

# Truisms for Principals

1. It is always about the students and the accomplishment of learning; everything else is secondary.
2. GOOD common sense trumps everything else.
3. Be a part of the team and work enthusiastically to make the vision of the superintendent and the goals of the district happen in your school.
4. YOU ARE A TEACHER FIRST and whatever else you are comes second. The full title is “principal teacher.” You are a teacher of teachers and need to grow your teaching skills as well as growing as a leader.
5. A few times each year go into a classroom and teach. Make sure that you have done everything that you expect your teachers to do in planning and teaching the lesson. Have one of your master teachers monitor your lesson and give you feedback. This one little thing alone will turn back a great deal of criticism from faculty members. However, this can be very risky. Make sure you do a great lesson. If you fail, the whole faculty will know and lose respect for you.
6. If you are doing professional development, then you should be there and participating like your teachers not standing in the rear of the room checking your phone, reading, or playing with your computer or devices. Teaching is the most important thing that you do to accomplish learning and you should whole-heartedly support training to make it better. Do not leave, or not attend, unless it is a real emergency.
7. One of the worse things that you can do is waste the time of your faculty. Do not have meetings just to have a meeting. Make sure meetings are announced in advance, well-planned without fluff or cutesy junk, quick and fast-paced, and are to the point. Schedule questions at the end and allow those who do not need to ask questions to leave. You will always have one or two teachers who will ask a myriad of questions just to impress the others on their knowledge of the subject or try to catch or embarrass you in front of the faculty. It doesn’t hurt to have some refreshments as well.
8. If it is important enough to have an after-school meeting, it should take precedence over everything else happening on the campus. Coaches should not be exempt unless they have no one to supervise kids during the time. Video the meeting and require them to view. If it was important enough to pull in the entire faculty, it is important enough for them to take their time to view the meeting. Remember, they are being paid for the extra work while the rest of your faculty is on their own time with children and families that need attention.
9. Have a plan. If you do not have your own plan, then you are part of someone else’s plan.
10. Expect the unexpected. No matter how carefully you plan, something will come “out of the blue.” Always be prepared. Have plans and checklists for everything. When everything is falling apart, keep your cool and follow your checklist. Also refer to Number 2.
11. Remember Murphy’s Law always applies. Mr. Murphy is either seated outside your office door or is at the DO looking at your numbers. He is always around, and you will have to deal with him.
12. Pay attention to the small things; they are the things that will cause you the greatest problems. The opposite is also true. Don’t major on minors or make mountains out of mole hills. Sometimes a problem is not as bad as it seems. The trick is in knowing how and when to handle the small things.
13. Everyone entering your office has an agenda. Your job is to find it and use it to benefit the school or prevent it from destroying the school. Some people are just plain mean and gleefully want you to fail for a wide variety of reasons.
14. Not everyone will love you. Someone will always be finding fault and criticizing. If you are making your school move forward, you will have one-third with you and one-third against you. You have to convince the one-third in the middle.
15. Politicians, some preachers, educators outside of your school, and media types are not your friends. They all have agendas that have nothing to do with improving education or your school and will not hesitate to “throw you under the bus” because destroying you enhances their resumes.
16. Beware of social media. It can destroy a lifetime of good work in minutes.
17. Schools and school people are easy targets. By our own policies, we do not fight back. Any bully with any agenda can and will attack you.
18. Everyone is an expert on school. Attendance sometime in life automatically makes one an authority.
19. Mistakes and dumb moves made in a school anywhere are applied to schools everywhere.

20. Your association with the school and education, in general, lasts a lifetime. For example, you will attend a lot of events after you retire, mostly funerals. They were your teachers and students and your presence and support is always appreciated.
21. Remember almost everyone is walking around with a quality movie camera and they will record and broadcast things that happen. Get a situation behind a closed door and out of public view as quickly as possible.
22. Adults create most of the problems in a school.
23. Everyone and anyone will lie to you. Do not lower yourself to their level. Truth is the best policy for a principal even if it hurts.
24. Make sure that you keep your supervisors informed when they should be informed. Don't go running to the district office with every little thing or you will look weak, indecisive, and ineffective. They do not want to run your school. *"If you want my help if you crash and burn on an issue, I had better been there for the take-off."* Dr. James O. Jennings, Superintendent Spartanburg School District Two.
25. Do not ever mislead your superiors; they have to know all of the facts regardless of who it hurts.
26. Be very careful in dealing with the opposite sex—teachers or students. Do not put yourself into a situation that fits someone else's agenda or compromises your integrity.
27. In most situations where you have to deal with an individual, if at all possible, have a trusted witness, usually an assistant principal, in the room with you.
28. Be careful with whom you talk to about school business or school people. In a small town, everyone is related.
29. Avoid trying to reason with large groups of angry people. Seek out the leaders for a talk and let them communicate with the others. Be careful or you will organize your own lynch mob.
30. Listen to everyone! You are not the smartest person in the building. Teachers, staff members, and students see things in a different light from you and may have the perfect solution to a problem.
31. Listen more than you talk; do not be doing other things while listening. Give the person your undivided attention.
32. Do not hesitate to admit you are wrong. Apologize if necessary. Sometimes eating crow will pay off in the future. You are not perfect and will make mistakes.
33. Correct in private; praise in public.
34. The real art of leadership is not only to say the right thing at the right time, but also to leave unsaid the wrong thing at a tempting moment.
35. Always give the credit to the teachers and students, even if it was your idea. Remember the Hebrew parable of "bread on the water." Any successes in the school will always reflect well on you.
36. When good things happen, remember to make it a point to thank the superintendent, district office, the board, and the faculty and staff for their support and help. Make them part of the celebration because, no matter how good you are as a principal, it is a team effort and nothing could be accomplished without their help. When bad things happen, you must take the blame alone because you are the leader and it looks really bad trying to spread the blame.
37. You are in charge. There must always be a separation between you, as the boss, and teachers and students. You are not one of the gang anymore.
38. Always have the highest expectations and demand the best from everyone. You are the head cheerleader for the school.
39. You will not reach nor be successful with every student (or teacher). You have to try your best to reach every one of them, but some have to experience life and learn the hard way. Almost all of them will eventually realize the importance of getting an education and improving themselves.
40. You can't fix stupid. Ignorant people can be educated. Stupid ones won't learn.
41. Usually when something stupid happens, it will involve the child of your loudest critic or a board member.
42. Students, teachers, parents and community members do not let the truth get in the way of a good, juicy story, especially about the school.
43. Your behavior in the community, while not at school, can and will reflect back on the job that you do in the school.
44. Make a decision! Sometimes it has to be quick and you will not have the time for careful consideration.
45. Bad planning by some else's part does not make it an emergency on your part.
46. When you start a project, take it to the end. Finish something! Complete the action and clear it from your desk.

47. Use the “between times.” You will be surprised at how many things you can get done in the minutes between different events or things on the schedule.
48. Do not discount the ability of special needs students. With the right teacher and educational programs they can succeed and improve your scores.
49. It is better to go ahead and handle a problem than trying to sugar-coat it. If you try to finesse a problem, it will roar back even worse. Handle it! Get it over and done! It may hurt a lot at the time, but that is far better than worrying about a problem while it hangs around for weeks. The opposite is also true. Sometimes it is better to ignore a problem than take action on it. Many times the person creating the problem, after a little time, will realize how ridiculous it sounds. Most times they will not even bother to tell you that they have let it go. You have to know when and when not to act.
50. In a contentious situation, remember if you followed policies and procedures, you are going to win—provided you do not lose your cool. Go into a computer mode and do not be baited into a bad situation. Two fools in a room never work to anyone’s benefit. Students, parents, and community members will try to bait you into a fight and doing or saying something stupid. Your words will be taken out of context and thrown back at you in a desperate attempt to avoid the consequences of their actions. (Refer to 21 above. You may be recorded and not know it.)
51. Always do a follow-up or an after-action report on an incident giving as much details as you can remember. Do not hesitate to be critical of your actions. Use it as a template to do better the next time and adjust your plans accordingly.
52. If you have the luxury, pick your fights—ones that you can win. In most instances you do not have a choice, and the fight is forced on you by others. If you win one, don’t take victory laps; quietly keep it to yourself and smile.
53. Don’t announce one thing and then do something else. Unless the announced action is a complete disaster, let it go forward and make adjustments after it starts and while in progress.
54. Proper planning and practice prevents poor performance.
55. Do not reject wild ideas as being unpractical. Look at them closely. Some parts of the ideas may be useful. Great ideas come from some unlikely sources.
56. Keep an eye on your fellow schools and principals and what they are doing. Cultivate a network of friends in those schools and talk to them on a regular basis. You may be able to “borrow” something from another school and do it successfully. You also may be able to avoid a problem by watching how a plan or program develops on their campus.
57. Just because something works in one school, does not mean that it will work in your school. Cultures and people can be very different even within the same district or county.
58. Don’t use excuses to justify bad performance. Learning to recognize the problem is the first step at solving it and preventing it from happening again.
59. *“Trust, but verify.”*—Ronald Reagan.
60. Don’t handle discipline in anger. Get the situation under control, if necessary get the persons causing the problem off campus, and delay final action until cooler heads prevail. Be proactive; if necessary, send the arguing students home before it erupts into a more serious problem. Often, other students will promote the argument and help it escalate.
61. If you find yourself enjoying doing discipline, go home and/or find something else to do.
62. The second quickest way to get fired is to mismanage money. For the first way, refer to Number 26.
63. In dealing with students, parents, persons in the community, and persons under your supervision (Refer to Number 37) be careful what you say in jest or when you use expressions that have a double meaning. Even though they are spoken in innocence, they can and will be reinterpreted, using the other meaning, and harm you.
64. A school with a toxic culture is like a flat tire. It has to be fixed or the school will not get far.
65. Don’t you limit, or allow others to limit, the unlimited potential of your students, teachers, or staff.
66. For those of you considering retirement, “It is better to wear out than rust out.”
67. Dr. Jimmy Littlefield, Retired Superintendent of Spartanburg School District One, quotes Acts 7:18 *“...another king arose which knew not Joseph.”* Do not expect to be remembered for too long after you retire. Schools and people move on.

68. On retirement, there are just so many holes that you can dig in the backyard. Initially, you will have a hard time adapting to retired life, but it will grow on you. One of the best feelings is to hear the school bus go by your house at 6:30 a.m. knowing someone else will be at school to greet it.
69. From a church sign, "You say you want change, but YOU WON'T change!" Change is difficult. (Refer to Number 82c below.)
70. Be careful in your contacts and interactions with board members. You do not know their true agenda and they may use something you say or do to undercut the superintendent or someone else. You should be truthful and answer their questions, but not volunteer information. You should then report that contact and the conversation to the superintendent so they do not get blindsided. Information given to the board should come from the superintendent. Superintendents serve at the pleasure of the board and do not have the same job protections as you. Let them deal with district politics and do your job following policy.
71. If you put something on email (or on social media) you might as well announce it on the intercom and engrave it on the walls. Everyone will know it and it won't go away because someone somewhere has a record of it.
72. There are only five things that you can do to improve your school. First, you must establish a culture that supports teaching and learning. Second, time must be used efficiently and effectively; never waste a minute. Third, your curriculum must support and be taught to the level of the standards. Fourth, you must monitor student progress constantly and have in place an effective data system so that students, teachers, and parents know where a student stands in accomplishment of the standards and you know where your school is in regards to accomplishing its achievement goals. Fifth, you must have an effective professional development program in place for everyone in the building that supports classroom performance and student achievement.
73. What you think and hope is happening in your classrooms, may be something else altogether. Unless you get into the classrooms and observe on a regular basis, you will never know.
74. The good that you do is forgotten in thirty minutes and your mistakes live forever. What have you done for me lately? It takes a lot of good, and a long time, to cover failure or bad decisions. Sometimes it requires a job or career change.
75. Try to not bring bad things home with you.
76. Celebrate your successes as a school.
77. Honor and reward academic achievement as you do athletic successes.
78. Never be satisfied with good enough. *"Absolutely nothing is good enough if it can be made better, and better is never good enough if it can be made best."* Mr. Ozzie Smith, Baseball Hall of Fame Speech
79. Seek out activities and events that are good and participate in those. You need to see your students functioning in a positive situation to balance the negative that you constantly see and handle.
80. Eventually, even years later, the Right will prevail and Truth will win. You will read the name of an old problem in the newspaper or see a report on the evening news and know that the Right finally prevailed.
81. You will never know the influence that you have had or the good that you have done on this side of eternity. An educator's—especially a principal's--rewards are few and far between in this life.
82. Carol Ann Tomlinson in her book, The Differentiated Classroom (Second edition; ASCD) has some great quotes. These not only apply to teachers, but to principals as well.
  - a. *Every child is entitled to the promise of a teacher's optimism, enthusiasm, time, and energy.*
  - b. *Like students, teachers grow best when moderately challenged. Waiting until conditions are ideal or until you are sure of yourself yields lethargy, not growth.*
  - c. *Teachers change either because they see the light or because they feel the heat.*
  - d. *If curriculum and instruction are the heart and limbs of sound teaching, then classroom management is the central nervous system. Without the heart, there is no life, but without the nervous system, there is no function.*

## Quote from Theodore Roosevelt's "Man in the Arena" Speech (1910)

*"It is not the critic who counts: not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, and comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."*

## General Colin Powell's Rules

### **Rule 1: It Ain't as Bad as You Think! It Will Look Better in the Morning!**

*It is true how many events that seem so devastating have in them the seeds of renewal if we look for them. Give it some time and perspective. You can deal with it! You have made it this far!*

You will spend many sleepless nights, but IT IS NEVER AS BAD as it seems in the wee hours of the morning.

### **Rule 2: Get Mad Then Get Over It!**

*OK, you're mad—maybe even righteously so! So, instead of letting anger destroy you, use it to make constructive change in the organization. Acknowledge and accept that you are angry and then use your anger in an effective manner for your own benefit and the benefit of others.*

Be careful about letting teachers and students see you angry. Keep your cool.

### **Rule 3: Avoid Having Your Ego so Close to your Position that When Your Position Falls, Your Ego Goes With It!**

*Your position is what you do to live, it is not who you are. Leaders that have "their egos in check" can lead from wherever they are. For them, the position was just a means to an end—not the end itself. You can always lead!*

### **Rule 4: It can be done!**

*Leaders are about making things happen. They continually ask, Why Not, when faced with the improbable. While one approach may not work, it can be done another way. Find the other way to make it happen!*

### **Rule 5: Be Careful What You Choose! You May Get It!**

*Don't be rash with your decisions. You will have to live with your decisions, and many decisions have unintended consequences. This also includes the people you choose to associate with. Choose them wisely too!*

### **Rule 6: Don't Let Adverse Facts Stand in the Way of a Good Decision.**

*Whoever said leadership was easy! If they did, they were not truthful. Leaders sometimes have to stand alone (or with the support of only a few) on what they know to be right. They have to make difficult, right decisions that may cost them some relationships. Fortunately, the truth has a way of surfacing with time. Leaders we now admire such as Dr. Martin Luther King and President Abraham Lincoln had plenty of people who hated them in their times. Make the right decision, take the heat, and let time and good results prove you right!*

**Rule 7: You Can't Make Someone Else's Decisions! You Shouldn't Let Someone Else Make Yours!**

*While good leaders listen and consider all perspectives, they ultimately make their own decisions and take responsibility for their choices. If it does not feel, seem, or smell right, it may not be right. Make your own decision about what is in your own best interests. Accept your good decisions. Learn from your mistakes.*

**Rule 8: Check Small Things!**

*While leaders live in the "big picture" world they should never forget the importance of the details and ensure they are attended to. It is often the small things, or little foxes as King Solomon put it, that ruins the best laid plans. Don't forget the details!*

**Rule 9: Share Credit!** *It is probably our American culture but "leader worship" seems engrained in us. The CEO's get all of the attention and most of the credit for a company's success. While leaders are indispensable to success, the truth is the leader did not achieve all that success by him or herself. Success is built on the talents of the women and men working with the leader to achieve the vision. Without them, the leader would not be successful. So, share the credit with others! Some of it rightfully belongs to them anyway.*

**Rule 10: Remain calm! Be kind!** *It is hard for a leader to inspire confidence and resilience in others if he cannot keep his composure in times of difficulty. It is hard for a leader to garner loyalty from others if he treats them badly. Remain calm and be kind and your team will climb mountains for you!*

**Rule 11: Have a Vision! Be Demanding!** *Lost sometimes in the language of inclusion, employee participation, servant leadership, motivation, etc. is the fact that leaders are demanding when it comes to fulfilling the vision. Effective leaders do not accept poor performance and mediocre results. They hold people accountable for their performance. It is talented people working diligently that achieve success. Be clear about what needs to be done and hold people accountable for fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.*

**Rule 12: Don't take counsel of your fears or naysayers!** *Fear can be paralyzing and there will always be those who do not support a leader or have her best interests at heart no matter how hard she tries to work effectively with them. Tune out your fears and the uninformed naysayers. You will be more successful.*

**Rule 13: Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier!** *There is something to be said for the leader who refuses to accept defeat and continues to adapt as necessary until she is successful. She is a force to be reckoned with and she will positively impact others. Remain optimistic and your leadership effectiveness will multiply.*

# Poem Used by Dorman High School Coach Dale Evans

*Anonymous*

Stick to the task, until it sticks to you.  
Beginners are many, Enders are few.  
Honor, glory, power, and praise  
Always goes to the one who stays.  
Stick to the task, until it sticks to you.  
Bend with it, sweat with it, smile with it too.  
For out of the bend, the sweat and the smile  
Will come life's victories after a while.

## Winners Blueprint for Achievement

*By William Arthur Ward*

BELIEVE while others are doubting.  
PLAN while others are playing.  
STUDY while others are sleeping.  
DECIDE while others are delaying.  
PREPARE while others are daydreaming.  
BEGIN while others are procrastinating.  
WORK while others are wishing.  
SAVE while others are wasting.  
LISTEN while others are talking.  
SMILE while others are frowning.  
COMMEND while others are criticizing.  
PERSIST while others are quitting.

## Just Try

*University Teaching Hospital School for Special Needs*

Try.  
Try more.  
Try one more time.  
Try it a little differently.  
Try it again tomorrow.  
Try and ask for help.  
Try to find someone who has done it.  
Try to determine what is working.  
Just keep trying.