

Step-by-step

Building a story from scratch

By Bobby Hawthorne
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The Essentials

You'll need all of this and more.

Biographical info.

Personality info.

The interview.

The appearances.

The follow-up

Biographical information

- Childhood
- College
- Teaching experience
- Extracurricular activities
- Awards/honors

Personality information

- Heroes
- Hobbies
- Favorite movie, musicians, book
- Pet peeves
- Guests at fantasy dinner party
- Guilty pleasures

Defining moments

- Highs? Lows?
- How did you get here from there?
- Best? Worst?

Show, don't tell

- Physical features
- Study body language
- Personal environment
- Listen for dialogue

Meet the new principal

- Grew up in Brooklyn
- Attended New York University
- Degree physics
- Taught physics
- Coached soccer for 19 years
- Pennsylvania high school coach of the year, 1993 and 1996; numerous other awards; two state titles
- Principal, Homestead HS, Pittsburgh, PA, 1999-2004

Meet the new principal, Dave Eggers

- Heroes: His mother, Winston Churchill, Albert Einstein
- Hobbies: Racquetball, biking, music
- Movies: Casablanca, The Godfather
- Books: To Kill A Mockingbird, Cider House Rules
- Musicians: Frank Sinatra, The Beatles
- Pet peeves: Elective ignorance
- Guests at fantasy dinner party: Magellan, John Lennon, Humphrey Bogart, Leonardo da Vinci
- Guilty pleasures: Ben & Jerry's Coffee Toffee ice cream, show tunes

Defining moments

High: soccer championships

Low: daughter's illness

Lessons learned

There's a difference between a problem and a hassle

Surprise! We have a new principal!!!

We have a new principal this year and his name is Dave Eggers, who came here from Homestead High School where he was principal from 1999-2004.

“I am impressed with the school as a whole, the faculty and student body in particular,” he said. “The community has made me and my family feel very welcome, and I’m thrilled to be part of the Sunset High family.”

And he's totally awesome!

Eggers grew up in Brooklyn, New York and graduated from New York University with a degree in physics. He also coached soccer in Pennsylvania and was the 1993 and 1996 Pennsylvania High School Coach of the Year.

His heroes include his mother, Winston Churchill and Albert Einstein, and his favorite movies are “Casablanca” and “The Godfather.”

He said his pet peeve is elective ignorance, whatever that means. So when you see our new principal in the halls, stop by and say “hi.” He’s awesome!

‘My job is to...’

Dave Eggers knows the difference between a hassle and a problem. A hassle is a lost wallet, a scratched CD, a car that won't start in the morning.

A problem, well, that's getting ahead of ourselves.

In his third week as principal at Sunset High, Eggers says he knows and understands that students' lives are complicated, occasionally difficult.

“School isn't easy,” he said, looking over his half-moon glasses. “So many expectations. So much competition. Such a toxic culture. I don't envy young people today. My job is to create an environment in which they can set aside all these hassles, all the distractions and learn. Learn how to think, to solve problems, to play a meaningful role in the life of this community, our nation, the world.”

‘It’s out there.’

Eggers resembles the former soccer player and coach he is: just over 6-feet tall and thin, he runs three miles every morning before school, with a wispy gray moustache that he’s had since his freshman year at New York University and a boyish mop of dish-water blonde hair that would shame Hugh Grant.

He spends as little time in his office as possible, and it shows. He has no “I love me” wall, and the only pictures on his desk are those of his wife and two daughters, circa 1985.

“My job isn’t sitting behind a desk. It’s out there,” he said, pointing toward the halls. In his initial meeting with the faculty, he told them, “I like to wander, so don’t be surprised or offended if I stumble into your room, unannounced. Chances are, I’m just there trying to learn something.”

‘...I found I was good at it...’

On this day, he is standing in the back of Joyce Dawes' American history class as students compare the Vietnam War to the current conflict in Iraq. When a student says Jane Fonda should have been jailed for her anti-war activities, Eggers asks, "Isn't freedom of speech what our soldiers then, and now, are fighting for?"

Eggers later admitted, "I participated in one or two anti-war rallies myself" during the 1960s. After graduating from NYU, he accepted a teaching job.

"I hadn't planned to teach as a career, but I found I was good at it and I enjoyed it," he said. "Plus, I loved coaching soccer."

‘Everything changed...’

He coached for 19 years, winning two Pennsylvania state championships and numerous “coach of the year” awards. During that time, he met, wooed and married his wife, Paula. By 1980, he was the father of two girls, Wendy and Sandra.

“As a young coach, I thought losing a game was a big deal,” he said. “Or losing my lecture notes. The washing machine goes out. That was my idea of a bad day. Then, we found out Sandy needed an operation.”

A 2-year-old, Sandra needed risky surgery to correct a heart defect.

“Everything gets put into perspective when you’re holding your baby daughter’s hand as doctors wheel her into surgery. Everything.”

‘It’s a beautiful ride...

Sandy survived — and thrived. Today, she’s a junior pre-med major at the University of Virginia. She’s also a standout soccer forward on the nationally-ranked UVA squad.

“She’s overcome a lot, more than I ever have,” he says. “Life isn’t easy. It requires a lot of focus, a lot of concentration, a lot of work. And high school is particularly challenging. All these kids, crammed together. Our jobs as educators is to help them move forward. There are bumps and hassles, but trust me, it’s a beautiful ride.”

For more great examples...

THE *Radical Write*

By BOBBY HAWTHORNE

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