

National Title I Association

New Directors' Training
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Navigating SEA Relationships and Politics

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Lessons from the Trenches

- One director's perspective based on personal experiences.
- Background:
 - Started as Title I Specialist
 - Assumed Director role in 2010
 - State agency has 260+ staff, but has positions for over 500
 - Chief is appointed by Governor
 - Governor's term is for 4 years with no reelection



Lesson #1

Stay humble, stay hungry,
and always be the hardest
worker in the room.

- The Rock



Lesson #1 continued

- As state employees, we are entrusted by the public to consider their best interest and welfare in every decision.
- Your larger role is to understand the limitations *and* possibilities of federal requirements and maximize the use of resources for the academic achievement of all students.
- Ultimately, we work on behalf of “the kids.”



Lesson #2

Establish “brain trusts” to help inform important decisions.



Lesson #2 continued

- There is no way to know everything, no matter how long you've been in your position.
- Rely on and consider the experience, expertise, and perspectives of others in your agency.
- Create and call on teams of staff from your area and other areas to help share in decisions.
- And remember... be willing to let others be right.



Lesson #3

The right thing at the
wrong time is the
wrong thing.



Lesson #3 continued

- Every decision you make:
 - Impacts the entire agency and the state at large.
 - Has unintended consequences.
 - May change the way Title I operates in your state.
- Slow down and take the time to *think through* all of the:
 - Options and short- and long-term consequences.
 - Resources and time needed to accomplish the mission.
- **Maximize your political capital by knowing when to act.**



Lesson #4

The devil is *always*
in the details.



Lesson #4 continued

- Bridge the chasm between the big dreamers and nay-sayers – most “prudent” answers are somewhere in between.
- Map out what it will take to launch a new initiative or successfully change a policy or practice.
- Talk about it, sketch out the plan, put it away, and come back to it later.



Lesson #5

**Hire the best,
mitigate the rest.**



Lesson #5 continued

- People “are who they are” when they join your team. Be sure to:
 - Have as rigorous a hiring process as possible.
 - Cultivate a culture of continuous improvement and growth, but also acknowledge some of what doesn’ t work well may never change. Accept it.
 - Know your staff strengths and assign work accordingly.



Lesson #6

People are not
against you.

They are for themselves.



Lesson #6 continued

- When you have trouble understanding or accepting the decisions that are being made, or the dynamics of a team or professional relationships, remember...
 - Chances are the behavior is not personal.
 - Everyone is doing the best they can with the information they have.
 - We are all working toward our own sense of equilibrium in the work we do and the professional relationships we have.