

Beth to teach the class. I knew that Beth would be perfect for the job and I figured that my boss would be grateful for me helping her out of a tight spot.

I should have kept my mouth shut. Beth *did* turn out to be perfect for the job. The problem was that my first impression of the dean turned out to be wrong. She was petty and vindictive. She seemed to see it as her professional responsibility to make Beth miserable. She harassed her continually.

Who do you think got blamed for this? The guy who urged Beth to take the job as a favor to his boss. In other words, I, her fiancé, got blamed.

But Beth's patience was not unlimited. Eventually, she quit and filed a grievance against the dean.

Guess what happened? The dean lost her punching bag and went in search of a new one. Who do you think would be a good candidate for this position? How about the guy who'd recommended the woman who ended up filing a grievance against her? In other words, the dean went after me.

Fortunately, my first semester's evaluation had been completed before Beth had filed her grievance. I got a stellar evaluation. But the next semester, I got a terrible one. And that was on top of having to endure daily harassment from my boss.

This brings us to Lesson #4.

Lesson #4: Join the union.

And don't just join. Make sure to get to develop a good relationship with your union leaders and, especially, your grievance representative.

I did just that at Cypress College. And guess what happened? The college vice president himself joined the committee evaluating my performance. He knew that the dean was way out of line.

In the end, both the dean and I ended up leaving Cypress. I left because my wife got a job offer in northern California that she couldn't refuse. When I left Cypress, both the president and the vice president of gave me wonderful letters of recommendation. What happened to the dean? Her contract was not renewed and she had to find another job.

I'd cultivated a good relationship with the top administrators at Cypress. That was a lesson that I'd learned at my previous job, at CCSN. It was a lesson I'd learned the hard way.

In my memoir, *Teaching Amidst the Neon Palm Trees*, there is a scene in which I make a speech to a group of faculty and administrators. I describe how I developed an innovative study abroad program and got funding for economically-disadvantaged students to participate. I received thunderous applause from the faculty. But Vice President Silverman was furious at me. Why? Because I'd violated lesson #5.

Lesson #5: Keep the top administrators in the loop.

I'd done all sorts of innovative things. I'd kept my department chair informed of everything. But I'd assumed that the top administrators had more important things to do than get progress reports from me. I was dead wrong.

Stop and think for a second. Why on earth would people be attracted to the job of running a large, complex organization like a college? Logically speaking, it's probably because they like being in charge.

If you're the type of person who likes to be in charge and to get credit for the achievements of the team of people working for you, then you'd probably be annoyed with Lee Miller for doing a bunch of stuff without informing you. You'd probably be especially annoyed if the newspapers were interviewing him and he didn't mention how grateful he was for all the help you'd given him.

What help? If I hadn't bothered to tell the president or vice president what I'd been up to, then of course, they'd given me no help. But that's beside the point. Part of the game of politics is that you need to swallow your pride and publicly thank your boss for all the help that s/he's given you—even if s/he didn't give you any help at all.

That's lesson #6.

Lesson #6: Make your boss look good.

Remember, your goal is not to become famous. Your goal is to survive academic politics so that you can be the best instructor you can be. Survival sometimes require you to make the people in power look good.

That's not fair. But it is smart. If you help to buttress the egos of people who are higher up the food chain, they're less likely to eat you and more likely to leave you alone. And if they leave you alone, it means you are free to be an excellent instructor. That is your goal, isn't it?

Lesson #7: Cultivate media contacts.

Those in power respect power. It's a simple fact of life. The media have the power to advance the careers or ruin the careers of people in power—including educational administrators.

My mistake at CCSN was not that I managed to get in the newspapers a lot. My mistake was that I neglected to thank my boss for his support (even though he gave me none).

Vice President Silverman was afraid of the press. One day he spent an hour yelling at me for no good reason and then suddenly stopped and told me, "Natalie Patton had better never get word of this." Natalie Patton was the education reporter for the local newspaper. After Silverman decided to fire me, Natalie was the first person I called.

Also, a reporter on the *Los Angeles Times* was quite helpful in my ordeal with the dean at Cypress College. I didn't need to tell the reporter what a menace to educators the dean was. I just needed to suggest that he interview her.

The reporter did a great job of presenting accurately what the dean had said to him. She came across as a lunatic. Sometimes, if you give someone enough rope, she hangs herself.

I've saved the most important lesson for last.

Lesson #8: Keep a sense of perspective and a positive attitude.

Academic politics is apt to drive you nuts if you take it too seriously. A wise man once said, "Who you are speaks louder to me than anything you can say."

Lee Ryan Miller, Ph.D., is a motivational speaker and the author of three books. He has taught at many universities and community colleges during his academic career. Currently, he teaches political science part-time at California State University, Stanislaus and is working on a novel. You may visit his website at www.LeeRyanMiller.com.

A guide to acronyms and organizations in higher education

AAUP - American Association of University Professors

A nationwide professional association that acts as a union in a small number of California institutions (i.e. has collective bargaining rights).

CCA/CTA/NEA - Community College Association of the California Teachers Association of the National Education Association. A union.

CCC/CFT/AFT - Community College Council of the California Federation of Teachers of the American Federation of Teachers. A union.

CCCI - California Community College Independents.

A consortium of union locals unaffiliated with any of the larger unions.

CPFA - California Part-time Faculty Association.

A statewide professional association for non-tenure-track community college faculty that does not seek collective bargaining rights, acting as networking support for part-timers within their unions.

CWA - Communication Workers of America.

A union; has collective bargaining units for part-time faculty in a few districts.

FACCC - Faculty Association of California Community Colleges.

A statewide professional association that does not seek collective bargaining rights, engaged in legislative advocacy and professional support for community college faculty.

related groups:

AFL-CIO - American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations.

A national union coalition with which AFT and CWA, but not NEA, are affiliated. Contrary to urban legend, AFL-CIO is **not** "The Teamsters." In fact, the Teamsters recently dis-affiliated from AFL-CIO.

CFA/CTA/NEA - California Faculty Association/CTA/NEA. Also affiliated with AAUP and SEIU. Represents all faculty in the California State University system.

UC-AFT - University Council -AFT. Also affiliated with CFT. Represents non-tenure-track (non-Senate) faculty in the University of California system.