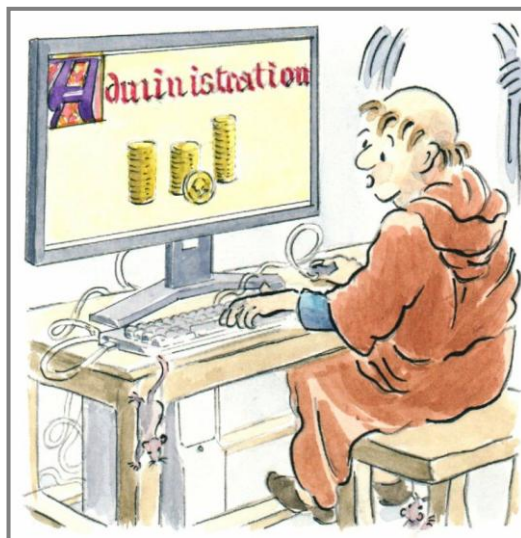


An Administrator's Planning Retreat

TN162 Training Notes series: Administration



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What I have in mind for these notes is a special kind of retreat as described in Training Notes TN54, *Making space for a Planning Retreat*. You might read that before turning to what follows here. That is because my concept of a Planning Retreat is somewhat different from a traditional retreat.

The notes you are reading now make suggestions for what a Church Administrator or Operations Manager might aim to cover on such a retreat. TN54 gives some outline ideas but the aim there is to promote the value of making time for such an event. Here the emphasis is on possible content for Administrators.

What I describe here would fill at least three days if followed in detail! Cut down the expectation for a one day away. You need to have space rather than a crowded 'To Do' list and to think slowly rather than work at your normal pace.

But try to include a night away if you can for a Planning Retreat, and at least two complete, consecutive days.

Consider the setting for each of these tasks. Do you pray, ponder and analyse best sitting at some kind of desk, in a church building or retreat centre, or out in the countryside on a walk? Whatever you choose, ensure it is away from your workplace and that you are on your own and will not be disturbed.

This material could also be applied to a staff team retreat, but my focus is on a Church Administrator or Operations Manager on their own.

So here are eight ideas for what you might cover, grouped as a 'one', a 'three', a second 'three' and a second 'one' giving a total of eight. I have Administrators in mind although the headings could apply to anyone.

One priority for your content

First of all and before you rush into planning mode, take time to develop your relationship with your Father.

Give yourself time for studying the Scriptures and prayer

If you work as an Administrator in any form, you are sure to be dealing with the pressure of deadlines and detail for much of your working life. Within this you may feel at times that you are clinging on to your faith by your fingernails. Studying the Bible and prayer when you are not having to cope with emails, texts and WhatsApp messages is a luxury so try not to neglect it.

Prayer will play a key role in what follows but here I have in mind prayer for your own discipleship, for your own health, for your own family and friends. It may be a Planning Retreat but do focus on 'retreat' before you think about 'planning'.

See this as 'reconnecting with God', renewing the relationship, reminding yourself of the Father of grace, being in conversation with him.

Three tenses to address

Here are three ideas to work on as a possible structure based on three tenses: past, present and future.

1: Review the past: both work role and discipleship

We easily forget what we have achieved over the past year so consult your diary, work reports and other documents and bring to mind projects you have been involved in, routine work, work relationships, special events, developments in your Christian life, etc. What went well, what gave you lessons to learn, what developed you as a person, as an Administrator or Manager and as a Christian disciple?

In TN54 I mention finding measurements to determine what is developing in your work and life. But the key point is to call to mind what you may have forgotten in the rush of life. Use this overview for praise and prayer.

2: Analyse the present: both work role and discipleship

What are the work and home issues you are facing at the moment? These might be to do with routine work, those you work with in any way, your Christian life, your health. What is worrying you? What gives a cause for praise? Do you believe you are gifted by God as an Administrator or Manager?

You might like to look at Health-checks HC8 & HC9, *A gift assessment for Administrators*, on this website for that last point. Or, if you prefer a shorter summary of that material, try Training Notes TN115, *Identifying gifts of administration*.

This is the place to check out your job description and, more importantly, your job's person profile. Are they accurate? What do you feel needs to change in the role you are playing and the work relationships you have? What do you need to change to match more closely the person profile? Write down a list as a record and commit them to prayer.

3: Plan the future: both work role and discipleship

What is coming up in the next year both in your work place and at home? What is changing? Where do you want to be in a year's time? Be ready to think through ideas which may come on the basis of the past and present.

Where do you feel inadequate for the challenge? What can you do to develop the gifts of administration within you? Don't rush forwards but let God speak to you through his word. A Planning Retreat offers you precious gifts which may be in short supply for most of the year: time and space.

I have found that ideas for the future rarely come in neatly packaged ideas one day, but develop over time as I ponder them. Perhaps one of the key activities in a Planning Retreat is to have time and space to ponder.

Three possible applications to work on

Within the structure of three tenses as above, here are some specific ideas of some practical applications.

1: Think through one work project

Although much of the idea of a Planning Retreat allows you to think big picture, there is no harm in giving yourself time to consider one specific work project that needs unhurried thought to be given to it. Don't let this fill the time but don't be afraid to let it have a reasonable proportion of the total, perhaps one eighth of the time as I am suggesting eight activities and this is just one of them.

For me, I ponder best while walking in the countryside but it may be different for you. But a Planning Retreat offers you the opportunity to get away from your desk and that is the key need here, perhaps in a very different environment from your normal work station.

You don't need to feel you have to do all the thinking about this project now, but the retreat may offer an opportunity to start the process.

2: Ponder one discipleship issue

But the retreat is not all work-focused. It offers the opportunity to reconsider your Christian discipleship too, or your marriage if relevant or your relationship with friends. Do you have one temptation that continually gets you down? Is the busyness of administrative work squeezing out your time with God? Has your faith lost its cutting edge in the worries you have to face day by day?

Making space for a retreat offers the opportunity to face such problems and seek to deal with them. Your role as your church's Administrator or Manager is part of your discipleship and your service in God's work.

3: Chew over one book, set of web articles or recorded talks

This is linked to the previous point but time away enables you to get some serious reading or learning done. Christian Administrators need to have their minds stretched and may well find that the rush of daily work does not offer much time for that.

So take a serious book away with you, or listen to specific podcasts or read a number of website resource items, or a series of sermons you want to come back to.

One extra to give yourself a break

Time for a fun activity

But a retreat does not have to be full of work and discipleship issues. One part of it might well be a fun activity of some kind to offer relaxation. This might involve sport in some form, a challenge to take part in, time away with friends, an outing to the theatre with family and/or friends, a weekend break with your spouse or family member.

Let this be a time of what God has given you in terms of people or interests. See this as an addition to your retreat time away.

So there are eight elements of a possible programme. You may decide to give each one the same amount of time, or you may prefer to focus on one or two this year and others next. Use this list as a possible building block to develop a programme. By all means vary it to fit yourself.

But there again we administrators run the risk of categorising it all, and of making it too ordered. Don't be surprised if God breaks through and wants to deal with you in some other way!

Resources you may find useful

Article A38, *Appointing an Operations Manager*

Article A42, *What do Church Administrators do?*

Health-checks HC8 & HC9, *A gift assessment for Administrators*

Training Notes TN54, *Creating space for a Planning Retreat*

Training Notes TN72 & 73, *Church administration explained*

Training Notes TN77, *Administrator wisdom*

Training Notes TN91, *An MOT for disciples of Jesus*

Training Notes TN112, *Set my leaders free!*

Training Notes TN115, *Identifying gifts of administration*

Training Notes TN157, *The value of reviewing the past*

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN162. See also Training Notes TN54, *Making space for a Planning Retreat*, and the other resources listed just above.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication and Administration. File TN162 under Administration (with a link to Planning).

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