

# 10 top tips for teachers heading into school senior leadership teams

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## **Be aware that you may now have different priorities**

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You won't have the same responsibilities as classroom teachers with full teaching timetables, but don't forget what it feels like to be in their shoes.

It's important to help them to do the best job they can, rather than making it tougher. If you receive feedback from any source that you are adding to staff stress rather than supporting them with the demanding elements of their role, then you need to do some hard thinking about how you can redress this. The most important thing in any school is the quality of the pupils' experience, and you can influence that positively by working with and through – not against – classroom teachers.

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## **Be credible in the classroom**

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Continue to be a good classroom practitioner and a positive role model for your team. Try not to reduce the time you spend on planning and marking or miss deadlines, for example. This can be harder than it sounds because you will have many other demands on your time, but be mindful of when you're at risk of putting the quality of your lessons, and your relationship with the pupils you teach, insufficiently high on your list of priorities.

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## **Your relationship with middle leaders is crucial**

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Middle leaders have a critical influence on the quality of teaching, learning and pastoral care in their departments and sections, as well as the morale of their teams and how willing their team members are to expend "discretionary effort".

If they get the right balance of support and challenge from you, this will act as a model for what you need them to do with the individual members of their team. Too much support, and people don't always achieve all they can. On the other hand, too much challenge and they can feel frustrated, overwhelmed and angry. You need to lift, not protect, them. Be sensitive to any indications about how staff are feeling, and actively seek feedback from them to help you to get the balance right.

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## **Be visible and approachable**

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Don't spend breaks and lunchtimes catching up with emails. Be out and about, and a positive presence around the school, reaffirming key messages about behaviour and building relationships with staff and pupils.

Always support extra-curricular activities too. Make sure the pupils know you are interested in their experiences and achievements beyond the classroom, and that the staff running such activities see that you value their contribution.

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## **Make sure lesson observations aren't just seen as another way to pass judgement**

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Lesson observations should be an opportunity to reflect, open a dialogue and learn for both the observed and the observer. Encourage others to observe you and be receptive to their criticism and advice to improve your own practice. Make sure staff know when an idea you've picked up from someone else (and that could be a trainee teacher or an NQT, as well as a more experienced practitioner) has helped you to develop your thinking and practice.

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## **Make sure you're reflective and keep up to date with current thinking in the world of education**

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You could set yourself a target – read one good current book about education in each of the longer school holidays, and talk about what you've read/thought/learned, for example. Starting a staff educational library, if there isn't one already, is a good way to encourage this.

Reading blogs is also an excellent way of keeping up to speed, and writing blogs – for example, about your leadership journey – will help you to reflect and learn. Use Twitter, if you don't already, for educational professional development, and encourage others (especially middle leaders) to do the same. Follow [@SLTchat](#) and join the debates each Sunday evening (#SLTchat) where a range of issues especially relevant to senior leaders are thrashed out. Follow the blogs of some of the inspiring senior leaders out there, such as [@johntomsett](#), [@headguruteacher](#), [@leadinglearner](#) and [@kevbartle](#).

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## **Continue to grow as a professional**

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Develop your self-awareness by actively seeking and acting on constructive criticism from those whose professional judgement you trust. Which skills or areas of professional knowledge do you need to strengthen? How can you go about this? Show that you are aware that, however experienced you are, you never “crack it”.

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## **Support the headteacher**

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This involves being honest. The worst thing for any head is to be surrounded by people who don't tell them the truth. If the senior leaders don't do so, and the governing body aren't sufficiently on the ball, then who will? It has to be done positively, sensitively, constructively and professionally, but it has to be done. Show empathy, but be honest – your head should respect you for it.

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## **Everyone needs praise**

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Sometimes this will involve making sure your headteacher feels valued when they do something particularly well. Don't assume that the head is above the need for encouragement and positive reinforcement – no one is.

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## **Don't be afraid of aiming high**

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If you can see yourself in the role of a headteacher, and it's a challenge you think you will relish, go for it. It is the best job in the school. It isn't easy, but it offers you the opportunity to make a difference on a scale unlike any you've known before – and that's a difference to pupils, staff and parents.

That's a privilege.

*Jill Berry is an education consultant. This blog is based on a chapter she wrote in the forthcoming book [Don't Change the Light Bulbs](#).*