

SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH....

RANDAL BROWN, HEAD OF SCHOOL, WORCESTER PREPARATORY SCHOOL

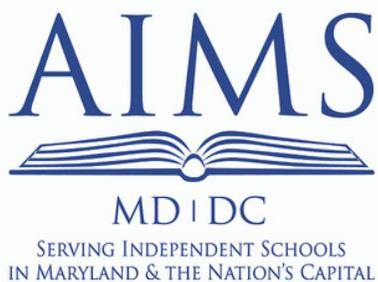


What's your first memory of being a Head of School?

In 2010 I was fortunate to assume the headship at All Saints Episcopal School in Tyler, Texas. I did not really feel the full weight and responsibility of the role until my formal installation by the Suffragan Bishop of Texas in front of the full school community just before Labor Day. As they always do in school transitions, things had begun quietly enough in early July. But soon enough you recognize that the order of complexity of the position is many times greater than the school role you previously held.

Why did you decide on a career in education?

In my late teen years, working in an independent school as a teacher really began to interest me. It resulted from a crisis and turning point in my life. I was at a high-powered day school in Nashville where I was profoundly unhappy and not academically productive. I landed at a boarding school for my last two years of high school, Webb School, in Bell Buckle, Tennessee, which is as rural as it sounds and about an hour south of Nashville. It proved the perfect fit. I became a much happier and academically productive kid. College doors opened for me that would not have had I not made a change. At Webb, I began to build strong relationships with instructors who pushed me to achieve. In classes like English and history I began to think about how I might present the material differently and began to often project myself into a class in the role of teacher.



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

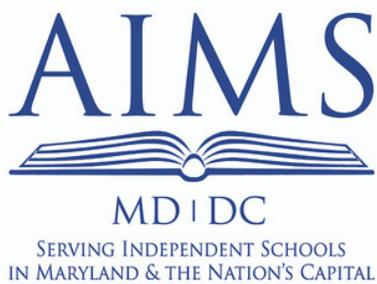
Over a twenty-five year career in independent schools, I spent over half of that time working in high-powered PK - 12 day schools and a bit less than half working in small, rural boarding schools. I held a variety of roles....history teacher, dormitory head, dean of students, and fundraiser. Experience is a great teacher, especially if it comes in a variety of roles and requires one to adapt to different school cultures. These years allowed me to amass a lot of expertise.

Beyond my school career, I spent 23 years as an officer in the Army National Guard (commissioned through an Army ROTC scholarship) and retired as a lieutenant colonel in 2014. Over that period of time I had a lot of excellent training, including the completion of the Command & General Staff College while a major. I got very good at managing complex decision cycles...ensuring maximum staff input so that the best and most up-to-date information was used to drive timely decisions. This has translated well in pushing school admin teams or faculty committees through collaborative decision making. Executing decision cycles that advance programs and include a lot of buy-in by participants is a real personal strength.

Along with this came the very practical lessons that come with three command tours, one as a battery commander of over 80 soldiers in Baghdad, Iraq for a year. Command in the combat zone teaches some hard lessonsyou have to grow into the role quickly.

Who was your best teacher?

Mrs. Sandra Truitt, my Honors Pre-Calculus teacher was my best teacher. My rapport with her was not great, but she was demanding and knew how to get the best out of her students and would not settle for less. The class nearly buried me, but I got through it or she got me through it, take your pick.



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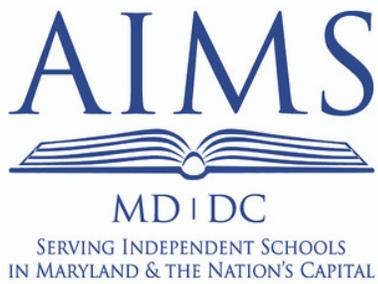
What experiences as a school head brought you the most joy?

Early in my career it was the work with students. Seeing students stretch intellectually and find success was always rewarding. Doing something new in the classroom and seeing students respond well felt great. As a head of school, fundraising and hiring well seem to bring the most joy. I get a real rush when I hire someone who can really move the needle for my school. Similarly, strategizing for capital gifts, cultivating donors, and then securing a large capital gift that will really impact your school feels great.

What parts of the work were the most difficult?

Working with boards and or major donors at a school can bring the most joy or result in the greatest frustration. I sometimes refer to this as managing the mismatch -- the professional mismatch between the head and the trustees. In theory the head is the subject matter expert on independent schools, while trustees offer expertise in a wide variety of fields in everything but independent schools. The board respects the head's turf and stays out of operations.....in theory, but often not practice. All of a head's time in that situation is directed at pushing the board back up to 30,000 feet.

I have a unique comparison here with a long career in the Army. As a battalion commander I worked for a colonel who commanded the brigade. He had previously commanded a battalion a lot like mine and knew exactly what it entailed. He was in an excellent position to judge if my mission had gotten real tough and thus I need support, or whether my unit performance was weak in a low bar task and thus he needed to grab me by the short hairs. Commanders work for commanders and do not micromanage. My boss will tell me what to do (mission) but now how to do it. I had plenty of freedom of action in that regard. The professional mismatch referenced in schools is not present. That mismatch really only exists at the head to board level.



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What lessons have you learned about leadership?

Formidable skills of diplomacy are incredibly valuable and this is especially so as you advance in your school career. I have heard some experts describe conflict resolution as the essential skill in the industry. Do not shrink from the tough problems confronting your school; meet them head on. These tend to be the obvious problems clear to everyone. You get credit for taking them on and in doing so one creates a positive gravitational pull that tends to bring along everyone else in the organization. Let subordinates know they have your trust and support. Never be shy about publicly praising their hard work or good ideas. Do not micromanage.

If you were not serving as a head of school, what would you be doing instead, or what would your life be like?

I would have probably been a career Army officer (active). Thirty years ago it was the path not taken. I commissioned at the end of the Cold War and was given a choice between active or reserve forces duty and chose the latter and a career in independent schools.