



**Hire the Best** is an excerpt from *Gardening in the Minefield: A Survival Guide for School Administrators* by Laurel Schmidt.  
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## *Hire the Best*

### *Getting Smarter About Selecting Staff*

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The day my district adopted class-size reduction, I was lounging on a beach in North Carolina, fitful, twitching, unaccustomed to the silence. Having survived the first year of my principalship, I was ready for a long spell of sloth. A week later I was back in my office, knee-deep in resumes and dialing for teachers. No beach time, no novels. Just an outrageous opportunity for gardening. In a mere six weeks, I would add eleven amazing people to my staff. It was the best unvacation a principal ever had.

For administrators in many districts, hiring has become a spectator sport as unions increasingly negotiate to control staffing. The New York City Teachers' Contract presents an arresting example of this upside-down world, where principals can't hire but must supervise and evaluate. When a vacancy occurs, tenured teachers from any school may apply, and the one with the most seniority gets the job. End of discussion. The principal is so marginalized that the transferring teacher is not even required to show up before the first day of school.

So, if you need to read this chapter, consider yourself lucky. If you get to fill three vacancies two weeks before school starts, stand up and cheer, because you're still in possession of the right to hire—the most powerful tool in the gardener's shed!

## Your Partners in Human Resources

The human resources department in your district is there to help—in fact, you can't get the job done without them. But they don't take hiring personally. They work in an office, on the receiving end of hundreds of phone calls a day, plus an avalanche of resumes and applications. Think pegs in holes and you get the goal of personnel.

*“I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist, and that there are as few as there are any other great artists. Teaching might even be the greatest of arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit.”*



—John Steinbeck

Whether you end up with the world's best teacher, or a nutcase with an expired emergency credential, their job is largely unchanged. Even if you get no teacher at all, they'll still be working in a relatively serene office, whereas, you could be facing twenty first graders, all shined up for the first day of school, and a substitute teacher whose usual

beat is high school calculus. Or escorting a professional musician-turned-substitute-teacher to an AP chemistry lab. It's your problem, and it's very personal. So roll up your sleeves, and hire, hire, hire. It's a contact sport!

## Paper Screening

The first step in hiring excellent staff is gleaning vital information hidden in a stack of resumes. You can whittle a field of potential candidates down to your Ten Most Desirable List in an hour or so if you study every application as if it were the Rosetta stone, and always read between the lines.

- The best indicator of what a person will do for you is what he has done elsewhere. If you see a half page of committee work and community service, you've got an activist on your hands. If you're looking for a spark plug, put this one in the interview pile.
- Focus on verifiable facts: positions held, responsibilities, dates, and salaries. Do the math. If there are significant gaps in the dates of employment or no dates at all, pay attention. If the last salary is significantly higher or lower than the job for which the person is applying, check it out. The phone is your friend in the pre-hiring process. If you have a hunch that something is amiss, contact some of the references or a former employer. A few minutes of detective work can help you thin the pile or zero in on a winner.

- Search for evidence of knowledge, skills, and ability in every possible place in the application, including reference letters, undergraduate minors, and special interests.
- Weigh the strengths but search for weaknesses—a narrow band of experience, no evidence of growth, no team work, or a half dozen experiences all in short succession. Marginal applicants mask deficiencies with ambiguities or omissions. I’ve yet to see “I was fired” gracing an application.
- Letters of recommendation are packed with clues about candidates. I read them with a yellow highlighter in hand, so I can mark key phrases for reference during an interview. First, check the dates. Three-year-old letters are not a good sign. Next, look for a letter from the most recent supervisor. If it’s missing, ask for it. Recommendations from a broad spectrum of colleagues indicate a robust professional life beyond the classroom. Finally, I look for passion and originality in letters of recommendation. Safe language may mean that the writer wouldn’t walk the plank for this person.

Don’t paper-screen alone. Recruit colleagues who know the requirements of the job to lend their eyes to the effort. They can spot things that you miss, and act as a sounding board while you think through the complex dynamics of adding a new person to the staff.

## Cold Calling

Now you have a stack of “good paper.” Don’t even think about hiring at this point—it could only lead to grief. When I finish paper screening, I sit down with the pile of “possibles,” pour a cup of coffee, and start dialing. Before you say “forget it,” you should know that the thought of calling a stranger used to horrify me. But during that summer hiring marathon, I learned to love it. Cold calls saved me hours of pointless interviews and kept good people from being scooped up by other districts. I’ve actually intercepted people on the brink of signing a contract and convinced them to see me first.

Cold calls provide a flesh-and-blood sense of the candidates, but they have to be efficient. I don’t want to spend the whole afternoon on the phone with one applicant, so I ask two or three questions that get to the heart of the matter, like:

- Tell me about your most recent teaching experience.
- How do you identify and respond to individual learning differences?
- What are the most important things you can do to help students succeed?

- How would your students or colleagues describe you? Your supervisor?
- Tell me about the strategies you use to help students succeed in \_\_\_\_\_.
- What experience have you had with inclusion of special education students?
- What assessment techniques have you used?
- Describe ways that you incorporate projects and hands-on activities in your curriculum.

Then I listen for key words, thinking versus jargon, and most of all, energy. I want an exciting professional dialogue. If I hear passion, eagerness, even irreverence, I'm all ears. And fingers. I scribble notes all over the application to capture my impressions. This process may go on for days before I get a good crop of candidates.

Cold calls give me first crack at shaping the candidate list. I can reject people for lots of reasons without a discussion. Only the winners in my dialing-for-dollars festival are invited to interview.

## Team Hiring

As a principal, I never hired alone. I hired teachers with teachers, clerks with my administrative assistants, custodians with my plant manager, assistant principals with staff and other administrators. I've also been on hiring teams that included parents, mentors, community representatives, and university colleagues.

When recruiting season rolled around, I extended invitations to the entire staff to join the hiring team, then crossed my fingers. I cringed at the thought of who might accept my offer, but I was determined to avoid the accusation that I was rigging the process. I also trolled for volunteers and got lucky every time. I hired with a team because I valued their expertise and dedication.

*“One measure of leadership is the caliber of people who choose to follow you.”*



—Dennis Peer

I wanted to build an outstanding staff, they wanted the best colleagues. We all refused to settle for second best, even when summer was long in the tooth. It was a very bonding experience.

After one spectacular interview, my team shouted, “don’t let her out of the building without a contract.” Their cries were music to my ears, because it meant they owned that hire. As a result, every newcomer on the staff had his or her own cheering section, starting from day one.

Another advantage of team hiring is that great teams attract great candidates. Smart candidates know that their colleagues can make or break them, so it's easier for them to evaluate your offer and say yes if they spend time with a half dozen of your brightest and best teachers, who clearly like you and each other. Team hiring is the most effective way to sell your school to outstanding applicants who may have three or four offers.

Of course, you are the only one who can make the final hiring decisions, because you bear the responsibility for supervision and evaluation of all employees. So take a few minutes to remind your hiring team that there may be times when one person will disagree with the rest of the team. Talk about why that might happen, and how they feel about it. You may need to agree that the dissenting voice on the team will not leave in a huff and bad-mouth a successful candidate in the faculty lounge. Then remind them that even if they are wild about a candidate, you may uncover information during the reference check that could disqualify the person. Again, that would be your judgment call, and they need to trust that you are doing what is best for the school.

## Preparing for Interviews

The challenge of interviewing is to get the best out of every candidate in a limited amount of time. Effective interviews are focused, strategic investigations that feel like collegial conversations. The first step in preparing for interviews is to think about what you need. I don't mean a first-grade teacher or a baseball coach. What do you need to build a strong, smart staff? Do you need another teacher-leader, some innovative collaborators, or shock troops?

Next, hone a list of legal questions exploring attitudes and practices that you consider deal makers or breakers. I recommend six to eight open-ended questions for a forty-five minute interview. Good questions allow candidates to think out loud, provide detailed answers, even raise questions of their own. That doesn't happen if you pepper them with yes or no questions at the rate of one per minute.

## Writing Effective Questions

If you're working with a team, they usually have their own high-priority questions that focus on philosophy, pedagogy, or instructional experience. You need to probe for ethics, strengths, and dedication—the heart of the candidate. Work together to craft a balanced set of questions, using this list to jump-start the process.

## Sample Questions for Teaching Candidates

- To begin, please tell us what we should know about your experience and training that make you an excellent candidate for this job.
- How do you recognize and respond to individual learning differences?
- How do you adjust your lessons so that all students can succeed?
- Tell us about your experience with school improvement work, curriculum development, teaming, multiage teaching, looping?
- What strategies are needed to help special education students succeed?
- What is your understanding of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and Section 504?
- What are some assessment strategies that you have used?
- Describe an effective assessment technique for limited-English speakers.
- How do you incorporate critical thinking into your teaching?
- Tell us about your approach to discipline.
- If we could walk into your classroom, what would we see?
- What is the most important thing you do as a teacher to help kids succeed?
- What special talents or skills would you bring to the staff?
- How do you communicate with the parents of your students?
- How do you alert parents to problems between reporting periods?
- How do you train and use volunteers?
- How do you engage students in service learning?
- What words would your students use to describe you?
- What is your greatest strength as a teacher?
- What is your area of greatest challenge?
- What is your focus for professional growth?
- What traits do you appreciate in colleagues and team members?
- We've come to the end of our questions. Is there anything else that you would like us to know about your qualifications for this job?
- Do you have any questions for us?

Throw in a few situational questions, such as

- Suppose a parent came to you insisting that the grade you gave their child is too low. How would you address their concern?

- A student is on a 504 plan for ADHD. What types of accommodations might you suggest to help the student focus during your class?
- You're teaching freshman composition but discover that several of your students speak English as a second language and need basic writing skills. What instructional strategies would you use to meet these students at their level and to ensure significant progress?

Tweak these questions to fit your needs, then give them the civil rights test.

## Keeping Your Questions Legal

Here's a simple is-it-legal test. Ask yourself: *Is the question related to the essential functions of the job?* Costly lawsuits have been filed against districts because interviewers innocently strayed into personal territory. Questions like: "Do you have any kids?" "When did you graduate from Akron High?" "That's an interesting name—is it Persian?" can be construed by applicants as a screen for discrimination. The job requirements must be the focus of the question. If not, rephrase or drop it. Train your team using these examples:

Legal: Do you have any commitments that would prevent you from staying for faculty meetings until five o'clock twice a month?

Not: Do you have young kids who need to be picked up at a certain time?

Legal: Do you have any health issues that would prevent you from carrying a full teaching load?

Not: Teaching is very stressful. Have you ever had psychological problems?

Legal: Tell us about your graduate studies at Bernadine College.

Not: I see you went to Bernadine College. Is that Catholic?

Legal: What languages do you speak or read fluently?

Not: Is Tagalog your native language?

## Writing Prompts

Written communication is a critical skill for teachers. In some communities, parents and teachers keep in touch almost exclusively through notes, newsletters, emails, and narratives. So you may want to include a writing sample in your hiring process. Ask candidates to come in thirty minutes before their in-



interview to complete the writing sample and emphasize that it's only a draft. Provide a computer and printer, since many of us are losing the knack of composing by hand—and the samples will be easier for your team to read.

### Sample Writing Prompts for Teaching Candidates

- Literacy is the goal of our school. Write a letter to parents giving them tips on helping their children strengthen literacy skills at home.
- You're starting a difficult unit of instruction. Write a letter to parents explaining what students will learn and how they will be assessed.
- You are having behavioral problems with a student. List the steps you would take to find a solution.
- Your students will be taking standardized tests/exit exams/finals next month. Write a letter to parents explaining the purpose of the tests, how they interface with your curriculum, and the best ways for students to prepare.
- Your department has revised its curriculum to reflect state standards. Write a letter to parents explaining the relationship between state standards and student success.

## Interviewing Techniques

Once you've polished your questions and writing prompts, have a member of your support staff confirm all appointments, so that you won't waste time waiting for no-shows. At the start of each interview, have the team introduce themselves, then let the candidate in on the game. Share your format—who will be asking the questions, who will be scribe, the number of questions you want to ask, and how much time is allotted for the whole process. Have a clock visible so candidates can budget their time. Tell applicants that there will be time at the end of the interview for them to share additional information and ask their own questions.

Interviews are highly subjective affairs, easily influenced by appearance, mannerisms, and verbal skills. Work against this inherent unfairness by asking all the applicants the same questions. If a clever person gives a superficial answer about assessment, and a quiet candidate is encyclopedic in her response, the team will be able to get beyond the glitter or lackluster and look at the evidence of knowledge. The team can make better decisions when they focus on the content and quality of the responses—in effect, comparing apples to apples.

I know it's been a good interview when the team members

- add to their professional knowledge through the process;
- treat the candidate as a resource by asking to know more;
- are eager to spend more time with the candidate;
- feel their time was well spent.

## Demonstration Lessons

My teams quickly learned that a good interview is just that—an interview. Talking is important, but expert instruction is a must. After an impressive interview, we still insisted on seeing the real thing, even if we had to raid the day-care center or teen club for an audience. Don't skip demonstration lessons. You owe it to the students who could spend 180 days—1,400 precious hours—with this candidate.

The simplest solution is to make a site visit. Go to the candidates' classes and see them in action. If that's not possible, round up a group of kids in the approximate age range of the position you're trying to fill. In the very heart of summer, I'd get the PTA president on the phone and beg her to find a dozen kids. The deal was that we would feed and entertain the kids for two hours, leaving the moms or baby-sitters unexpectedly free. Or you can arrange with a summer school principal to have a "guest teacher"—your candidate—take over for a period. We drove to other districts. We would have crossed state lines to get the right person.

Demonstration lessons aren't long—thirty to forty-five minutes is enough. Look for the ability to establish rapport, exert appropriate control, engage kids in a thinking process, and motivate them to learn. Most of the time demonstrations confirm your hunches. Occasionally, we saw a really bad lesson and were grateful for the chance to keep searching.

## Reference Checks

If you think you have a keeper, make haste carefully. Great candidates often interview with three or four districts at once, and become disenchanted by a series of delays. But you must check references. So be encouraging to strong candidates, and then get on the phone. If the personnel department offers to make the calls for you, say no. First of all, it may take days for them to get to your candidates. In the meantime, your dream teacher may say yes to a district that moves faster or seems more organized. More important, there's a lot to be learned in a five-minute call if you ask the right questions. Don't leave

this to chance. Ask your personnel office for a reference-check form or use these questions to help you make your final decision.

### **Key Questions for Reference Checks**

- When you call, introduce yourself, explain the purpose of the call, and ask if the person has five or ten minutes to spend with you.
- Confirm the relationship of the applicant to the reference. Some people actually list friends as references, knowing that some districts are just too busy to call.
- Ask about the responsibilities and performance of the candidate.
- Ask about strengths and weaknesses.
- Ask how a new supervisor could help this person improve.
- Ask for three words that would best characterize this person.
- Ask if there were attendance problems.
- Be direct. Ask if the person would rehire the candidate, given the opportunity.
- Thank the person for taking the time to speak with you.

If you still have some doubts, don't stop at the reference list. Call other people who may have vital information to share, such as a faculty member at the applicant's university. Take notes during each call and hang on to them. If your decision to hire or decline is ever challenged, you'll need them. Listen for pauses, vagueness, spin-doctoring, sidestepping. The speaker may be dying to unload this person. If you feel the answers are evasive, be blunt. The candidate and your students are hanging in the balance. This is your last chance to avoid a mistake.

Never skip reference checks. I've known principals who did, only to learn that their new addition to the staff had been fired in two other districts. The cost of hiring a dud skyrockets when you calculate the hours you'll devote to fruitless coaching, evaluating, and placating unhappy parents. Then you have to fill the position all over again after a grueling dismissal. A few phone calls can save a lot of grief.

## **Notifying Unsuccessful Candidates**

Calling the winners is a treat because it's the start of something wonderful. But informing the runners-up is difficult, especially if you've spent hours

interviewing and observing a promising candidate. You may be inclined to avoid this step, so get a system in place that works for you. The most efficient approach is to write a form letter and have your administrative assistant send it out immediately after you make your decision. Your letter will probably cross paths in the mail with a thank-you note from the hopeful candidate, since most are well trained in employment protocol. The letter should be generic—thank the candidate for applying, indicate that you have chosen a different person, and wish the person the best of luck in the profession. Include an invitation to call for more feedback on their interview. Your notes provide specific details on strengths and areas for growth that could help the candidate succeed the next time around.

Phone calls are faster and more personal, except for the machines that cheerfully answer at least half the time. Occasionally you owe the person—and the profession—a personal call. My team was horrified when a talented candidate told us she would have had a more successful first year if she'd had a better class—of kids. She went on to describe the racial and ethnic makeup of her students, in terms that bordered on racism. Later that day, I dialed, prayed for a machine, but got her in person. It was a hard conversation. She was shocked, but open enough to hear the perceptions of the team and mature enough to thank me for the feedback.

## Hiring Nonteaching Staff

Support staff are often the school's invisible army. They clean, cook, type, file, shelve, sort, supervise, mop brows, apply Band-Aids, mow, blow, and rake—largely unapplauded. It just takes a nurse with attendance problems or a cafeteria manager with a lousy sense of timing to throw an entire school into chaos, so hiring nonteaching staff deserves quality time and attention. If you routinely delegate support-staff interviews to others, it sends a message about hierarchy and status. “She’s too busy to interview custodians.” Remember, a good plant manager can reduce campus complaints and unhappiness by 50 percent. Although you may never get credit for a brilliant hire, you’ll certainly get the blame if the campus is littered and the rooms are unswept. Here are a few tips for making a success of it.

- Call in the experts. Hiring support staff may require knowledge outside your comfort zone. Quizzing a maintenance candidate about plumbing emergencies can make you feel like the great imposter. So invite the experts on campus who do that job to join the interview

team. They'll be able to spot a good answer from a clunker, and feel valued to be part of the process.

- Call the central office staff who train and supervise support staff. Ask them to sit in on the interviews, or if that's not possible, buy them a cup of coffee and find out what questions they'd ask. Many departments have sample interview questions that they'll gladly share. After all, they want a strong workforce, too.
- Central office managers are eager to share their expertise, and feel flattered when you ask for advice. In the process, you build a better working relationship for the times when you need their help. But most important, you lessen the possibility of hiring a dud. If you do make a mistake, you can undo it together.

## Hiring a Coadministrator

Selecting a coadministrator or assistant principal can be one of the most perilous tasks in the principal's job description. The relationship between coadministrators is complex and multifaceted—at times, eerily like a marriage. Coadministrators routinely share twelve-hour days, six days a week, filled with tough tasks and unexpected triumphs. It affects people in life-changing ways.

When coadministrators respect and trust each other, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Without it, leadership can disintegrate into arm wrestling or steely silence. A dysfunctional relationship between administrators can undermine the entire foundation of a learning community. How can you anticipate problems and avoid making a bad choice? Be realistic about the potential for problems. In your euphoria at the thought of having someone to ease your burden, you may forget that an assistant principal will need time, coaching, and evaluation. If you are one of the few principals in the country testing the coprincipal hypothesis, the challenge of sharing power equitably is even greater. Some of the barriers to coadministration are different core values, incompatible leadership styles, unclear roles, competition for the top spot, breakdown in communication, and a lack of commitment to mutual goals.

To clarify what you want, and what you can live with in a coadministrator, use the successful relationships in your life as a guide. Develop a list of the attributes you value in a partner or colleague—courage, loyalty, hard work, a sense of humor, responsibility, and putting kids first, even when it hurts.

Now spend some time thinking about how things can go wrong. What bugs you? What's your greatest weakness in a relationship? What's your greatest strength? What do you absolutely need to make sharing the burden an adventure rather than a chore?

Finally, think about your personal leadership style. Are you rule driven, with a love of structure, boundaries, and a clear game plan? Or do you need the big picture and a firm grip on the meaning and implications of the work before you can move forward? Is action your middle name—stop talking and get to the bottom line? Or are feelings at the top of your agenda—sharing, caring, and supporting must be the foundation for any meaningful work?

People who analyze leadership styles tend to identify four basic categories. You may have done a leadership exercise where participants divide themselves into north, south, east, or west categories based on a series of statements. Other sorting systems use idealist, strategist, tactician, and administrator. The labels don't matter. What's important is to identify your leadership bent and find complementary colleagues. Here are four general types. This is a rough guide, meant only to help you analyze your basic leadership instincts before embarking on the search for a partner.

### *Type 1: I Love People*

I-love-people types are fascinated with people. They are value driven, patient, respectful, personal, inspirational, intuitive. Most are comfortable working outside the system and show a high tolerance for ambiguity. They take criticism personally and avoid confrontation but enjoy the role of mentor and facilitator. Relationships shaped their goals.

### *Type 2: I Love Plans*

Plan people are fascinated with concepts and facts. They are criteria driven, fiercely independent, intellectual, mentally restless, serious, competitive, and loners. They rely on criteria and guidelines, use an objective, analytic approach to situations, and prefer ambiguity to routine tasks. These future-oriented persons shape their goals by long-range priorities and tasks.

### *Type 3: I Love a Challenge*

People who love a challenge are fascinated with action. They are impulsive risk takers, who live in the moment. They are also perfectionists, playful,

hands-on, and skillful. Easily bored with schedules and systems, they are excellent in a crisis, great problem solvers, flexible, and opportunity driven. They are gifted negotiators. Individualists, they need freedom to explore outside the box. They focus on immediate challenges as their goals.

#### *Type 4: I Love Systems*

Systems people love structure. They are workaholics who are goal driven, punctual, precise, productive, and efficient. Finishing is the most important part of the task. These people are excellent at providing tools for teams to get the job done, but they are traditionalists, who enjoy the security of routines and need order and predictability. Their goals are shaped by desire to refine, improve, and develop known systems in the near future.

Using these thumbnail sketches can help you define your comfort zone and identify must-have characteristics in a potential coadministrator. There is no single formula for success, but acknowledging the fundamental features of your own leadership style may help you strike an interesting balance with your partner, and avoid the oil-and-water approach to school administration. With this self-knowledge in hand, you're better equipped to sort through the candidates.

### **Looking for Mr./Ms./Mrs. Right**

During the hunt for a coadministrator, it's easy to be dazzled by a resume with a long list of accomplishments, especially if they end in "at Harvard University," followed by dates more recent than your last dental exam. If you need a dictionary to plow through the adjectives attributed to the aspirant, cast a jaundiced eye. Sometimes a candidate's apparent virtues are really the tip of an iceberg, and you're the *Titanic*. Here are some red flags. Watch for them.

#### *Workaholics*

People who routinely turn in seventy- to eighty-hour weeks may be unorganized, perfectionists, miserable in their personal lives, or totally lacking a personal life. None of those characteristics are about doing the job well, and they surely aren't the stuff of a good partner. You could find yourself on the receiving end of a load of resentment if you call it quits after a measly sixty hours, or draw the line at coming in on Saturday *and* Sunday. You could

knock yourself out and still be cast in the role of the sluggard because you can't live up to the expectations of a hyperactive partner.

### *“Her Door Is Always Open”*

A person who is always accessible may be someone who has great public relations instincts. It could also mean the person loses focus, can't prioritize, has problems with time management, or is too meek to say no. A coadministrator who's there for anyone, anytime, can undermine your efforts to set boundaries with the staff and community.

### *A Rising Star*

Stars are usually risk takers and go-getters, with impressive skills in self-promotion. You need to ask, “Is this person rising by virtue of accomplishments and personal character or, like a zeppelin, via hot air?” Some stars are just good talkers who can't deliver or aren't interested in getting their hands dirty. What they crave is an audience and a promotion. You may be seen as the competition, or a stepping stone on their way to the top. One aspiring administrator told a colleague, “I'm heading for the Hill (central office). If you get in my way, I'll flatten you!” Check references!

### *“Everyone Loves Him”*

If you hear that everyone loves your candidate, it may indicate a person who needs to please more than he needs to lead. You can put money down that he will cozy up to the whiners on the staff, with whom you've taken a hard line, and get plenty of strokes for being sympathetic. He'll do for staff what they should do for themselves, just to win points. People who want to be universally liked don't belong in administration. If you hire one, you may find yourself alone on the firing line, undermined from within, and the only one who doesn't “love” your coadministrator.

### *Just Leave It to Me*

Hyperresponsible people can shoulder huge amounts of responsibility as long as you stay out of the way. Their need for control drives them to charge ahead, starting and finishing projects all by themselves. This puts a strain on partners who prefer a thoughtful, collaborative approach. While getting the job done, they may run roughshod over other people's good ideas, wielding their power with little thought for staff or their coadministrator.



## *Born Competitors*

Some people must be the fastest, smartest, and best at everything, which makes it hard for them to co-anything. Competitive people need to take the credit, even if you did all the work. Or they play up their skills, and forget to mention yours. Comments like, “I’m the techy. She can’t even turn on a printer,” capture the essence of this relationship. Competitive colleagues sabotage their partners and portray themselves as the only thing keeping the ship afloat.

## *Finding the Right Fit*

### **Sample Questions for Coadministrators**

- What do you think qualifies you to succeed at this job?
- What makes a job satisfying to you?
- How do you feel about being closely or loosely supervised?
- What did you dislike about your most recent job?
- What did you do to change it?
- Tell us about a successful innovation that you initiated to help students.
- What are your strengths as a manager?
- What are your strengths as a leader?
- What are your strengths in curriculum and assessment?
- What is your supervisory style?
- Tell us about a time when you had to deal with a substandard employee. How did you assist and/or discipline the employee? How did the employee respond?
- Tell us about a career accomplishment of which you are most proud.
- What are your goals for the next two years? Five years?

Most districts hire administrators at the central-office level. The process is similar to hiring teachers, but the panels may be larger and the questions more complex, with the superintendent and union president involved in the final decision. Your role will vary from one district to another. You may sit on all the committees or just one. When the field narrows to the final candidates, advocate strongly for site visits. It’s critical to see potential partners on their home turf and to interview coworkers. And don’t be afraid to ask for additional interviews or informal conversations before a deal is struck. After all,

you're the one who will be living with this person fifty to sixty hours per week. Getting this right can make the difference between loving your job and eagerly scanning the classifieds.

## **Holding Out for the Best**

Finally, remember that hiring is a personal investment that affects every member of your school community. It requires research, focus, intuition, and courage. Never resort to drive-by hiring, no matter how desperate your situation seems. The payoff for your persistence is that kids get the best shot at learning, and the foundation of your school gets stronger. Hiring excellent teachers, support staff, or coadministrators is one of the supreme joys of gardening.