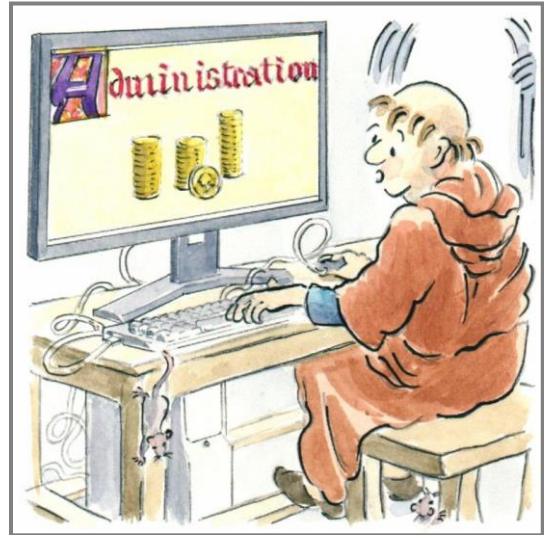


Advice for all church administrators

TN4 Training Notes series: Administration



These notes were first published on the website in July 2001 and last updated in July 2023. They are copyright © John Truscott. You may download this file and/or print up to 30 copies without charge provided no part of the heading or text is altered or omitted.

These notes list the points that I make when asked to give advice for how to handle administration in Christian ministry. Some of these points may seem unusual but I try to follow them all in my own work.

I would normally add considerably more explanation than can be shown here and provide a variety of illustrations from many different aspects of church administration.

What is your view? What would you add? Do email me (address at the top of every website page) so I may consider your ideas in future revisions of this list.

These notes certainly apply to those who work as Operations Managers or Church Administrators in churches of all sizes and traditions. But I have in mind a much wider application than this, hence the title of these notes with a small 'c' and small 'a'.

Many people work in church administration in some form without it being an officially paid staff post. Some will hold an administrative office:

- The Church Secretary in, for example, a Baptist Church, or the Church Wardens or PCC Secretary in an Anglican church.
- The Church Treasurer or, more likely these days, any member of the Finance Team.
- The Halls Manager for churches with a variety of rooms to let out.
- The Safeguarding Officer.
- The Newsletter Editor or similar post for any church publication.

But there are also a large number of posts that will usually be handled by church members who are not seen as office-holders. These notes apply to *any* administrative role.

1 **Get your theology straight!**

This has to be the starting point for all thinking about church administration.

- **Recapture the biblical doctrine of incarnation**
... because this demonstrates that you cannot separate the 'spiritual' from the 'practical'.
- **Understand the 'servant ministry' of administration**
It serves all other ministries.
- **See it as the gift of Jesus Christ to his church**
... since those who serve, help and administer are all included in biblical lists of gifts.
- **Glimpse something of the enthusiasm it deserves**
It may not be front line, but it's given by God for the health of his church.

2 **Ask the question 'Why?'**

This is the question Christians are frightened to ask. Good administrators ask it all the time.

- **Stand out from the Christian crowd and ask 'Why?' before 'How?'**
Why do we do this? Why do we need this committee? Why don't we try it another way?
- **Avoid the means becoming the mission**
Define what you are aiming to achieve and the means you use to do this.
- **Check if people know, agree and understand 'why'**
It gives motivation and leads to unity.
- **You may need to consider 'Why originally?', 'Why now?', and 'Why not?'**
Keep asking the question even if it makes you unpopular.

3 **Make lists**

Most people find that making lists (or drawing mind maps) clarifies issues. In a group this becomes blue-sky thinking, but it can be done solo too.

- **To solve problems, list all possibilities**
Lists of items, categories, principles, ideas, solutions...
- **Use God's creative gifts when listing all possible courses of action**
Use a group of creative thinkers or, if on your own, work in an environment which gives you ideas.
- **List the opposites of sensible answers**
Sometimes this is the only way to force your mind to think in a new direction.
- **Have vision – take risks – be an administrator of faith**
Don't restrict first lists by criteria such as acceptability (see also 7 below).

4 List priorities

Good organisation determines what matters most – and least.

- **Rank your lists**
Put an order (by importance, timing, or whatever) onto each list.
- **To have priorities you need 'posteriorities' too!**
If some things matter most then, by definition, some things must matter least – and drop off the list.
- **Decide what matters most in God's plan**
Decision-making for Christians is an element of guidance.
- **Agree on your shared values**
Your values will help you decide priorities.

5 Put yourself in other people's shoes

This will save you from all kinds of misjudgements.

- **List all the 'stakeholders'**
More lists, but it saves missing people out.
- **Try to see things from their perspective, not yours**
Whether they are the congregation, 'customers' or clients they will have a different view of the matter in hand from yours.
- **For unchurched people you need unchurched help**
If you want to see how this decision, publication, etc. appears to those of uncertain faith, don't ask fellow-Christians!
- **Understand the kind of person God made as 'you'**
Know yourself: personality, strengths, weaknesses.

6 Watch the second line

The 'first line' is what is visible and audible: the agenda. The 'second line' is what hides behind this: the unexpressed feelings.

- **Hone your skills to read the second line**
Expect it to be there, and learn to read the signs: body-language, coded messages.
- **Adapt your communication in the light of return messages**
A good communicator continually watches the return loop from audience/readership: the expressions, movements, actions.
- **Keep a healthy respect for the doctrine of original sin**
Then you will not be surprised by mixed motives, blind spots, blocking tactics.
- **Ask others what second line you are displaying**
Another case of seeking to know yourself.

7 **Keep all three tenses in mind**

Past, present and future are all important and each needs to be seen in relation to the other two.

- **Learn from the past without being enslaved to it**
It is a mistake both to live in it and to turn your back on it.
- **Analyse the present to assess it**
Good administrators categorise what they see, noting linkages and causes/effects.
- **Dream dreams for the future**
Learn to think unshackled by restraints of resources such as finance and time. Those come later (see 8 below).
- **Expect change to be the most important management issue**
Yesterday's Church was structured for safety and stability; today's must be ever on the move in structure and methodology.

8 **Be realistic about your resources**

The Christian administrator needs faith in a God of all resource, balanced with an accurate assessment of what is available.

- **Assess what is available, especially time and people**
Many churches simply try to do more than they can.
- **Never let finance dictate mission**
Budgets should be based on what you believe God wants you to do, not on what is in the bank today. But do count the cost: be wise.
- **Never be afraid to say 'No' or 'Stop'**
In God's sight it must be failure to continue something he wants closed down.
- **Know the standards you are working to**
Your standards need to take into account the expectations of those you are dealing with – but also the available resources.

9 **Do not be frightened to plan**

But Christians seek to find God's plans and work within them.

- **Learn from biblical planning**
Get your direction from the big-sweep plans of Scripture: before the foundation of the world, the plan of salvation, etc.
- **Set clear aims, then specific targets to help achieve them**
Aims are your main hopes for achievement in the coming year or so. Targets are the measurable steps towards each aim.
- **Plan first to pray, rather than praying after you plan**
Seek to discover God's plans, rather than asking him to bless human plans.
- **Don't be frightened to review all you do**
Most Christians are threatened by the idea of assessing past performance. It should be one of your greatest learning tools.

10 **Aim for simplicity**

However complex the problem seek a simple solution.

- **Be a pilgrim church**
Pilgrims on the move take few things with them.
- **Be prepared to change at short notice**
Complex institutions find it hard to change direction.
- **Prioritise service in the world, not service in the Church**
Most churches focus inwards and tie up people's time in the busyness of keeping the internal machinery operating.
- **Simple administration keeps the focus on the real mission**
Administration is a means to achieve the mission God has given, never the mission itself.

You will no doubt be able to think of many more headings to add to these ten, or other points to make under each heading. But I have found this list to be a pretty good foundation for my work as an administrator over many years.

It is comprehensive enough to include most of the important ideas I would want to pass on to others. It is innovative enough to make the topic of church administration fascinating rather than predictable. It is practical enough to be put into operation in a wide range of tasks and offices. It has the spiritual heart that this subject requires if we are to be true to its representation in the Bible as a spiritual ministry and gift that enables other forms of Christian service to flourish.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN4. They cover one aspect of a possible event for all who want to understand creative administration in churches. Administrators will find many of the resources on the site to be relevant to their work but, in particular, see Article A15, *Christian administration?*, and Training Notes TN68, *Administrators who miss the point*, TN72/73, *Church administration explained.*, and TN115, *Identifying gifts of administration*.

Contact John if you would like to enquire about the possibility of his running an event for your church.

Cartoons are by Micki Hounslow for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN4 under Administration.

John Truscott, 24 High Grove, St Albans, AL3 5SU

Tel: 01727 568325 Email: john@john-truscott.co.uk Web: <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk>