

STAFF POLICY: RESIGNATION PROCEDURES

Background

Historically most school staffing contracts require a teacher to give one term's written notice of their intention to resign. In practice this means that the staff member needs to give 50 teaching days of notice [10 x teaching weeks x 5 days per week] indicating that they wish to resign from the employment of a school. Whether this time honoured tradition will stand up in a Labour Court is another matter, signed contract or not!

In practice, resignations become an emotional issue from both the principal's side and the staff member's side:

- The staff member has often agonized over the decision to resign and it has taken courage to meet with the principal to hand in his / her resignation.
- The headmaster is often the "last to know" and will probably struggle to find a suitable replacement in the 50 allotted days.

The result is that tension arises and more often than not the teacher feels that he / she has left the school on less than ideal terms. Both parties, for different reasons, often feel that the departure could have been handled in a better way.

The purpose of the suggested policy below is to sketch the ideal way a resignation could be handled and in doing so, the inevitable resignation pain can be minimised. Hopefully, the school and the teacher can part company on good terms!

Some general context to a resignation which a staff member may not be aware of:

- In the ideal employment arrangement, a staff member should be at a school for four to five years before reassessing where they intend to teach for the next five years. This enables the teacher to glean as much as possible about the workings of the school and at the same time be able to plough back into the school which has employed them. It is thus a two-way process of "give and take". Both parties benefit from this arrangement.
- The decision to resign is rarely a step taken in haste. Normally there is a lengthy process under way before the decision is arrived at.
- Seasons come and seasons go. God, in the fullness of time, does reallocate his teachers to different vineyards. Finding replacement staff is one of the key aspects of a principal's job description. It is thus not an unexpected shock to him / her.
- What is termed "white envelope season" [resignation time for the following year] in the South African context usually takes place from the end of May till the end of July. This will enable the principal to widely advertise the vacant post, compile a short list from the applications, conduct the necessary interviews and appoint the successful candidate. This gives the successful candidate time to work their notice period.
- Last minute, surprise resignations have major timetable implications for a High School. Timetables are usually well advanced by the end of the third term. Hence a resignation handed in at the end of September is difficult.
- Leaving a school in the middle of an academic year is not in the best interests of the learners. Where possible, staff should plan their exit for the end of the academic year [Dec in the SA context].

Suggested policy for the teacher who is considering a resignation. If a teacher wishes to resign this how he / she should consider doing it [the ideal way]. This is the advice I would give to the teacher.

1. Inform the principal at the very start of the process and invite him / her to walk the road with you as they hear God for the next season of their life. No principal worth his / her salt will hold this decision against you if you decide to remain at the school and not resign. In fact, to the contrary, there are many character qualities in you which will be affirmed by bringing the principal into the decision-making process right from the start.
2. Teachers forget that principals communicate with one another before making an appointment. Please do not place your current school principal in the difficult position of hearing about your intended resignation from your prospective employer! This will leave a sour taste in his / her mouth!
3. Finish the year if at all possible – make your resignation effective as from 31 December if at all possible.
4. Arrange a private meeting with the principal and hand over a signed resignation letter at this meeting. Do not just leave it in his / her in-tray. If this is a difficult exercise, then take your best friend on the staff with you for moral support. Be honest in your resignation letter about why you are resigning. Take time in crafting an honourable resignation letter as opposed to a few hurriedly scribbled lines.
5. Do not take your colleagues into your confidence before you have met with the principal. Too often this type of confidential information finds its way to the parent body before the principal is even aware of the resignation.
6. After handing in your resignation allow the principal at least a week to inform the staff [at the next staff meeting], inform the parents of the vacancy [usually by email], inform the School Board / Governing Body as well.
7. The ideal resignation period is two terms as it allows a teacher employed at another school to resign without leaving the other school in the lurch.

Exceptions

These do happen when a spouse is suddenly transferred to another city or if the working conditions become unbearable. In similar vein, the principal might ask you to resign immediately if he / she has a replacement in the wings or from his / her side and it is in the best interests of the school and teacher to accept a resignation with a short notice period.

Conclusion

Both parties need to work hard at creating an environment in which staff can leave with dignity and honour. One never knows in the big scheme of things that a staff member may consider returning to the school they have just left. The climate should be of such a nature that the principal would welcome an application from the resigning teacher at any stage in the future.

Feb 2020

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