

# Mutiny against the leadership

Ann Arkey County Schools, Amok, Ky.

If you wanted to find out who is in charge of the transportation department at Ann Arkey County Schools, the answer you'd get would depend on whom you ask.

"I've been at this operation for 35 years, so I pretty much run the show," says Donny Growler, a veteran driver and self-appointed "team leader."

"Since no one else has been getting the job done, I've been forced to take the reins," says P.M. Strictly, shop foreman.

"I'm the boss, applesauce!" says Judy Judge, a kindergartner and bus passenger.

Technically, the person in charge of the transportation department is Hugh Shymann, who joined the district as transportation supervisor two years ago. At the time, a man named Benson Hermetic was director of transportation.

Hermetic was as mysterious as he was intimidating. He was rarely seen outside of his office, but when he was, you

would hope he didn't see you as well for fear of a verbal attack.

Anyone who needed to contact him would slip a note under his door. They did not e-mail Hermetic, because Hermetic did not have and was decidedly against having a computer. Fixed in his old-fashioned mindset, the man resisted any change to the operation that involved computerization.

District officials brought in Shymann, who had 14 years of experience at a neighboring county, with hopes that he'd be able to implement some updates and increase efficiency. He wouldn't get that chance until Hermetic finally accepted a long-standing retirement package from the district at the end of last school year.

However, the rest of the transportation department — free from the tyranny of the Hermetic era — seized the opportunity to do their own thing. Factions formed, and leaders, such as Growler and Strictly, rose up. Most staffers remain

suspicious of Shymann, who came in from a neighboring county.

To make matters worse, the majority of drivers are unable to control their more rowdy students, such as the aforementioned Judge, and the buses have become increasingly chaotic. This resultant environment has led to several accidents, including one in which a driver was hit in the head by an airborne apple and veered off the road into a ditch.

Hermetic, it seems, objected to student management training, which he felt was unnecessary and referred to as "hippie nonsense."

## Fleet Facts

Buses	232
Total staff	281
Schools served	40
Students transported daily	Too rowdy to count
Average driver wages	\$13.25

## Ask the experts

**C**hristopher Andrews, a partner at Transportation Advisory Services, offered the following advice to the good people at Ann Arkey County Schools. Transportation Advisory Services has offices in Walworth, N.Y., and Orlando, Fla. Andrews can be reached at (800) 858-9615.

Ann Arkey County Schools has a problem that we occasionally come across — ineffective leadership. We would start by interviewing everyone within the transportation department, as well as building principals, central office administrators and PTA/PTO representatives. We feel it is important to involve all stakeholders in the process, as some may provide insights not shared by others.

As part of the interview process, we look for those parts of the program that are working well, as well as those that are experiencing problems. It is easier to build upon successes than failures.

Upon completion of the interviews, we would sit down with the administration to outline a plan of action. To start with, we would recommend monthly transportation staff meetings, organized and run by Hugh Shymann, the supervisor. To instill some sense of teamwork, however, we would suggest that at the first meeting he ask for input from the staff concerning topics they would like covered at future meetings. An important part of each meeting would

be student discipline training, along with the implementation of a student discipline policy. Mr. Growler, the veteran driver and self-appointed "team leader," should be asked to gather information about driver-training programs to bring into the meetings and possibly present them, if qualified.

In an effort to recognize the work that the mechanics perform, the shop foreman should be asked to gather information on the ASE bus mechanic certification program, with the objective of getting him and his staff the testing, certification and recognition they deserve. He should also be asked to sit down monthly with the supervisor to review maintenance activities of the previous month and lay out his plan for activities for the following month.

The supervisor should also be looking at the variety of transportation software that is available to make his job more efficient and then present his findings to the administration.

The administration should remind the supervisor that he is responsible for gaining control of this department. While he should be given their support, they should also give him a timeline for implementing all of these recommendations over a 90- to 120-day period. Failure to meet this timeline should have detailed consequences.