forward, would you say you plan to transition from this job...



- This breaks down the support staff even further – looking at just EAs. They plan to be in the position longer than other groups.
- When asked when they plan to transition from the position, only 16% reported within the next 1-2 years.
- 55% plan to stay for the next 3-10 years or longer, and 29% are unsure.

Tips to strengthen your EA/HOS relationship



A Dynamic Role

- Changing Roles and Responsibilities
- Independent
- Proactive
- Project management
- Collaborating with teams
- Knowledge of the industry
- Know the school and its constituents
- Increased strategic thinking

Tips to strengthen your EA-HOS relationship

- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Have regular check-in meetings.
- Trust one another and maintain confidentiality.
- Understand that the community may make a mental connection with the EA and the HOS. Together you represent the head's office.
- Seek and accept constructive feedback from one another.
- Have a good attitude toward work.
- Give credit where it is due.
- Remember you are partners working toward a common purpose. Make sure your goals are aligned.

How an EA can assist a new leader

- Provide insights into school culture and traditions.
- Outline current practices and processes.
- Identify stakeholders.
- Set up calendar (there will no doubt be many meetings in the first few months of school).
- Provide context for sticky wickets.



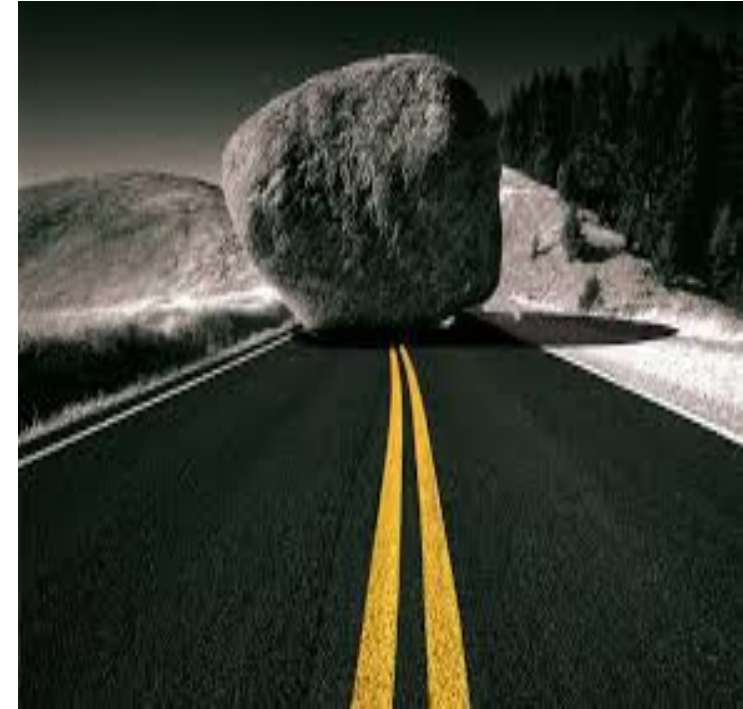
How the HoS can ensure an EA's success

- Be clear about goals & objectives and the EA's role in supporting them; prioritize needs.
- Delegate effectively; answer questions fully. Understand what is already on the EA's plate.
- Give EA opportunity to learn about all aspects of the school.
- Make sure the school community sees the trust you place in your EA – to be effective the EA must have real authority in the community.
- Give stretch assignments.
- Provide timely feedback.
- Celebrate successes.



What causes the relationship to fail

- EA misreading school culture.
- Not asking questions (this applies to both parties).
- EA agreeing to take on too much or not adhering to deadlines.
- HoS not delegating effectively or prioritizing work.
- HoS not trusting EA or undermining authority.
- EA not building appropriate bridges in school community.
- EA not keeping confidences.
- HoS not providing feedback grounded in examples.



Values Exercise:

Values exercise – understanding one another's core values can strengthen your relationship.

Values describe who you are at your core and what you care about the most.

Take a few minutes to identify your core values taken from Brene Brown's list in her book *Dare to Lead*.

Group Values Exercise:

Choose the top values that resonate with you. Sort them into groups and rank them so that you end up with your top 5.

Connecting with your HOS/EA around these values can help you understand reasoning and build better working relationships. It can be a great way to see where you balance each other out and where you overlap.

Source:

<https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/workbook-art-pics-glossary/>



List of VALUES

Accountability	Diversity	Intuition	Safety
Achievement	Environment	Job security	Security
Adaptability	Efficiency	Joy	Self-discipline
Adventure	Equality	Justice	Self-expression
Altruism	Ethics	Kindness	Self-respect
Ambition	Excellence	Knowledge	Serenity
Authenticity	Fairness	Leadership	Service
Balance	Faith	Learning	Simplicity
Beauty	Family	Legacy	Spirituality
Being the best	Financial stability	Leisure	Sportsmanship
Belonging	Forgiveness	Love	Stewardship
Career	Freedom	Loyalty	Success
Caring	Friendship	Making a difference	Teamwork
Collaboration	Fun	Nature	Thrift
Commitment	Future generations	Openness	Time
Community	Generosity	Optimism	Tradition
Compassion	Giving back	Order	Travel
Competence	Grace	Parenting	Trust
Confidence	Gratitude	Patience	Truth
Connection	Growth	Patriotism	Understanding
Contentment	Harmony	Peace	Uniqueness
Contribution	Health	Perseverance	Usefulness
Cooperation	Home	Personal fulfillment	Vision
Courage	Honesty	Power	Vulnerability
Creativity	Hope	Pride	Wealth
Curiosity	Humility	Recognition	Well-being
Dignity	Humor	Reliability	Wholeheartedness
	Inclusion	Resourcefulness	Wisdom
	Independence	Respect	
	Initiative	Responsibility	
	Integrity	Risk-taking	

Write your own:



Copyright © 2020 by Brené Brown, LLC | All rights reserved | www.brenebrown.com/daretolead

1/1

Choosing your Values:

Choose the top values that resonate with you. Sort them into groups and rank them so that you end up with your top 5.

- What are your core values and why are these values important to you?
- Do you share any core values?
- Do your goals align with your values?
- What does your school value? Are they similar to your own values?
- What makes you feel good, smile, laugh, or feel fulfilled?

Source:
<https://daretolead.brenebrown.com/workbook-art-pics-glossary/>

List of VALUES

Accountability
Achievement
Adaptability
Adventure
Altruism
Ambition
Authenticity
Balance
Beauty
Being the best
Belonging
Career
Caring
Collaboration
Commitment
Community
Compassion
Competence
Confidence
Connection
Contentment
Contribution
Cooperation
Courage
Creativity
Curiosity
Dignity

Diversity
Environment
Efficiency
Equality
Ethics
Excellence
Fairness
Faith
Family
Financial stability
Forgiveness
Freedom
Friendship
Fun
Future generations
Generosity
Giving back
Grace
Gratitude
Growth
Harmony
Health
Home
Honesty
Hope
Humility
Humor
Inclusion
Independence
Initiative
Integrity

Intuition
Job security
Joy
Justice
Kindness
Knowledge
Leadership
Learning
Legacy
Leisure
Love
Loyalty
Making a difference
Nature
Openness
Optimism
Order
Parenting
Patience
Patriotism
Peace
Perseverance
Personal fulfillment
Power
Pride
Recognition
Reliability
Resourcefulness
Respect
Responsibility
Risk-taking

Safety
Security
Self-discipline
Self-expression
Self-respect
Serenity
Service
Simplicity
Spirituality
Sportsmanship
Stewardship
Success
Teamwork
Thrift
Time
Tradition
Travel
Trust
Truth
Understanding
Uniqueness
Usefulness
Vision
Vulnerability
Wealth
Well-being
Wholeheartedness
Wisdom

Write your own:



Group Values Exercise:

Consider the following in your next 1:1 meeting:

- What are your core values and why are these values important to you?
- Do you share any core values with your EA or Head of School?
- Do your goals align with your values?
- What does your school value? Are they similar to your own values?
- What makes you feel good, smile, laugh, or feel fulfilled?



Working as partners



An effective relationship will:

- Keep your morale up, affecting attitudes and emotions both inside and outside of work.
- Increase productivity and efficiency.
- Allow the head to identify areas of strength and interests which can lead to professional development and new opportunities for the EA.
- Anticipate potential problems and offer a chance to act before issues become crises.

Working as Partners

“Most important for me is a personal and professional connection that allow “me” to be my whole self in our work together. I need a partner who allows me to think out loud, change my mind, vent, be happy and be sad. She understands the work obligations and the personal obligations in my life and she works hard to help me manage both. When it comes down to it, my EA is a thought partner, who delivers a pep talk, a counter point or a reminder just when I need it.”

- Randall Dunn, Latin School of Chicago

“My assistant always seems to become one of my most trusted confidants and a protector. This person is the great anticipator, the magician of my calendar, and the amazing insight provider. I absolutely LOVE all the assistants I have had in my 15 years of headship- (two retired!) as they know the real and raw me. They see me at the toughest moments- letting someone go, expelling a great kid who made a bad mistake, or dealing with a significant issue. I am so blessed by the authentic and soulful partnerships I have had!”

- Fran Bisselle, Head at Hathaway Brown School

“I have been fortunate to have a number of amazing assistants over the years. Honestly, I would not have succeeded without them. My assistants have had my back, anticipated everything I needed to be doing, and helped me focus on what is truly important to do. They have also been confidants who know all of my weaknesses and did their best to make me an effective school leader. Maybe most important, they have been fun to work with!!”

- Bernie Noe, Lakeside School



‘You Make My Dreams (Come True)’ by Hall & Oats

Thank you for attending!

Feel free to reach out to me (Erica) at Zematis@nais.org with any additional questions or comments. Thank you for your time!