



THE GOLDEN SLATE

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Question the Process, Not the Person

By Heather Thomas, CATA President Elect

Over the course of my 31-year career, I have had 13 principals, nine vice principals, seven superintendents, six assistant state FFA advisors, four regional supervisors, three state advisors, and too many school site faculty changes to count. When a new hire enters the scene, there is always a great deal of chit-chat about the strengths and weaknesses of the candidate. We stalk his or her social media account and call teachers at other schools to learn more about the individual's background. This meticulous gathering of information is inherent to the role of an agricultural teacher, as we find ourselves frequently interacting with state staff, site administration, ASB directors, and athletic directors—far more frequently than our colleagues across the campus. Our reactions to new hires vary—sometimes we're excited, other times less so.

Rumors about candidates and the hiring process are common whenever there's a new hire, whether at the local or state level. In my experience, the times when we have been most unhappy about a new hire stem not from the individual selected, but rather from flaws in the hiring process itself. When input from stakeholders is disregarded, candidate recommendations are overlooked, and vetting is insufficient, it often leads to an adversarial working environment that does not benefit anyone.

As we embark on the new school year, I have a challenge for all of us facing faculty and administration changes: let's give new hires the benefit of the doubt. Most people applying for a job intend to do the best job possible to help students, teachers, schools, or FFA regions succeed. As I stated before, if dissatisfaction arises from a hire, it's typically due to the process rather than the individual.

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With new administration, I am proactive. Our school site has had five new principals in the past decade. I have met with each new principal to familiarize them with our program and its historical context, which informs them of many of our established procedures not only within our department but also school-wide. I invite them into my classroom or barn to take part in student activities and FFA meetings. I ask them to judge our local contests. How they react to these invitations tells me a lot about their priorities and support.

When it comes to new hires, let their performance on the job be the basis for your opinion. Let's approach this new school year with an open-minded perspective, embracing the potential that each new hire brings. By focusing on their actions and contributions, we can collectively create a supportive environment that fosters growth and success for all involved.

