



Career Confidential is ready with answers



Educators who confront sticky workplace issues have found a trusted confidant in Career Confidential blogger Phyllis Fagell.

Since last spring, Phyllis Fagell has written more than three dozen weekly Career Confidential blogs posted at kappanonline.org. Why focus on workplace issues for educators? Because kids aren't the only ones who come to school every day. The adults working in schools have their own unique challenges — and not all of them are related to students.

“When something goes wrong at work, that can play an outsize role in a person's life. Someone may have a very rich family life, tons of friends, and lots of support, but if something goes wrong at work, that can overshadow everything. It can really throw someone off balance,” Fagell said.

Fagell draws on her extensive experience as a school counselor and therapist to help educators think through some options for responding to tricky situations in their work life. In her day job, Fagell is the school counselor at the Sheridan School in Washington, D.C., and a licensed clinical professional counselor at Chrysalis Group, Inc., in Bethesda, Md. In addition to Career Confidential, she regularly writes about parenting, counseling, and education for *The Washington Post*.

In the past year, she said she's learned that issues that seem fairly small on the surface can become loaded very quickly, such as how to use all-staff emails, communication between administrators and teachers, and chain of command issues. Regardless of what kind of school they work in or where it's located, educators confront some common themes. “People are very preoccupied with interpersonal dynamics, with anything that smacks of inequity, with disconnects between what they know children need and the directions they receive from people further removed from the classroom,” she said.

Fagell said she receives more questions from men than women. “Women are more open with each other and more likely to crowdsource an answer. Men see this as an opportunity to take advantage of an anonymous forum where they can reveal a vulnerability,” she said.

She also gets a disproportionate number of questions from principals and superintendents. “I think that's because it's lonely at the top. They are more isolated, and it can be risky to ask subordinates for advice. They feel safer seeking outside counsel,” she said.

Fagell has learned a few lessons herself from writing about the experience of other educators. “Listening to multiple perspectives of people describing essentially the same situation has really helped me assume positive intent when I hear something from my own peers and to fully consider someone else's perspective,” she said.

Submit your questions to her at careerconfidential@pdkintl.org. All names and schools will remain confidential. No identifying information will be included in the published questions and answers.

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