

The fates seemed to be calling. I was unhappy in the job I was in and another district had not found the right person for a middle school principalship after three tries. The only problem was that the job was in the district in which my husband worked. We had a strong marriage, but could it last if we worked even more closely together?

It was time to find out. I threw my hat into the ring and expected that I'd at least get a courtesy interview. And so I did. I met at Central Office with a small group of the traditional first round team members. Parent, Board member, a few teachers, another principal, curriculum director, and the superintendent. It was an easy, get to know you type of meeting. I was able to make them laugh when I explained that having my husband as the principal of the 4th, 5th, and 6th graders was an advantage. If he did not have them adequately prepared for 7th grade, I'd send them back to him. We talked about how middle schoolers were "hormones with sneakers" and how the new State testing would impact curricula. We shared stories about the difficulties of communicating and the need for teachers to gain better computer skills. At the end of the meeting, I felt I would get a call to come in for the second interview. Usually this is more grueling and includes a visit to the school and a wider variety of audience members.

Sure enough, the call came for the second interview a few days later. The superintendent's secretary asked me to meet some community members at the high school library at 10 a.m. the next day. No problem. Since my husband had been an administrator there for a year now, I felt that I knew enough about the school and district. The middle school, which was the former high school, was almost 125 years old and had many of the issues faced by its age and original purpose. I could handle that. There were 350 students in 7th and 8th grade. This is a wonderful number; a principal can get to know all of them. The staff was a mixture of senior staff and newbies which makes for a terrific balance of experience and enthusiasm. Given what I knew, I prepared my portfolio. I ensured that my red and white suit (the colors of the middle school) was in good order. A carefully prepared question sheet was my final task. What did I want to know about the school, district, and expectations for the middle school principal? Done! Ready for round two.

I arrived at 9:45 a.m. at the high school parking lot giving myself enough time to get into the library and prepare for the interview. Unsure if there was another person being interviewed first, I waited in the lobby for an escort to the library. While standing there mentally reviewing my notes, I was approached by a man with a large, fancy camera. He politely introduced himself as a reporter for the local newspaper and asked if he could take my photo before the meeting began. I laughed and said, "I think you must be mistaken. I'm just here for an interview." He shook his head and empathically stated, "I hope not. Because we've already got the headline and story ready to go. Curtis New AMS Principal."

With my mouth glancing off the floor, I heard my name and turned to face the Superintendent. "Patricia, did you forget to tell Ms. Curtis that she's the new principal?" asked the reporter.

"Oh god! I was supposed to call and let you know, but I got so busy. Don't worry though; we have lots of people here to meet you today. They are so happy that the search is over," gushed Patricia, my new superintendent.

I walked into the library feeling as if I'd been teleported to another universe. My current employer knew I was being interviewed and was ready to release me from my contract. My husband was just fine with me coming to work in his crazy district. I loved middle school and the smaller size of the student body. But really? One quick interview and I was it? I knew that I couldn't say, "Time Out!" There were about 50 people sitting waiting for me to be introduced. I swallowed hard and smiled. I was the new principal. No idea of salary or contract details. Never been in the school. Didn't get to meet the staff or students. But here I was. Then I thought back to my husband's interview a year before. He too had been interviewed at the high school. When he was done with the oral part, the superintendent (a different one) told him there was a written component. He gave my husband a piece of paper and asked him to write on the topic of parent participation. Since the superintendent had to leave for another meeting, and it was already evening, he asked my husband to leave the writing sample on the towel dispenser in the main boys' bathroom. So, Gary sat in empty high school writing and when done walked into a messy boys' bathroom and put his carefully crafted effort on the top of the dispenser as asked. His last thoughts as he walked out were, "You've got to be kidding! No one will believe me."

But on that day as I walked up the aisle to be introduced as the new principal, I believed him. This district was one for the books.