

I find it quite embarrassing that this group would even want to hear a response to the question, “Why do administrators need scholars?” The answer seems so self-evident that to convey in twenty-five hundred words a response appears as tomfoolery, or, using the more recent theological language, “hooley.”

As an academic community, I’m going to assume you appreciate definitions. “Administration” or any other derivative, I will be using to identify what is normally referred to in *Working Policy* and Bylaws as, “officers.” These are the president, executive secretary, and treasurer specifically.

Next, while the term, “scholarly community,” could apply to any professor of any standing within any higher educational institution, I will be referring specifically to those who serve in academic institutions who specifically develop the future ministerial workforce of the wider Church.

Having set the table, now, allow me to rephrase the question to be more personal: “What is it about the scholarly community, this community, that I, as the Executive Secretary of the Illinois Conference, find so beneficial?”

Allow me a moment to describe a week in my life as an executive secretary of a mid-range conference. As a result of our October 31 Constituency meeting, I am now working with our HR Director on an exit package for the department director who was not returned into the office. I received a call from a pastor about an attendee has been extremely disruptive during the Sabbath morning gathering and has now gone so far as to say, “What I will do, I will not be responsible for because I will be doing it because God told me to do it.” I received two emails from church members to discuss the question of a new pastor since theirs is leaving. I have

been working with our HR Director to finalize details related to a counseled resignation of a locally-funded, conference-hired church pastor. The breakdown of the relationship between the pastor and that congregation in less than a year occurred in a millisecond. I've had questions come to me via phone call and email related to specifics about our constitution post-constituency meeting. I've facilitated the transition of our retained legal counsel from a family legal firm that has worked with our conference for five decades to new legal counsel. The council has been invaluable as I've had to work through a lawsuit based upon a member being disfellowshipped and another member trying to declare that we are not covered by the General Conference when it comes to charitable contributions because this disgruntled member wanted returned their giving over the past 8 years.

Beside all this, I just wrapped up our Constituency Meeting (and all the meetings tethered to that meeting), as well as attended NAD Year-End Meetings. Last night I returned from three days of union Year-End Meetings. In the midst of all of this, we have a local head elder seeking to purge the congregation of all their sin so as to receive the latter rain. Finally, I continue preparing for our first meeting with our new executive committee.

This snapshot provides a window into the life of an officer in this day and age. And as I ask around the circle of administrators, I realize this is not out of the norm. To move from my "norm" as an administrator to your "norm" as a scholar requires the crossing of a historic Rubicon. To illustrate this iconic tension, I share a story from Dr. Tasha Eurich in her research-based work entitled, *Insight*.

After delivering a yearlong leadership development program for a client, she solicited feedback from the participants. One participant plaintively wrote, "My biggest learning from

this program is how much money a consultant can make by presenting banal, trivial, feel-good, recycled and repackaged pop psychology and common sense concepts as innovative leadership training.” (p. 125) Simply stated, this tension-filled Rubicon can be identified as the seven-decade old “gap” between academia and practitioner.

In preparing this essay, I examined several studies and books to solicit input that would go beyond my working knowledge. (The consulted works are identified in the Reference List at the end.) One piece in particular challenged my thinking and brought forth an unintended direction. Bartunek & Rynes published in the *Journal of Management* a July, 2014 essay entitled, “Academics and Practitioners are Alike and Unlike: The Paradoxes of Academic-Practitioner Relationships.” The heart of their suggestion is this: “Imagine, instead, an approach to this gap that does not try to resolve or bridge it, but treats it as fundamentally important in itself for scholarly research and theorizing...[I]t treats academic-practitioner tensions as significant phenomena whose exploration can suggest important knowledge that is pertinent not only to academics and practitioners, but also to other relationships that include tensions of some sort.” (p. 1182)

If the authors are accurate, the tension between administrators and the scholarly community can become a source of hope and courage in the heightened uncivilized world of today (Christine Porath, *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace*, 2016). The authors identify five tension points between these two communities: differing logics, time dimensions, communication practices, rigor and relevance, and interests and incentives.

Precisely, the authors root their discussion within the framework of studies and theories related to “tensions, dialectics, and paradox.” (p. 1182) As Bartunek & Rynes seek to bring a

fresh perspective to the tension, their focus becomes what they identify as “connection.” (p. 1191) Connection is a refusal of choosing the path of selection, separation, integration, or transcendence. Quoting earlier studies by Seo et al. (2004), Bartunek & Rynes (2014, p. 1191) suggest connection “legitimizes dualities through demonstrating respect, empathy, and curiosity for differences. Rather than oscillating between them, unifying them, or merging and transcending dichotomies, connection seeks to embrace differences...using them to gain insights.” (p.101).

Connection acknowledges the necessity of both the rigor-from-academia and the relevance-for-administrator poles while not taking sides but admitting an interest in both perspectives throughout time. If both tribes can indeed admit interest in the “Other” community without seeking to minimize, and to lean into the ensuing tension it brings—imagine what synergy can move us toward greater mission pursuit? (Please, allow me to dream!)

Let me speak from within the “Relevance-for-administrator” tribe for the remaining time. I realize the insights generated from the resulting tensions, paradoxes, and dialectic of leaning into this kind of connection are numerous and significant. There are two particular spaces within my world as an administrator where the generative insight can be particularly shaping. I select these recognizing the vastness of choice opportunities. And I select these because I believe them to be acutely meaningful for this moment in our larger tribal history as a Seventh-day Adventist Church.

My particular area where I have invested my scholarly life has been in the area of leadership and organizational culture. I have perused Dr. David Weigley’s dissertation regarding

the development of new conference presidents. I have scanned the 2014 Dulles Report, “The State of the Church.” I have skimmed the 2015 “Advancing the Adventist Mission in North America” report regarding the restructuring of our church in North America. I have read through other documents regarding our church structure. There is a tremendous amount of heat and anxiety in our system. Emerging from these two elements of heat and anxiety, prominence will be given in two spaces of my life as an administrator. I will begin with the “doing” side of administrative life and end focused on the “being” side.

Noted scholar, Warren Bennis, and noted practitioner, Noel Tichy, joined forces a few years back to write a book entitled, *Judgment: How Winning Leaders Make Great Calls*. In this lengthy work, they provide a definition of judgement as “a contextually informed decision-making process...” (Kindle L68) and, as they understand it, it serves as “the essence of effective leadership.” Or, to restate, at the core of administrative leadership is decision-making and the core of decision-making is judgment. This space of decision-making in the life of an administrator requires the insights that come from the community that I stand before this evening. I want you to consider your own particular field—how can that field contribute to my understanding and process of decision-making? The danger of both our tribes is that we only see our contribution within the framework of our particular tribe. There is power that comes from tribal meetings like these. There must be this kind of meeting to sustain the future of the tribe. But as I see it, the strength of this tribe can serve the administrative branch of our ecclesiastical tribe by also speaking into our world as decision-makers.

There are a thousand variables involved in decision-making and these variables can be addressed beyond the default scope of social sciences. What do Scriptures say about decision-

making? What does our history as a Seventh-day Adventist Church say about decision making? Is there a “theology of decision-making” that can be articulated? Are there “best theologies” in the Christian faith tradition that can inform my own decision-making?

According to Seijts et al. (2015), one of the elements of judgment that must be activated is critical thinking. I wonder, “What do the scriptures say about critical thinking?” Now, I admit, the danger of this approach will be to do eisegesis—an ever-present danger. I am not asking this community to contribute in this way. But I firmly believe this community can contribute in so many ways to my understanding as an administrator about decision making. In the most recent issue of *Business Horizons*, authors Perry & Kahn (2018) ask the following questions: “How can executives, managers, marketers, consumers, and entrepreneurs operate confidently, successfully, and ethically in a culturally diverse global business environment? How do human values intersect with business practices?” (p. 811) Should not the communities of Biblical studies, historians, missiologists, and systematic theology inform these kinds of questions?

Within the framework of the business community, there is an example of this. Barbara Kellerman, professor at Harvard, published a book that republished various pieces of literature that she sensed addressed the question of leadership. The title of her work, *Leadership: Essential Selections on Power, Authority, and Influence*, attempts to bring the practitioner by the back door into the world of these three major components of leadership through the literature of Confucius, Plutarch, Locke, Tolstoy, Weber, Freud, and many others. And yet, I believe there is a space even more vital right now where we must hear from your tribe.

When Tichy & Bennis (2007) assert, “Good judgment depends on how you think as much as what you know,” (Tichy & Bennis 2007, Kindle L548), they invite investment in the “being” side of the administrative world. If, indeed, good judgment includes not just the accumulating of information but the development of the way I think, I realize the task of leading stands much larger than myself. And within our presidential system, this is crucial. Part of the role for the scholarly community in serving the wider tribe of the Seventh-day Adventist Church remains this needed task of teaching me how to develop my thinking, or, in the words of Professor Peter Vaill, to see *Learning as a Way of Being* (1996).

In her work, *Who Do We Choose To Be*, consultant and teacher Margaret Wheatley identifies a number of challenges that can emerge for leaders of social change. Among the list of eight, there is one specifically that I believe is important for this discussion—“Egotism grows as the leader receives admiration and devotion.” (Wheatley 2017, p. 165) If I, as an administrator, am going to improve my decision-making, if I am going to become a person who lives out learning as a way of being within the particular context of our heated and highly anxious Adventist system, it is imperative I realize there must be a certain degree of courage. And courage requires resistance. Let me address Wheatley’s observation within our particular context.

The *Church Manual* reads: “He [the conference president] stands at the head of the gospel ministry in the conference and is the chief elder, or overseer, of all the churches. He works for their spiritual welfare and counsels them regarding their activities and plans. He has access to all the churches and their services, business meetings, and boards, without vote unless granted by the church, or unless he is a member of that congregation. He may, by virtue

of his office, preside over any meeting of any church when necessary. He has access to all church records.” (2015, p. 31) As stated, the president officially is recognized as the “head” and “chief elder” of all churches in a local conference. The inference from this might be, despite all the posturing otherwise, that we are a presidential system. I don’t need to tell this tribe this—but there are inherent dangers with this kind of language within the *Church Manual*. Someone like a “secular” person, Margaret Wheatley, has identified some of those dangers.

Stephen P. Banks, in his edited work, *Dissent and the Failure of Leadership*, opens with these remarks, “More importantly, dissenters bring to decision-making fresh information, unpopular or non-normative perspectives and agendas, challenges to accepted ways of thinking and acting, opportunities to test and improve understandings.” (p. ix, x) As an organization that has developed well over one hundred years, the danger has become fully present that the person filling the role of a president, or, to broaden it a bit further, one of three officers, can easily be seduced by the role. This seduction includes a shift from recognizing that my identity is first and foremost in Jesus and now has become my position in what I call, “the unholy trinity.” While many in your tribe may argue against the notion of a headship theology, as an organizational practice, and as articulated in the *Church Manual*, we may be guilty of operating with a headship theology—with the president as the head.

It is vital, therefore, that those occupying such roles like myself, seek out this community to keep us humble and to develop us as people bearing first, the *Imago Dei*. In other words, this second space of our development as a human being in need of a Savior must find your voice as part of our development. To ignore the contributions this tribe can make to

my own development as a person, including the way I see the world, the windows from which I view, would be a grave mistake and would have solemn repercussions for us as a movement.

Let me end on a personal note. There was a time in my journey through our wider tribe where I was not sure I could continue within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Without going into depth in my story, I will say this: I found great solace, great strength, and great hope alongside renewed meaning from this community. To put it quite bluntly: it was the scholarly community that brought my heart, soul, and mind back into the Tribe—and for that, I thank you.

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