

7 Ways to Foster an Amazing Professional Relationship with Your Head of School

by Barbara Barron

1. Make your Head of School look good.

Always. Be prepared. Do your homework and make sure your Head has all the available info prior to any ask. If the prospects say no, at least it won't be because you botched the prep.

2. No surprises!

I learned this from my first Head of School. If you get wind of something, make sure s/he hears about it from you.

3. Good news first; bad news immediately.

This may be a corollary to #2. When you get a nice donation or a sweet note from a donor, share it first with your Head. It might be just the thing s/he needs to recover from a challenging meeting. Share the good. But even more importantly, give her/him the bad news right away. Don't sit on it, hoping it'll fade. Get out of your chair and go knock on the door.

4. Develop an early warning system.

Make sure you know who is coming to the event. Give your Head a cheat sheet. But then stick close by. Remember the scene in "The Devil Wears Prada" (ha! another Prada reference!) when Miranda Priestly blanks on the name of a VIP's and Andy (her beleaguered 2nd assistant) pulls it out in the nick of time? Be her.

5. Do the heavy lifting.

Maybe it's drafting a first pass at an important thank you letter when your Head is especially pressed for time. Or apologizing early for a mistake made in your department so it never escalates. Or redirecting an ask that's going off the rails. (Once my Head got so caught up thanking the donors that he said (and I kid you not), "You've been so great I couldn't possibly ask for more." To which, I quipped, "Well, he can't but I will!". Big laugh. And a second gift. Save.

6. Be the cheerleader.

Especially in the 4th quarter. For many of us, that means the spring. When everyone is tired, your Head may be feeling discouraged, and you've already asked nearly everyone you have. Stay positive. Stay at it. I've had some fantastic success in May and June. How about you?

7. Take care of yourself.

Dip into the pools of support you have among your team, your colleagues, your friends, and families. Have a laugh. Or take a walk. Replenish your own source, however you do that.

Can you think of more? Tweet at Barbara Barron @BBAdvancement and we'll share your good ideas with the community. Or simply visit www.BarbaraBarron.com.