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## Gray Hair and a Doctorate: A Prerequisite to Being a Good Education Administrator?

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## Academic Leadership Journal

Traditionally, from a very young age, children are taught to respect their elders. This tradition tends to carry over to their adult lives when they enter the work arena. Age means experience and knowledge, and these young pups who come in wagging their tails and jumping around, so full of excitement and new ideas, must be taught to calm down and control themselves. Let's face it; we don't need any messes on the carpet. Nowhere is this contrast between young energy and older experience more evident than in the world of academia.

I currently hold an upper level administrative position at a small private college. At the age of 30, this is almost unheard of, and the people I meet in the higher education field don't quite know what to do with me. How can I possibly be qualified for a position like this? And without a Ph.D.? Surely there must be some mistake. Clearly, the president of the college must have lost his mind for a moment.

Believe me ladies and gentlemen, I have often asked myself what I could possibly have to offer. Am I really qualified to do this job? What was I thinking accepting an offer like this? What was my boss thinking offering it to me? Can I really hold my own with people who have been in the field of higher education for years? And believe me, no combination of letters and punctuation has ever been as scary to me as Ph.D. Yikes! Perhaps I should have stuck to the kiddie pool instead of diving head first into the deep end. Would someone please get me my floaties? I might be drowning here!

To be honest, I never really thought about whether or not I was too young for this job until I was six months into it and our institution was having a site visit from an unnamed accrediting body. The site team—all men over 55 and, yes, all with gray hair—mentioned the management team, particularly that one member, who, while having the right educational background, even without the doctorate (grudgingly admitted), did not have enough experience to be in that aforementioned upper level administrative position. After stamping my feet and pulling my hair and shouting “I am too old enough (metaphorically speaking of course),” I really started to wonder if they were right. Perhaps I didn't have enough experience, and maybe I was doing my institution a disservice by sticking around.

But then I started to pay attention. Yes, I was (or am) inexperienced, and yes, I made (or make) the mistakes that only the young can make, but I believe I have a lot of good ideas. And on occasion, I noticed that an idea of mine would be thrown out, only to be accepted later when presented by a gray-haired Ph.D. And so the question was born in my head, though I'm sure it's already been asked by countless others: Is age really a prerequisite to being a good education administrator? Couldn't these higher-level positions benefit from an infusion of young blood?

Don't get me wrong. I think that age and experience, especially in academia, commands respect. And of course the time and effort that people put into a doctorate program, and the knowledge gained from it, cannot be ignored. But I also feel that some younger people can perform just as well in administration. Yes, they may make more mistakes, but so does anyone who is new to a position. Most importantly, they can have a new and fresh perspective on the often stodgy and stuffy academic world;

they can breathe new life into an institution; and they can help avert the entropy that unfortunately tends to plague educational systems.

So, twenty plus years from now, when I'm the one with the gray hair and doctorate, I'll try to remember that I once wrote a particular article in my youth. And I will hopefully pause in my estimation of that young, know-it-all whippersnapper with all the big ideas and cut her some slack.

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