

BEYOND THE BOARDROOM

Editor Jeff D'Alessio's weekly chat with a local boss about leadership, management style and more

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My single favorite moment of all-time in this job was ... finally returning full-time with students after COVID.

My one unbreakable rule of the workplace is ... assume positive intentions. As with the students I used to work with directly, I frame my leadership by choosing to believe people are doing the best that they can do or the best that they know how to do.

This means that people can learn to do better and ultimately be better in the workplace.

My philosophy on meetings is ... they're a necessary part of any large organization. Nobody seems to want them, but as soon as you don't have them, somebody wants them.

The hardest thing about being a leader is ... accepting that you can't satisfy everyone.

The three adjectives I hope my staff would use to describe me are ... effective, reasonable and fun.

I can't live without my ... wife. On my office walls, you'll find ... pictures of my family. Some Illini gear. Way too many Lego displays.

When it comes to a professional role model is ... one is Rosemary Gonzalez-Pinnick. She was one of my first principals and supervisors when I went into school administration. Everything about her was servant leadership.

In the same way, another is Urbana's Dr. Preston Williams.

I became frugal ... only after years of marriage. I avoid clutter and unnecessary items, and I prefer to have fewer but nicer things in my life.

If I could trade places for a week with any other business person in town, I wouldn't mind switching with ... Luke Boyce of Flyover Film Studios, or any of the folks with the movie studios in Rantoul. Our district offices share a building with the Rantoul-based movie studios, and it just seems like an enjoyable industry to be part of. Plus, I would definitely cast myself in my movies or at least a TV commercial.

The single-most important question I ask job candidates during interviews is ... what is it that gives your professional life purpose and meaning?

The first thing I do when I get to work most days is ... check emails and start making my list of priorities for the day.

For lunch ... I really enjoy my lunches with the Rantoul Exchange Club. This is usually the one time of the week where I stop and eat, and I really enjoy the other people in the club.

I wind down after work by ...

having dinner with my wife and kids. I love when all of us are together at the same time, and this, sadly, happens less and less as the kids get older.

The last luxury in which I indulged was ... our family going to Chicago to see "Hamilton," followed by dinner at a steakhouse. I might still be paying for this.

The most beneficial college class I took was ... African American History, taught by Dr. Juliet Walker at UIUC. I was studying to be a high school social studies teacher, and this course really opened my eyes to start to realize how much I didn't actually know.

A close second was History of the Civil War, taught by Dr. Robert Johannsen at UIUC. I was in awe of his knowledge of 19th century U.S. history.

As for the last good book I read ... I'm usually reading one fiction and one non-fiction at the same time. For non-fiction, "The Lincolns: A Portrait of Marriage," by Daniel Epstein.

For fiction, "Violeta," by Isabel Allende.

I'm up and at 'em every day by ... 5 a.m.

My exercise routine consists of ... walking the dog. Whenever I drive one of my children to swim practice, I usually use the elliptical. I try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise daily.

The first job I ever had was ...

delivering the Moline Daily Dispatch at an apartment complex near my home. Back then, I had to go door-to-door to collect from subscribers, which seems like a big expectation for an 11-year-old.

Monday to Friday was an afternoon edition, no problem. Saturday and Sunday mornings were a struggle. I'm not sure my dad wanted that job.

The worst job I ever had was ... working several summers at a local Pepsi bottling plant on the production line. My primary job was putting the cases of returned, dirty glass bottles onto the line.

It was gross what came in with those bottles.



Growing up the son of two lifelong educators, SCOTT WOODS had an inkling early on that he'd also pursue a career in the family business. "But I never saw myself doing anything but being a teacher," says the Moline native, who has worked in Illinois public schools for the past 27 years. ¶ As it turned out, most of those have been as a boss — principal at Aurora's Herget Middle School and Urbana Middle School, district bilingual director and principal and Rantoul's JW Eater Junior High, and since the summer of 2021, superintendent of the Rantoul City Schools district, succeeding Michelle Ramage upon her retirement. ¶ Woods, who got his start in teaching at Rantoul Township High School, also married a proud ex-Eagle, Rachel. ¶ The holder of three degrees from the University of Illinois took time out to answer questions from Editor Jeff D'Alessio in the 237th installment of our weekly speed read spotlighting leaders of organizations big and small.

Robin Scholz/The News-Gazette

