

SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

BOOTH KYLE, HEAD OF SCHOOL, INDIAN CREEK SCHOOL



What's your first memory of being a new Head of School?

That would be my first day, Monday July 1 when the faculty and staff at Indian Creek had a welcome coffee/breakfast to welcome me. I figured it would be me and the other full-year administrators but there were several classroom teachers that took the time to drive in to say hello and be a part of my first day. I was really touched that so many folks took the time to say hello. It was fun and a real symbol of how welcoming the Indian Creek School community is.

Why did you decide on a career in education?

Truth be told, I had a feeling in college. I enrolled in a few classes in the Education department and while I stopped short of majoring or minoring in Education, I enjoyed those classes more than any others. In addition to that, I was a collegiate athlete and back then I had an inkling that coaching would be fun. Then, my first post-college job was as a door-to-door salesman selling long distance telephone service to small businesses (remember MCI?). As a salesman, I had some flexibility in my schedule and when my high school soccer coach asked me if I wanted to coach the JV team at my alma mater, I jumped at it. That spring the school posted a job for an admissions intern to begin in the summer, and the rest is history.



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What experiences and preparation helped you become a head of school?

I believe this with a ton of conviction; I feel well prepared for the Head of School role because of my background in admissions and financial aid. Enrollment professionals learn how to interact effectively with all the constituencies of a school. I had to know all about the school, worked with administrative and teaching colleagues from across the school, interacted with prospective parents, met tons of students/applicants, came to know those families with longer connections to the school, and learned a lot about the business side of school. In addition to that preparation, I had the good fortune to have some terrific mentoring by the Head of School at my previous institution. He modeled what effective leadership looks and feels like, and he also allowed me to grow by steadily increasing my responsibilities and always offering helpful feedback. That combination of a really comprehensive professional experience and a high-quality mentoring situation contributed to me feeling really well prepared for this.

Who was your best teacher?

Wow, this is a tough one, as several come to mind. I really owe a lot to two of my high school coaches, Dusty Richard and Henry Fox. I learned a lot by just being on their teams. But my 9th grade English teacher, Susan Hodgson, gave me a gift that has been a huge asset in college, and in every job I've had since (especially now); she gave me a ton of confidence in my ability to write and express myself with the written word. She was a great teacher. Ms. Hodgson was always upbeat, knew how to reach all the kids in the class, offered constructive feedback, and was a really caring and kind person. Early on in my freshman year, she read one of my essays aloud to the class, citing it as good example of narrative story telling. I couldn't believe that she was sharing that with my classmates and it gave me so much confidence. Since then, I've always enjoyed writing. In my line of work, where all forms of communication are important, I feel fortunate to have had a great teacher like Ms. Hodgson. She laid way more groundwork than she probably realizes and was a true difference maker for me.



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What experiences as an educator have brought you the most joy?

I was a rowing coach for about 20 years, and I loved my teams. I'm an optimist at heart, and boy did I always believe in my kids! Belief in them brought me boatloads of joy, no pun intended. My wife used to tease me about my rowing obsession because she'd find scraps of paper around the house with different lineups and workout descriptions written on them that were indecipherable to anyone but me. Watching any of my crews practice hard, and then executing a really sophisticated race plan was so satisfying and celebrating their successes with them was the joy. And a huge part of that was enjoying the trust and friendship that is inherent in a successful team. I really miss that camaraderie, but I know enough from my own experiences as a young athlete that those memories last a long time and the lessons learned impact you forever. What do you think is the most important innovation that independent schools must adapt? I think we need to innovate around our schedule and calendar. These days we hear all the time about the financial model; the financial model can be adjusted if the calendar changes. With that said, I'm a big fan of balance, and I'm also interested in more year-round learning. I don't like models where kids are grinding all the time. I do like models where kids can have space to explore their interests, go deep, enjoy what they're doing, and through that learn how to commit and work hard. I think the answer is to distribute learning opportunities more evenly throughout a daily and/or annual calendar. I'd love to see schools move towards "summer terms" that can be used for deep dives, place-based learning, and enrichment opportunities that take the pressure off having to cram everything into our typical school schedule.

If you weren't serving as a Head of School, what would you be doing instead, or what would your life be like?

I'd be a full-time rowing coach or a farmer. As an educator, I was my best self when I was on the water with my crews. Rowing is a complicated sport and it pushed me to be an effective problem-solver and I think I modeled commitment and effort for my teams. One other huge benefit to being a rowing coach was related to the primary competitive goal - winning a race. There was lots of failure involved! And so I learned a lot. I suppose that if I ever tired of all that competition, I'd try my hand at farming. I don't know a darn thing about being a farmer, but I do love being outdoors and the beauty of self-sufficiency has an appealing simplicity to it. I've always felt like there's a piece of land somewhere in Vermont that would be a great place to be. However, there's more than enough for me to do here before that happens. I have to get started on changing that school calendar!