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The Director's Role in Creating Community

by Michael Koetje and Peter Blair

Michael Koetje is the new Director of District Child Development Centers for Pierce College in Tacoma. He was previously Programs Manager for Skokomish Tribal Early Childhood Programs at the Skokomish Indian Nation. He is a husband, father of three daughters, and a grandfather to Jannah Rose, who it just so happens is older than her aunts and her mom. In kid years she is five. He lives on an island in the Puget Sound. He has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education from the State University of New York-Oswego and has worked in ECE leadership roles for over 25 years.

Peter Blair began working in the field of Early Childhood in 1997 as a teacher, and was named Early Childhood Director at the Stroum Jewish Community Center on Mercer Island, Washington in September of 2004. He is a husband and new father. He has worked with children and youth in a variety of settings since 1992.

At first glance, the topic of motivation seems fairly straightforward. But the real work of creating community is much harder to address. Perhaps this is because it requires reflection and change on our part as leaders and because forming true community often runs contrary to how most leaders lead. Here are some points to consider along the way.

Point 1: Hire good people

The first thing on our list is hiring passionate, motivated people. We want people who love children, families, themselves, and life, express a desire to be a part of something larger than themselves, and want to join a community and contribute to its growth. Then we give them lots of autonomy and support them. Goethe said, "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being." Most leaders develop their own vision and encourage others to join them in attaining that vision. We feel that in order to develop community you must develop a common vision with your staff, one that everyone feels a part of, and thus, empowered to create change to attain that vision.

Point 2: Help teachers see themselves as professionals

There are a lot of ways of doing this. We both have been helping teachers to see themselves as professionals in the early childhood field. They are not child care or day care workers. And certainly not babysitters. Peter calls his teachers **faculty**. He provides them with opportunities to travel and study with other inspired educators and then empowers

them to create change when they return from their travels.

Point 3: Create learning communities

We encourage our teachers to share their knowledge and new-found skills with other teachers in the programs by acting as "learning buddies" or mentor/coaches. As they gain skill and confidence they can work with teachers in other programs as well. It is a tactic we often use with children — to have them teach their newly acquired skills to a younger/less experienced child because it helps them solidify their own knowledge. We have found that by treating teachers as professionals they begin to expect more of themselves, take greater pride in their work — and not only their classroom environments, but the environment of the school as well.

This approach of treating teachers as professionals may run contrary to the way that many leaders lead, for empowering staff can be unsettling for some directors. Creating community requires directors who are able to:

- take criticism
- reflect on their practice
- take risks
- empower their faculty to make decisions independently and learn experientially.

Point 4: Build a successful team

Here are some of our strategies for developing a sense of community in our centers around the concept of community.

- We both conduct team meetings with a focus on professional development rather than the minutia of schedules and regulations.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNIE NEUGEBAUER



. . . you must develop a common vision with your staff, one that everyone feels a part of, and thus, empowered to create change to attain that vision

- We use the word **team** to include the cook, janitor, and bus driver. They are part of the team and we have high expectations for their interactions with children and families as well. Very often early childhood folks think of community in limited terms, including only paid employees or volunteers in our definition. Instead, we think of our community of learners as made up of every person who steps into the life of our center: teachers, parents, children, administration, community members, extended family, and subcontractors. Everyone who contributes to the life of the center is a member of our community.
- Treat each member of our team as an equal in order to develop a sense of ownership for the whole center.
- Treat each person with respect and listen to their opinions. While we may not agree with each other on every decision, we try to listen to one another and understand their vision and how it fits in with our own.
- Use inspiration. Michael often begins meetings with a poem, a song, an inspiring speaker, or a story that offers a provocation to help staff reflect. He asks

everyone to bring scenarios, or wonderings — something that went on with a child or family during the week — to discuss with the group.

- Discuss the BIG issues. We dialogue about our beliefs about children, childhood, families, and community. We talk about how we see our role as educators of young children.

Point 5: Focus on relationships

“A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm” is the way Henrik Ibsen put it. You really have to trust and believe in your people. We are in relationship. Like any good relationship it can't be one-sided. There has to be give-and-take.

- We believe in the importance of relationship as an underlying theme to everything we do.
- Developing these relationships — teacher-parent, teacher-teacher, administrator-parent, or teacher-child — requires time, energy, trust, and respect. To paraphrase Ben Zander in *The Art of Possibility*, we as leaders have to be able to allow our people to be

. . . true caring can be felt

great. A lot of it has to do with sharing control and power, not such an easy thing for leaders to do.

- We both believe in giving people a great deal of autonomy. We believe that this autonomy is essential in building community; in allowing your people to make decisions, you are telling them that you trust them implicitly.
- Strong relationships are built on trust. While we may not be happy with every decision which our faculty make, this trust and respect enables us to openly communicate when things go wrong. This trust and respect is apparent to parents as well, for they know that decisions made by our teaching faculty will be supported by the school's administration.
- Parents want what is best for their children, and are in most cases their child's only advocate. Our community respects the magnitude of parents' trust in us and operates from a place of understanding when negotiating conflict.
- We model the kinds of behaviors we want to see in our people. We have both found that if we want our staff to change how they are with children and families, we need to change how we are with them. Like any other evolving relationship, we talk about how we want to be with each other. For instance, we as directors or supervisors can ask ourselves how we show that we care for our people. Another thing we need to reflect on is whether we really pay enough attention to know what really matters most to them. Do you know your staff? Do you celebrate the ups and downs of life with them?
- We believe in bringing the meaningful parts of their lives into the life of our center. By doing this we create an environment where staff are treated as people, not merely an "employee" to "serve" our "clients." This difference is palatable to teachers and parents; true caring can be felt.

Point 6:

Bring your heart and soul to work

People need to be able to bring their heart and soul to their work. We aren't really creating a place of

work, it's a way of life — a way of being. Michael believes the same thing about intimate relationships as he does about work relationships. The majority of people don't come to intimate relationships to have a bad time, or to be a thorn in their partner's side. (Of course, that doesn't mean they aren't from time to time!) The same goes for work relationships. People don't get up in the morning and say, "I'm going to work today and be mediocre." Robert Rabbin, author of *Invisible Leadership*, goes so far as to say, "I am not interested in appealing to anyone's rational mind, to inform or persuade, but to evoke their wild heart of ecstatic love."

It is a little scary for some people to utter those words at work: passion, love, ecstasy. At one of Peter's team development meetings he invited a Rabbi to talk about listening to and talking to the other person's heart, their soul. Very heavy stuff for work, but not if you are talking about a way of being with each other. And not if together you are working on creating your company's soul. Again, this is where collective vision comes into our equation.

- Talk openly about your hopes, your dreams, and your desires for every aspect of our work. This helps create community, and thus increases motivation.
- When you feel that your vision is heard — whether it be your vision for a certain physical space in the school, say, an art studio, or whether your vision is for a way of working with children — you are more likely to invest your time and energy into helping that vision be realized.

Point 7:

Build relationships with individuals

We think you hire great people and then work like mad on the relationship. Easy to say, hard to do. As directors we have to take the time to work on individual relationships with each member of our team, and provide opportunities for us to speak to each other.

Human beings are meaning-making animals. We set out on a life journey that takes us on a search for

meaning. We often find our most meaning in our relationships with other people. Today most of those connections with others come from our place of work. This parallels early childhood philosophy. Children, too, are making meaning of the world around them, constructing their view of the world based upon their environment and their interactions with others in “their world.”

Webster defines community as a group of people having a common interest or those sharing participation or fellowship. In other words, people who are in relationship, creating meaning together. When we talk to our team about their beliefs about children and families, and their beliefs about themselves, we build those foundations of community.

Not everyone has the same ideas about what children are capable of accomplishing, or of how we ought to be in our relationships with parents, each other, and the community. But we think by really listening to people in our programs, and giving them a safe place to explore their beliefs, we can come to a common ground from which we can move forward together.

We begin developing our relationships from the very beginning: from the initial interview to exit interview.

We listen and reflect on each other’s perspective to develop a shared sense of understanding. We create from our diverse ideas and thoughts a common shared vision, a common meaning. And as Margaret Mead said, “The need to find meaning . . . is as real as the need for trust and for love, for relationship with other human beings.”

In conclusion

The process of forming community is a long journey, one filled with challenges, struggles, success, and celebration. It is also incredibly rewarding and exhilarating when it all comes together. We hope that you will join us on this journey and empower our entire early childhood community to nurture children and families in developing strong relationships, and in doing so have an increased understanding of the value of our diverse society.

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We aren’t really creating a place of work, it’s a way of life — a way of being.

Be a mentor or coach: Teach newly acquired skills to others. Find an interested colleague and try it out.

Broaden the view: These authors talk about widening their view of who is part of their community. Try this interesting idea out by considering the strategies they suggest.

Shared power, autonomy, trust — the ingredients of community: If these descriptors don’t match teachers’ experience, create opportunities to try them out.

Work on relationships: This straightforward idea isn’t so simple. Talk with teachers to find out how they feel the relationships between staff members are working and how they might be improved. Be candid and make a plan to work on improving relationships with the ideas generated. Remember that creating community is a journey — a journey you can start today.

Using Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers
by Kay Albrecht

Ten Strategies for Coaching a Winning Team

A Director's Game Plan

by Pam Schiller

A successful director is in many ways like a winning coach. Both encourage people to work together. Both inspire people to do their best. Both are boosters of morale. A director who carefully selects a team and practices effective coaching skills will create a high quality environment for both children and staff.

We have all witnessed cases where a team of talented baseball players just can't seem to have a winning season. Each player is outstanding individually, but the cooperative effort just doesn't create the desired result. Then a new coach is hired and, bingo, everything comes together.

A good coach is able to see how each person's strength strengthens the team and is able to bring those skills and talents into consort. With this kind of leadership, the whole team benefits and each individual player is able to blossom to full potential.

1. Be a Good Scout

Building a winning team begins with the selection of the players. A good coach is a good scout. Looking for the right players for the right positions in the beginning will save time and energy in the long run. It gives the team an early advantage.

Make a list of attributes you expect to find in an employee and stay committed to not settling for less. Ask prospective candidates why they want the job. This information in all actuality will determine to what extent

the candidate will be an asset to your team. Answers like "I'm not trained for other work" or "I figure anyone can watch children" aren't acceptable. You are looking for team members who enjoy children and have a passion for making a difference in their lives. You want team members who believe they can make a difference. You want people who believe they are the best candidates for the job.

Hire people who are versatile. Versatility provides flexibility. On a playing field or in a child care center, flexibility is an advantage. In a pinch, you may need the assistant director to cover the two-year-old room or the cook to accompany children on a field trip.

Ask yourself if the candidate fits into the existing team. Will this player get along with others? Will she be committed to the good of the whole? Does she enhance the team as a whole?

Finding the right players is only the first step in building the team. Placing them in the right positions is equally important. Before placing new team members, evaluate their talents, capabilities, inadequacies, needs, and wants. Ask about preferences for age groups and working

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schedules. Listening closely will enable you to make the best match between a team member's strengths and desires and available positions on the team.

2. Let Orientation Be Your Warm Up

Start with the end in mind. Plan an orientation for team members that allows them to know exactly what your expectations are. Provide copies of rules and policies and discuss and give examples of each. An employee needs to know in advance that you expect caregivers to space themselves on the playground instead of huddling together talking to each other.

Employees should not have to find out about a rule by breaking it. If your employees understand what the rules are and why they exist (in the example above, spreading out on the playground helps prevent accidents), they are much more likely to develop good habits from the beginning.

In addition to rules and responsibilities, discuss personnel policies. Outline your center's structure, methods of communications, personal space, policies regarding promotion, and probationary periods.

Establish a 30-day period during which you and the new team member have a scheduled time set aside to discuss progress. Your goal is to coach your new team member to be the best she can be in her new position. This takes time and practice. Perfect practice means the team member receives feedback on her progress and is allowed time for self-evaluation.

3. Offer a Training Camp

Training is critical to maintaining the team in body, mind, and spirit. Initial

training helps a new team member get off on the right foot, while continual training keeps everyone on the right foot and also builds camaraderie and morale.

Assign new team members a mentor. We typically use this strategy for helping new children *learn the ropes* and feel more at ease. Why not our staff?

Provide an opportunity for new employees to actually work beside someone in a comparable job for a day or two. This is absolutely one of the best strategies you can use to boost a new team member's confidence and understanding of expectations. It allows him to walk in the footsteps of someone doing the job well.

Be sure to think of ways to reward your mentors. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that just being selected as a mentor is reward enough. It may not seem that way at all to your mentor. Use more concrete and visible rewards like a gift certificate, an extra break, or getting to go home early one day.

Make staff training for your whole team a regular routine. You want to keep staff inspired with new ideas and motivated toward constant improvement. Plan in-house training and, whenever possible, use the talents of staff. Ask Sam to demonstrate his art ideas and Tiffany to show the movement activities she uses on rainy days.

Use spontaneous training. Occasionally surprise your staff with special supplies for a new activity. Place the supplies in the workroom with a sign: *Make, Take, and Try!*

Make training accessible and fun whenever possible. When professional workshops are given in the community, offer to drive the facility van. Get team members together for breakfast before the workshop starts or for lunch

between sessions.

4. Get Your Signals Straight

Communication is key to the game. You need clear, direct, two-way communication between you and the team, you and the families in the center, the team and the families, and the team and the children. A competent coach will constantly think of ways to improve communication because clear communication means that everyone stays on track. It also is at the heart of team member and fan morale.

Establish regular and frequent communication. Plan for general communication by means of bulletin boards, staff newsletters, and staff meetings. Plan for personal communication through individual mailboxes.

Involve the team in communication when possible. A staff or parent newsletter can be more than an administrative memo from the director. It can include contributions from staff or parents.

Remember that our actions speak louder than our words. Treat all team members equally. What applies to one applies to all.

Provide your team members with appropriate support for communicating effectively with parents. Practice possible daily scenarios so that everyone knows automatically what to do when challenges appear. Give players a playbook. Set up responses to daily scenarios and parent comments and concerns that provide solutions and responses for staff to follow. For example, provide a response in the playbook for what to say to a parent who is concerned about a biter in their child's classroom or the length of naptime. Practice these responses.

5. Use a Visible Scoreboard

Recognize individual staff members through daily activities and in program planning. Visit each classroom when you arrive in the morning and greet each staff member by name.

Highlight each team member's personal and professional accomplishments. Use staff memo, parent newsletter, or bulletin board display to acknowledge Madison's unique bulletin board, Gabrielle's completion of a first aid course, and Tamera's new grandmother status. To emphasize the individual's importance to the team effort, display a *Who's Who on the Team* or a *Hall of Fame* photo gallery of all team members.

Treat team members with empathy when personal challenges arise. If you can adjust the work schedule while Judy's husband is in the hospital, do so. Invite staff to help think of ways to fill in for Judy. Pick up the slack yourself when possible. These actions create a climate of caring essential to team building.

Recognize longevity and loyalty with a progression of awards. People who complete one year of employment may get a day off. After two years, they may get a designated parking space. For extensive longevity, consider naming a room after the employee. The yellow room can just as easily be called *Ms. Joan's Room* or the kitchen *Alice's Place*.

6. Consult the Team

Actively solicit input from your team. It is a true statement about human behavior that what we help build we are far more likely to support.

Involve staff in the decision-making processes of the center. When money is

available for equipment or supplies, ask for staff input on how to spend it. Staff members are far more likely to recognize that a new tricycle will help avoid more conflict on the playground than a new jungle gym.

Involve staff in setting policy. Classroom teachers, for example, may recognize that a particular policy regarding show and tell is disruptive to the class schedule and should be changed. This kind of staff involvement not only improves the caring environment but also contributes to a *we* feeling in the center. Being involved as a decision maker allows each person to know she has some control over her work environment.

7. Stay Focused

Coaching is continuous. A coach watches the team no matter what other stress is around. It is the coach's job to remove a tired player, see a nervous pitcher, watch for frustration, and so forth. The coach does this even though the general manager is making demands, the score is behind, the fans are asking for autographs, and a team member is injured.

Employees get frustrated, isolated, and overwhelmed. It is the director's role to recognize these situations and intercede before they become insurmountable or threatening to the health of the team.

8. Remember the Seventh Inning Stretch

Recognize the social needs of the team. Working in child care is one of the most stressful jobs a person can have. Breaks are essential for reducing stress and for allowing adults opportunities to communicate with other adults. Staff members need a quiet and comfortable place to relax and refuel. Providing for a few minutes away ensures staff

members return to the classroom more patient and loving.

Plan for staff socials in recognition of birthdays, holidays, graduations, engagements, and other special events. Bring-a-dish meals or bring-an-ingredient salad luncheons are excellent ways of encouraging social interactions. Everyone deserves a celebration and a stretch every once in a while.

9. Be a Model

Be a model of the behavior you expect from the team. Treat parents with respect. Offer to help when a caregiver wants to rearrange her room. Share your ideas, talents, and materials. Be friendly to everyone. Be willing to do anything you ask your staff to do.

Some centers have established core values — a code by which to live and work. Core values provide clear objectives and focus for all employees. They also send a strong message to parents and the community about the center's goals. Children's World Learning Centers has developed a set of core values. These values dictate the expected behaviors of everyone from the CEO to the assistant teacher in each classroom. Their values are:

- Do the right thing
- Make a difference
- Keep your promises
- Help each other

10. Create Raving Fans

One of the most visible signs of a winning team is loyal and dedicated fans. Who are your fans? They are the children and families you serve. Your ultimate goal is to have children who can't wait to return to your center the next day and families who can't wait to

recommend your center to their friends.

The best way for you to create those raving fans is to build and coach a winning team. Team members will blossom with the support of raving fans and so will the coach.

You don't have to win the World Series to have a winning team. You just have to play your best game every time you are on the field. How does this happen in child care? By creating a team with high morale, one that communicates well, practices, and remains dedicated to the passion to create a happy, secure, loving, and challenging environment for children.

Building Effective Teams Through Delegation and Recognition

by Amanda Siderits

Staff turnover is a major problem plaguing many child care centers today. Replacing teachers frustrates parents, confuses children, and costs the center thousands of dollars each year. No matter how large or beautiful the facility, the biggest selling point for any center is the quality and longevity of the teachers. Unfortunately, staffing headaches cannot be totally eliminated, but you can arm yourself with tools to build a more effective team.



Amanda Siderits is the president of Youthland Academy in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her mother opened the first center over 20 years ago and today the family business has grown to 16 centers and one franchise. Amanda joined the family company in 1997 and since that time has added nine centers to the corporation and created over 100 jobs. She works closely with Directors and Regional Coordinators to constantly improve management style and effectiveness. A major objective for Amanda and her company is to provide trainings and continue education for teachers and directors as well as develop staff incentives to reduce turnover. Under her guidance, Youthland Academy has established an in-house scholarship program for up to 25 teachers a year to earn a CDA. Since Youthland Academy operates a variety of centers from small and cozy facilities to large and state of the art, innovative management trainings are a top priority for Amanda and her team. Amanda has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Appalachian State University and enjoys creating company training manuals as well as teaching management seminars.

Assign key center responsibilities

Core staff, as we call them, are the heart and center of the child care center — the strongest and most reliable teachers you have. They can be identified as the teachers who put their heart and soul into the children and the program. They are the teachers that go the extra mile to reassure a nervous parent or notice Tommy's new shoes. These teachers are your most valuable assets.

Consider distributing your core staff throughout your program so that there is at least one strong, dependable teacher in each classroom. Often a center will have a strong preschool program with three core teachers and a weak toddler room with all new, less experienced staff. Approaching your strong preschool team and asking one of them to work in the toddler room with the new group and assigning one of the inexperienced toddler teachers to join the trained preschool team, encourages the group to pull together to strengthen all of the classrooms.

The core staff are valuable team members and vital to the daily life of the center. They are trusted teachers to

the director, other teachers, and the children and parents as well. New and less experienced teachers can benefit from working closely with these skilled teachers who are familiar with center policies and programming. I share the following example of how I paired teachers to strengthen their individual skills and increase the quality of the program.

I assigned a core staff member, Stephanie, to work as the lead teacher in the toddler room. Under her guidance, the newer, less experienced teacher, Mandy, was able to listen to the tone she used when talking to the children to get their attention. A few weeks later when Mandy was in the classroom by herself, she remembered how Stephanie had clasped her hands together to make an elephant's trunk to get the children's attention. This simple technique gave Mandy the confidence to work with the two year olds and to communicate in a way they understood.

In another example, a new teacher, Suzanne, was working with a group of four year olds on an art project that consisted of gluing facial features on a face. She started correcting a child who insisted on placing the eyes where the nose should be. The core teacher, Linda,

explained that art is open to the children's interpretation and creativity. In a later art project, Suzanne encouraged the children to create a house in their own way, even if the door was on the third floor. She understood that it wasn't about accuracy but about expression.

These are specific examples of how lead teachers work with staff as the eyes and ears of the director when she can't be in each classroom.

Core staff have a vested interest in the center because they are entrusted with key responsibilities. Assign these teachers to specific roles such as Lead Teacher, Curriculum Coordinator, or Cleaning Supervisor. With these assignments and recognition, you are building a team that feels a strong sense of purpose.

Lead teacher versus assistant director

Reconsider the typical organizational structure that appoints an Assistant Director and consider instead having several lead teachers. This structure can encourage ambitious teachers who are seeking opportunities for growth or acceleration in the center. Instead of appointing one assistant director, you can recognize several strong teachers with a prestigious job title and appropriate center responsibilities.

Another advantage of having lead teachers instead of an assistant director is reflected in payroll. Assistant directors spend, on average, 2-4 hours per day outside of the classroom, and are not counted in ratio at those times. Lead teachers spend almost all of their time in the classroom working closely with other teachers, children, and parents. In essence, your center works more efficiently with lead teachers in the classrooms. In this structure, the director is the only person who is

assigned time outside of the classroom to tour new parents, complete paperwork, call absent children, and work on center projects.

The director plays the role of chief delegator, and like any good delegator, he/she must understand everyone else's job and monitor their performance. There are simple ways of staying on top of the lead teachers such as requiring weekly reports and conducting weekly 20-minute meetings with the group to touch base. It is the responsibility of the director to define what is expected of each lead teacher, provide necessary training, and follow through with consequences and rewards. Specific assignments for lead teachers might include the tasks that follow:

■ Curriculum and programming

To encourage an atmosphere of friendly competition, place a notice on the staff information board that you are interviewing for a Curriculum Coordinator. This gives interested staff members a chance to meet privately with you and discuss the specifics of the job. This position may require weekend in-service trainings and attendance at seminars as well as research at the local library. Once you have selected the person for the job, remember to make a formal announcement and prepre a congratulatory breakfast to recognize the staff member's new responsibilities. Review the job description with your new Curriculum Coordinator and the entire staff to clarify what will be expected of everyone.

Depending on your program structure and curriculum, you can establish the responsibilities of this position to meet the needs of your center. Some centers ask teachers to turn in lesson plans to the lead teacher in charge of curriculum or programming one week in advance. This allows plenty of time for reviewing lesson plans, offering input, and helping

teachers gather supplies for the lesson. Often this lead teacher will use her training and experience to guide teachers and help them plan age-appropriate activities and design their teacher boards for the week.

While this lead teacher will teach her own class during the day, she may have the flexibility to spend time in other classrooms with teachers who need her guidance. For example, if the toddler teacher is having trouble with children biting, the lead teacher may show her how to implement an activity or song that keeps the children's attention during times of the day in which the children tend to bite. The director or another teacher would cover the program director's classroom during times she is working with the children.

Lead teachers are typically available by phone in the evenings if a staff member wants to call for advice or if the director wants to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of staff in various classrooms.

The director plays an important role in guiding this lead teacher in training those teachers who need her attention and in helping him to focus efforts on weaker classrooms while monitoring the performance of stronger teachers. The director also assists the lead teacher in developing professional development goals that will help him build skill in various areas.

■ Facilities maintenance

The teacher assigned to this role generally has a good eye for detail and a strong awareness of organization and cleanliness. It should be her responsibility to create cleaning charts and check each classroom twice daily to ensure that cleaning is done properly. Because she is not the director, if another teacher fails to properly clean or close down her room, the cleaning supervisor should

simply report the matter to the director. All consequences are handled by the director only; lead teachers are only to perform their own job and report others who do not.

This lead teacher should make a weekly checklist and contribute to the cleaning of the center as well as offer new ideas for organization of the center such as storage closets or art cabinets. Here's an example of how this new position was implemented in one program:

The Facilities Maintenance Director devised a plan for the cook to maintain the kitchen and common areas in the center. She created a daily responsibility checklist with one added item each day. On Mondays she specified that the refrigerator must be wiped down. On Tuesdays the oven was to be cleaned and so on. Her new system assisted the cook in a routine maintenance plan and ensured that the kitchen was left spotless each day.

■ Creative director

This position is reserved for the most creative person in the center. She should use her talents to involve the staff in decorating their classrooms, displaying artwork, and in bringing out each person's individual creativity. The lead teacher of decorations and creativity plans and decorates the entryway and common areas.

In our center our creative director makes leaves out of construction paper to hang from the ceiling in the fall, and will ask the teachers and children to contribute monthly decorations. In September, she assigns the preschool class to make

back-to-school posters and artwork to hang in the entryway. The creative director is in charge of the parent board in the front entryway that identifies the class that decorates the center for the month.

In another center where this program was implemented, the creative director gave the preschool class ideas and stencils to use for decorating the common areas. The classroom made a big school bus and each child painted a picture of him or herself in the bus riding to school.

The creative director also offers teachers classroom ideas. One such idea in the infant room was to collect family pictures for each infant and make a mobile above the cribs, so that the babies could see their family members smiling down on them. Many of the projects incorporated by the creative director involve not only the teachers and children, but resources from the parents as well. For example, the creative director might ask the parents to bring in photos or wallpaper scraps for classroom projects.

This position of creative director is fun and allows your teachers to express themselves and to foster children's creativity in new ways. Parents and children are always excited by creative art projects and decorations and homemade expressions to warm the center.

Staff orientation and training

These are just a few examples of creating leadership positions that

benefit the entire center. There are dozens of roles you can create and implement based on the needs of your program. The goal is to develop a leadership program that involves your staff in areas that encourage them to take ownership and pride in the center. Just as many preschool teachers assign different tasks to the children each day to build leadership skills, the director can do this with her staff. Whenever the director leaves the center to run an errand or is home ill, she should assign a teacher to be in charge in her absence. Have specific instructions in a folder for your teacher-in-charge and leave her with the emergency phone list for center families. You will also want to leave a number where the teacher-in-charge can reach you for advice and guidance. When you return to the center, you can ask the teacher how she felt about her performance and ask the rest of your staff about how they feel she did. This gives you feedback that you can use in offering constructive criticism for next time.

Building a team creates a sense of community in your center and guides your staff to improve performance. Assigning new responsibilities and recognizing loyal and hard-working staff creates healthy competition, encourages teachers to take pride in their work, and helps to build a stronger team. Your position as the director is to act as the team leader and to bring out the best in your staff by recognizing their strengths and promoting them.

Assessing Team Performance

by Roger Neugebauer

- *Do staff members at your center freely share ideas, resources, and materials; or does everyone jealously guard her own turf?*
- *Do staff members care about each others' success; or does the philosophy every person for herself prevail?*
- *In short, does your staff function as a close knit team, or as an assemblage of individuals who happen to be in the same building?*

To be effective as a leader, you need to recognize an inevitable social phenomenon: the staff in your center is more than a collection of individuals — it is a small group, or, in a large center, an interconnecting web of small groups. Being a member of a small group significantly influences a staff member's behavior and performance. To motivate employees to perform to their full potential, you must be aware of this phenomenon and respond in a positive manner.

Small groups will develop in a work environment whether you want them to or not. Pretending they don't exist, or trying to break them up and deal with staff only on an individual basis, can have negative side effects. Left to their own devices, informal work groups can become the outlet for feelings of discontent, the breeding ground for rumors and gossip, and the focal point for employee unrest.

On the other hand, if the energy of a small group is properly directed, a

number of benefits will accrue. An effectively functioning group can . . .

- allow creativity to flower, as differing viewpoints stimulate new ideas and provide a supportive environment for risk taking;
- provide for stability in everyday performance and in response to crises;
- allow maximum utilization of member resources, as a group setting can allow individual members to specialize;
- provide psychological support for members by meeting their needs for affiliation and status; and
- reduce the burden on the leader through the sharing of leadership and motivation tasks.

To realize these significant advantages, a director needs to adopt a

team perspective of the supervisory process. You must take positive steps to develop a healthy team spirit. To assist you in achieving this, *Exchange* is initiating a series of articles on the team development process. This first article will provide a plan for assessing the current level of team functioning at your center and some ideas for initiating changes. Future articles will address the leader's role in team development, functional roles of team members, and dealing with intergroup conflict.

Rating Team Effectiveness

Team development is necessarily a team process. A director can undermine the spirit of what she is trying to accomplish if she attempts to set out on her own to improve team functioning. As organizational psychologist Douglas McGregor cautions, "Nothing can be gained by any kind of secret manipulation of the system. The process must be open and transactional."

The initial phase of this public process should be a team assessment of its own level of functioning. The assessment approach described below is based upon rating systems developed by Douglas McGregor, Edgar Schein, Rensis Likert, and Gordon Lippitt (see References and Resources), as well as upon sugges-

tions offered by child care directors who have field tested these systems. It is offered not as a formula to be rigidly adhered to but as a suggestion to consider in developing your own approach.

Step 1. Delineate the “team.” Before you meet with the team to begin the assessment process, you need to decide who the team is. One consideration is size. An effective team is often moderately small (four to eight members) in size. If a team has too few members, it may lack diversity; and if it is too large, individual members may get lost in the shuffle. In a small center, the entire staff may be one team; whereas, in a large center, there may be two or more teams.

A second consideration should be function. All members of a team should ideally share a common task, and a common set of goals.

Finally, reality needs to be taken into account in defining teams. As was stated earlier, workers in any setting tend to organize themselves into informal groups. Wherever possible, you should try to keep these “natural” groupings intact in organizing formal teams.

If a team has too few members, it may lack diversity; and if it is too large, individual members may get lost in the shuffle.

A related question for a director to address is where she fits into the picture. In a small center, the director can comfortably function as the team leader. However, in a large center where there is more than one team and where the director does not spend much time in the classrooms, the teams should probably be led by head teachers or mid-level staff. In

some large organizations, the director is the leader of an administrative team which consists of leaders of the various classroom teams.

While the director may want to take the initiative in delineating the teams, the final arrangement should be one that is acceptable to all involved. If staff members don't feel like a team the way you've organized them, no amount of memos and meetings will make them behave like one.

Step 2. Discuss the process. Before launching a team assessment, you need to discuss it with the team. The team leader should not be bashful or secretive but should share her specific thoughts on how the evaluation process might proceed. If team members have reservations with the proposal, their input should be sought in redesigning or fine tuning the process. If they adamantly oppose the idea — even after a full discussion — it should be tabled for the time being, as the effort has no chance of success without their enthusiastic cooperation.

Step 3. Define the criteria. Agreement needs to be reached among team members on the criteria to be used in the assessment. On the next page is a “Team Effectiveness Rating Scale.” This scale, developed by *Exchange*, is an example of the type of assessment instrument that could be employed. The scale could be used as is, or it could be modified depending on what team members were interested in measuring, or team members could develop an instrument of their own. In any case, the criteria that are finally decided upon should be discussed in a team meeting so all staff members share a common definition of the criteria.

Step 4. Rate the team. Each member of the team should rate the performance of the team. If you are using the scale, for example, everyone should rate the team in terms of each

criteria on a scale of 1 to 7. Ratings should be made anonymously.

Acting on the Results

It is just as important that staff members be involved in analyzing and acting upon the ratings as in making them. As director and/or team leader, you must resist the urge to keep the results of the assessment to yourself. Being open at this point can be risky and stressful, but it can reap significant benefits for the team.

If staff members don't feel like a team the way you've organized them, no amount of memos and meetings will make them behave like one.

Step 5. Tabulate the results. Pool all the ratings. On a chart, display the average rating and the high and low scores for each of the criteria rated.

Step 6. Develop a strategy. The unabridged final results should be shared in a team meeting. The status regarding each criteria should be discussed. Particular attention should be paid to those for which the average rating is below 5 or for which the range of high and low scores is particularly wide. Discuss various explanations for why these perceptions exist. To keep this discussion as fruitful as possible, it may be helpful to reflect upon recent incidents which pertain to these criteria.

When some general consensus has been reached on what aspects of team performance need the most work, team members should brainstorm about ways to improve the situation. Hopefully, at the close of the meeting, there will be general agreement on some specific strategies for upgrading team performance.

Team Effectiveness Rating Scale

Rate the effectiveness of your team on a scale of 1 to 7 in terms of each of the variables listed below. Below each variable are descriptions of the worst case (rated 1) and the best case (rated 7) for that variable. You can rate your team very low (1), very high (7), or anywhere in between, depending on how you perceive the situation.

- _____ 1. **Clarity of Goals**
 (1) The team has no set goals.
 (7) The team has challenging yet achievable goals which members well understand.
- _____ 2. **Level of Cohesion**
 (1) Team members have no group loyalty, have no sense of belonging to a team, and tend to exhibit hostility toward each other.
 (7) Team members exhibit a strong sense of loyalty to the team, are highly concerned with the performance of the team, and feel responsible for helping each other improve.
- _____ 3. **Level of Sensitivity**
 (1) Team members are insensitive to the needs and feelings of each other; expressions of feelings are ignored or criticized.
 (7) Team members exhibit outstanding sensitivity to each other; feelings are openly expressed and responded to with empathy.
- _____ 4. **Openness of Communications**
 (1) Team members are guarded and cautious in communicating, listen superficially but inwardly reject what others say, and are afraid to criticize or be criticized.
 (7) Team members are open and frank in communicating, reveal to the team what they would be reluctant to expose to others, and can freely express negative reactions without fear of reprisal.
- _____ 5. **Handling Conflict**
 (1) Conflicts are denied, suppressed, or avoided.
 (7) Team members bring conflicts out into the open and work them through.
- _____ 6. **Decision Making**
 (1) When problems or opportunities arise, decisions are delayed endlessly, and, when made, are never implemented.
 (7) Decisions are made on time and implemented fully.
- _____ 7. **Participation**
 (1) The team leader makes all plans and decisions and orders their implementation.
 (7) All team members participate in shaping the decisions and plans for the team.
- _____ 8. **Evaluation**
 (1) The team does not assess any aspect of its performance.
 (7) The team regularly questions the appropriateness of its goals. It evaluates its progress in achieving its goals, the performance of individual team members, and the functioning of the team. Objective feedback is freely and frequently shared.
- _____ 9. **Control**
 (1) Discipline is imposed totally from above.
 (7) Discipline is totally self-imposed; team members are responsible for controlling their own behavior.
- _____ 10. **Use of Member Resources**
 (1) Team members' knowledge, skills, and experiences are not utilized by the team.
 (7) Team members' resources are fully utilized by the team.

Step 7. Monitor progress. Periodically, the team should repeat the rating process using the same rating scale. By comparing current ratings with previous ones, the team should be able to keep track of its progress in upgrading performance and detect any new problems before they become serious.

Inevitably, strategies for change will require some work on the part of the

team leader as well as other team members. Future articles will provide specific ideas on the performance requirements of all team members.

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Who's Responsible for Making Your Team Work?

by Roger Neugebauer

"The highly effective work group has the capacity to mobilize fully all the skills and abilities of its members and focus these resources efficiently on the jobs to be done. Each member of this group feels responsible for assuming whatever role is necessary to keep the group operating in an efficient manner."

In the above quote, Rensis Likert captures a key ingredient of an effective team — all members of the team accept responsibility for making the team work. All too often this does not happen. Instead, members of a child care center team assume that it is the job of the director or head teacher to keep the team on track. When problems arise, they sit back and wait for their leader to solve them.

In many cases, directors and head teachers share this view as well. They start believing that all the responsibility is on their shoulders. When the staff is functioning poorly, they blame themselves for not being able to handle all the many burdens of leadership.

Yet, numerous studies of work groups confirm that in groups that are effective these burdens of leadership are not all dumped on one person, but are shared widely (Likert). All members of these teams are sensitive to what needs to happen for the team to perform well, and all feel responsible for making it happen.

This is not to say, of course, that a leader can wash her hands of any responsibility. In the final analysis, it

is the leader that is ultimately responsible for the team's performance. She must see to it that the team meets the demands placed on it by the organization of which it is a part. But she will never be effective unless she gains the cooperation, support, and commitment of all the members of her team.

Roles of Team Members

There are many different roles that must be played by team members on an effectively functioning team. A number of these roles have been described below. Those listed have been identified by organizational consultants as essential roles that must be performed in order for a team to work well together (Benne). These roles may at times be per-

formed by one or more team members and at other times by the leader. Each team member may carry out more than one role in any particular situation and may play different roles in different situations. What is important is not so much who performs what roles but that all the roles are performed and that participation is widespread. No team member should be required to fill too many roles at one time, and no team member should be allowed to avoid playing any of these roles at any time.

The functional roles of team members fall into two general categories. Some of the roles are **team task roles**. These are roles that are directly related to the tasks which the team is deciding or has decided to undertake. Other critical roles are **team maintenance roles**. These are roles that are concerned with the emotional life of the team, with how individual members relate to each other as a team.

Team Task Roles

Team tasks in a child care center involve either efforts to solve common problems or to achieve common goals. Figuring out how to reduce the noise and disruptive behavior in the toddler room would be an example of a problem solving task, and deciding whether or not to open an infant program would be a goal setting task.

The following team task roles must be performed in order to identify, define, and make decisions about such problems and goals.

- **Initiating.** Someone must get the ball rolling. The initiator identifies a potential problem or goal and brings it to the attention of the team. This person initiates action by stating the goal or problem and by making some proposal as to how the team might address it. For example, the person playing this role might say, "I think the activity level in the toddler room is far too high. Let's brainstorm about some ways to bring it under control."

In a newly constituted team, or one that is functioning at a low level, this role often falls to the leader. However, as the team grows and gains in confidence, the initiating role will increasingly be played by a broader range of members (Schein).

- **Information gathering.** Once an issue is addressed for team consideration, factual information about the issue needs to be collected and brought before the team. Some of this information is about the problem or goal being investigated. For example, with the problem of the chaotic toddler room, information would need to be sought and shared about when the activity level was at its highest, whether there is any evidence that the teachers or the children were negatively impacted by the commotion, and what other centers had done about this problem.

In addition, information is needed about proposed goals and solutions — "Will this really solve the problem or address the need? Exactly how will it be implemented? How much will it cost?"

- **Opinion seeking and giving.** Someone also needs to be sure that team members' beliefs and opinions about proposed goals and solutions

are brought out into the open. It is important that a distinction be made between facts and opinions and that both be sought out and considered.

- **Clarifying.** When proposals are brought before the team, whether they are suggested solutions to existing problems or proposed new directions for the center, someone needs to insure that the proposal is clear to everyone. The person playing this role helps the initiator clarify her proposal by asking questions about it and by restating her understanding of it. This role is especially important in the child care setting because team members often react emotionally to the ideas of others and form opinions about these ideas before they fully understand them.

- **Elaborating.** When a proposal is before the group, it is also helpful to have one or more team members concerned with exploring this proposal from all angles, considering all its possible ramifications, and building it into an even more creative idea. This would also involve trying to deduce how an idea would work out in practice if adopted by the team (Likert).

- **Energizing.** The person playing this role is concerned with prodding the team into action, attempting to stimulate the team to greater activity or to activity of a higher quality.

- **Summarizing.** When a team has been struggling with a problem or with a new idea for a long time, whether this be in a long drawn out staff meeting or in a process that takes place informally over a period of weeks, relevant information and views can often get lost due to the length of the discussion. In these situations, it is vital to have someone periodically summarize what has gone before. Effective summarizing will include a review of the points the team has already covered and what ideas have been stated, so that as decision points are reached the team

is operating with full information (Schein).

- **Consensus testing.** Every once in a while someone on the team needs to test the water to see if the team is ready to make a decision about a proposal under consideration. For problems that are particularly complicated and for goals that will require a lot of work or risk if adopted, team members can procrastinate for weeks to avoid making a decision. Someone needs to step forward periodically and ask, "Are we ready to decide?" Or the person playing this role could be even more assertive and say, "I can see that we have some strong reservations about opening an infant component, but that, basically, we are prepared to go ahead with it. Am I right?" The success of the consensus tester will depend largely on her sensitivity in choosing the right time to test, although ill-timed tests are still useful in reminding the team that it has some more issues to work out before deciding (Schein).

Team Maintenance Roles

Team maintenance roles are those concerned with building team loyalty and increasing the motivation and capacity of the group for candid and effective interaction and problem solving (Benne). The main focus of these roles is on avoiding damaged relationships. In a team environment, individuals can be alienated from the group in many ways — when two members angrily disagree about a team issue, when one domineering team member turns off others, when team members' views are ignored or outvoted, and so on. These situations need to be avoided or handled with sensitivity in order to maintain the commitment of all team members to the team.

- **Encouraging.** The person playing this role does all she can to ensure team members that there exists a climate of acceptance. She praises,

shows interest in, agrees with, and accepts the contributions of others. She demonstrates warmth and solidarity in her feelings toward other team members. She gives full attention and consideration to the contributions of others even though she may not fully agree with them, conveying to them the message "What you are doing or saying is of importance to me" (Likert).

- **Harmonizing.** Someone needs to be concerned with reducing destructive types of disagreement between team members. Conflict can perform a useful function in generating a variety of ideas and alternative proposals. However, when two or more members of the team are fighting or taking positions because of selfish reasons, such as maintaining their own status on the team, it may be necessary for someone to step in and harmonize the conflict before it becomes too destructive. The harmonizer may attempt to mediate the differences between team members in conflict; she may attempt to relieve tension in conflict situations through the use of humor; or she may assist each member in taking stock of her own behavior as a way of reestablishing good communication (Schein).

- **Compromising.** Whereas the harmonizer is a third party seeking to establish peace between two or more other members in conflict, the compromiser is someone who is willing to promote agreement by backing off from her own position. A person playing this role may offer a compromise by yielding status, admitting error, or meeting the other team members "half way" in a disagreement (Benne).

In a child care setting, where the interactions between adults are so intense, it is inevitable that conflict over team task issues will arise frequently. It thus becomes vital that compromising be a role that many team members be willing and able to

play in the interests of team harmony. If all the compromising is always done by one or two team members, these members will inevitably resent their role and lose their commitment to the team.

- **Gatekeeping.** The gatekeeper is the team member who keeps her eye on the level of participation of team members. She ensures that those who have a contribution to make get their day in court. In a staff meeting, a gatekeeper might take steps to ensure that the less assertive team members have a chance to express their views on the matter under discussion. In a daily work situation, the gatekeeper might see to it that all team members have an opportunity to try out their skills and ideas.

- **Observing.** Someone on the team needs to be keeping tabs on the overall functioning of the team. This person must be alert for and sensitive to any evidence that the group process is breaking down. The observer must be well aware of what types of behavior are destructive and what types are constructive or at least neutral in their impact. When she observes that relationships have in some way broken down, she needs to be able to feed this observation back to the team in such a way that it will be received constructively and acted upon. Providing feedback to the team on its performance actually requires as much, if not more, skill and nerve than observing the behavior in the first place.

Clearly, the role of the observer is one that new or inexperienced team members cannot play effectively. In fact, due to the sensitivity and credibility required, it may be beneficial to have the team formally designate someone to perform this role (Likert).

- **Standard setting.** Someone needs to move the team towards accepting or setting standards that will govern team performance. Team members

need to know what types of behavior are encouraged by the team and what types are discouraged. They need to know what level of participation is expected of them and what amount of flexibility is allowed to them in pursuing individual approaches to their work.

Each team member may carry out more than one role in any particular situation and may play different roles in different situations. What is important is . . . that all the roles are performed and that participation is widespread.

More often than not, this role falls to the team leader. Since the team leader is ultimately responsible for the performance of the team, it is important that she take an active role in seeing to it that appropriate standards are set for working to achieve the tasks before the team.

From reviewing these roles that need to be performed by team members, it is obvious that if a team is to be successful its members will need to do much more than simply show up and put in their seven hours every day. They must all be concerned with moving the team forward toward the accomplishment of its goals, and they must accept responsibility for helping the team function effectively.

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Step-by-Step Guide to Team Building

by Roger Neugebauer

*According to management consultant Peter F. Drucker, the **team** concept of management is ideally suited to a knowledge organization — an organization that trades in ideas, concepts, and services. Such an organization — and a child care center clearly falls into this category — can extract maximum performance from its workers by managing them as important players on a team rather than as faceless members of **the staff**.*

*Recognizing the potential value of a team approach to the management of a child care organization, **Exchange** has devoted a series of articles to the topic. In this, the third article, a step-by-step process for building an effective team is described.*

Developing a staff of individuals into an effectively functioning team can be a rewarding experience. When a staff is functioning as a team, team members' interrelationships can be supportive, satisfying, and stimulating. Team members will be motivated and enabled to use their talents to the fullest.

Unfortunately, team building is not a quick and painless process. In fact, a center should not even consider making the effort to engage in team building unless all participants are aware of how it will affect them:

- For the leader (whether this is the director, a coordinator, or a head teacher), this means being willing to delegate a considerable amount of authority to the team, being patient when it initially takes the team longer

to accomplish a certain task than it would for you on your own, and being able to accept that not *everything* is going to be done your way. For the leader, it means functioning more as a facilitator than as a boss.

- For subordinates, this means being willing to accept some leadership responsibilities, being more concerned with the interests of the team than with your own interests, and being able to be open and caring in your relationships with other team members. For subordinates, this means functioning as an active participant in the process, rather than as a passive follower of orders.

The Team Building Process

The team building process described below is designed specifically for the

child care setting. Built into it is the assumption that the organization is strapped for time and resources — that staff members do not have a lot of free time to devote to process, and that the organization cannot afford to send the entire staff away for weeks at a time to engage in team building exercises.

In addition, it takes into account the probability that, at the outset, staff members will be unwilling and unable to jump right in and assume significant levels of responsibility.

As a result, the following five step process is designed to be implemented gradually and flexibly. It can be carried out over a period of months as part of regular weekly staff meetings. It can allow various staff members to participate at varying levels of responsibility. And it provides a check to make sure that everyone is satisfied with how the process is working.

Step #1 — Set achievable goals.

According to Troy D. Bussey, having clear goals is the key factor to team effectiveness. "Mutually agreed upon goals," he observes, "constitute a cohesive and energizing force for all members of the team."

To have this energizing force, the goals should meet these criteria:

- They should be understood and accepted by all team members. The best way to make this happen is to have all team members participate in the goal setting process. One technique for doing this is outlined in “High Participation Goal Setting.”

- They should be challenging yet achievable. If goals are too difficult to achieve, team members will soon give up trying, and their motivational force will be lost. Likewise, if goals are too easily accomplished, there will not be much challenge.

- They should be measurable. If at all possible, the team’s general goals should be translated into specific yardsticks against which progress can be measured. For example, the goal *To instill a cooperative spirit in children* could be specified as *To increase the incidence of cooperative play by 25%*.

- They should have diverse time frames. Especially at the outset of the team building process, there should be one or two goals that can be achieved within a short period of time, such as *To redesign the toddler room so as to reduce the noise level*. By achieving some goals fairly quickly, individuals will be more inclined than ever to work together as a team to achieve its long term objectives.

Step #2 — Clarify roles.

Team members work most effectively together when their roles are clear and reasonably free of conflict. Ideally, each team member should know what tasks she is responsible for, as well as what tasks each other member is responsible for.

An opportune time to clarify roles is just after going through the goal setting process. At this point, there should be some sense of excitement about embarking on a new venture. Team members should be more open than normal to reexamining and redefining their roles.

To clarify roles at this point, team members first should brainstorm about all the areas of responsibility that the team must assume if it is to accomplish its new goals. For example, team members may list such things as . . .

- developing daily plans;
- developing curriculum activities;
- redesigning the classroom;
- selecting curriculum materials;
- buying curriculum materials;
- cleaning up the classroom; and
- supervising student teachers.

After the list is completed, each area of responsibility will need to be formally assigned to one or more team members. The more that team members participate in this assignment process, the more accepting they are likely to be of the final breakdown. In any event, the team leader will need to exercise final judgment in cases where team members can’t agree, or in cases where team members, due to their inexperience, are biting off more than they can chew.

Mutually agreed upon goals constitute a cohesive and energizing force for all members of the team.

In addition to these formal roles relating to the accomplishment of team goals, there also exists an entirely different set of informal roles. These roles relate to the internal functioning of the team. For example, in order for a team to function well, someone on the team needs to accept responsibility for harmonizing relationships among staff members, for encouraging less assertive or experienced team members to participate actively, and for initiating action when a problem or opportunity exists.

High Participation Goal Setting

When attempting to involve all team members in the goal setting process, the most skilled and most assertive team members may tend to dominate the process. If this is likely to happen in your center, you may want to consider employing a variation of the *Delphi Technique* to set goals. This technique assures that all individuals have an opportunity to get their views before the team. The process works as follows:

- Have each member of the team anonymously write down what they believe should be the top two or three goals of the center.

- Read through all these statements, eliminate duplicates, and compile them into a single list.

- Circulate this list back to all team members with the instructions that they select from this list their recommendations for the top three center goals.

- Count how many times each goal is selected and then present the top three or four vote getters to the team at the next staff meeting. At this meeting, team members should discuss these potential goals, agree on which ones make sense to tackle at the same time, and make suggestions as to how these might be stated more clearly.

- Write up the agreed upon goals based on the comments in the meeting, and pass these statements out to team members for their final review.

- At the next staff meeting, make final revisions and formally approve the goals. Write up the approved goals and distribute copies to all team members.

While it does not make sense to assign these roles formally, the team leader should continually monitor team functioning to be sure that all necessary roles are being performed by someone.

Step #3 — Build supportive relationships.

At the beginning of each year, Clare Cherry challenged each of her teachers to see to it that each of the other teachers had the best year teaching that they'd ever had (Cherry). This type of cooperative spirit is exactly what is needed to make a team work. In an effectively functioning team, each team member draws strength from the personal satisfaction of

being a part of a caring group of individuals, as well as from the professional support provided by team members.

However, it is very easy to say that team members should care about each other and support each other, but it is not so easy to make this happen. While the team leader cannot require team members to be supportive, she can structure situations that encourage this to happen, and she can remove obstacles that often prevent it. Here are examples of approaches that some directors have found effective:

- **Feedback training.** In a survey of child care centers in New England,

“lack of feedback on my performance” was identified by teachers as their greatest frustration (Neugebauer, 1975). The same teachers indicated that the persons they most would respect feedback from are the teachers they work with. Unfortunately, teachers often lack the skills and inclination to give useful feedback. To stimulate the flow of feedback among teachers, it may be helpful to provide training to teachers on how to give effective feedback (see “References and Resources”).

- **Team resource people.** Betty Jones has observed that it is easy for a director to view herself as the final authority on everything, when in fact in many areas there are other staff members who know more than she does (Jones). To tap the expertise that exists among team members and to get team members into the habit of looking to each other for support, instead of always relying on the team leader, some centers have found it helpful to designate different members of the team as resource persons for specific topics, such as music, large motor skills, aggression, or language. These people will be designated on the basis of their current skills and interests, and they will be expected to do some extra research to keep up to date.

- **Best-worst incidents.** In a team where there is not yet a great deal of trust and openness, it may be difficult for team members to know enough about the needs and feelings of their peers in order to provide them support. One approach many centers use to encourage team members to open up is the *best-worst incidents* approach. At a team meeting, the leader asks each staff member to relate the best thing that happened to them at the center the past week, as well as the worst thing.

An infinite variety of variations on this theme could be used: What is the toughest problem you have solved

Common Team Problems

- **Role ambiguity.** Sometimes certain areas of responsibility are left out in never-never land. Everyone knows that they exist but no one knows whose responsibility they are. This often happens with menial responsibilities that nobody wants to touch, such as cleaning up the classroom at the end of the day and keeping the book and toy shelves well organized. Sometimes it can occur with very important tasks that are hard to find time for. Everyone on the team may believe that researching new ideas or evaluating the curriculum are important, but if no one is specifically charged with carrying out these tasks, they just don't get done.
- **Role conflict.** Conflict can occur when two or more team members believe they have responsibility for the same task. A teacher and a director may both believe that it is their responsibility to bring a major concern with a child to the attention of his parents. When this occurs, both team members may end up expending a considerable amount of energy outwardly arguing about whose job it is, or inwardly dealing with anger and frustration. This energy drained off unproductively into the conflict is energy that could more profitably be invested in accomplishing the team's goals.
- **Intergroup conflict.** Conflict can also occur between groups of individuals, i.e., between teams. If the staff of a center is divided into two teams, one serving the preschool children and one serving the infants and toddlers, these two teams may come into conflict over the use of space, over money for supplies, or over use of the kitchen facilities. This is a behavior that very often occurs in the early stages of team building in larger organizations. Team members become so loyal to their own team that anyone on the outside is looked upon as a competitor. This *we-they* attitude is encouraging to the extent that it shows that some *esprit de corps* is beginning to develop among team members. However, in its extreme form, it can be harmful to the organization as a whole.

this week and the toughest you have yet to solve? What parent comment made you feel best this week and which one made you feel worst? Not only does this technique give all team members an easy way to share their victories and receive some positive strokes, it also gives other team members ideas on how they can provide some support.

Step #4 — Encourage active participation.

One of the positive features of the team approach to management is that it can take maximum advantage of the abilities and knowledge of individual team members. However, this utilization of member resources does not happen automatically. A team leader needs to be resourceful in encouraging all team members to contribute their ideas, opinions, and energies. Here are some suggestions:

- **Spotlight challenges.** The creative talents of a team are more likely to be unleashed if there is a specific task to focus on (Uris). The team leader can stimulate team members by pointing out a specific problem that is of major concern to the center (the frequency of accidents on the climbing structure) or an opportunity of high potential (the growing demand for drop-in care in the community).
- **Provide a fertile environment.** Creativity seldom involves the creation of a totally new idea. Organizational theorist James March has observed that “most innovations in an organization are a result of borrowing rather than invention.” Put another way, creativity involves combining conventional ideas in unconventional ways.

Therefore, the team leader should ensure that team members have rich and varied experiences to draw upon. This would involve such steps as providing a wealth of reading materials in the teachers’ lounge, encouraging

team members to visit other centers, and making it possible for them to attend classes and workshops.

- **Demonstrate interest.** Nothing kills the enthusiasm of individuals in developing a new idea more quickly than the realization that no one else is interested in it (Neugebauer, 1991). If one or more team members are working on a new room arrangement, parent communication form, or nap time routine, the team leader should support their efforts by demonstrating an interest in what they are doing, as well as by bringing it to the attention of the entire team.

The team leader needs to nurture a climate in the team that is accepting of new ideas.

- **Offer help when needed.** Not all individuals have an equal ability to come up with an inspiration, to flesh it out, and to develop it into a ready-to-implement product. A team leader needs to be sensitive to the creative styles of various team members. She needs to be able to jump in and offer a helping hand to those who can only come up with *gleam-in-the-eye* stage ideas, while standing aside and letting others run with their ideas through to completion (Uris).
- **Foster a permissive atmosphere.** All team members need to feel that their ideas and contributions are welcomed and valued. The team leader needs to nurture a climate in the team that is accepting of new ideas — no matter how outlandish they may initially appear.

Spiro Agnew loudly decried the *instant analyses* of television news commentators. While one may suspect that he was more upset by the content of their analyses than their speed, his concern does highlight the discouraging aspect of immediate

critical reaction. If a team member lacks confidence or assertiveness to begin with, he will certainly be doubly reluctant to expose his ideas to the team if he knows they will be criticized, ridiculed, or ignored.

That is not to say, of course, that all ideas should be accepted no matter what. Certainly every proposal should be subject to careful, objective scrutiny by the team before implementation. However, such a critical examination should only take place after the contributor has had the opportunity to explain it fully, and even try it out if possible.

- **Allow for individual interests.** According to organizational psychologist Harry Levinson, an organization is best served when it “permits people to seize and develop those challenges that most excite their curiosity.” In spotlighting challenges for the team, the team leader should not restrict attention to a single problem but should delineate a wide range of opportunities for useful innovation. Being able to follow one’s interest is more likely to stimulate a flow of ideas than being restricted to a problem that is critical but of little interest.

Step #5 — Monitor team effectiveness.

You can’t build a house without occasionally stepping back to see if all the workers’ efforts are resulting in a solid, salable product. Likewise, you can’t build a team without periodically monitoring to determine if progress is being made.

Two types of monitoring are of value. First and foremost, the team should be evaluated in terms of whether it is accomplishing its goals. It can be very rewarding for team members when they see that their cooperative efforts are really making a difference. This can provide all the more incentive to work hard at making the team

What Is the Optimum Team Size?

There are no hard and fast rules about what is the best size for a team for it to function most efficiently. Organizational psychologist Peter F. Drucker suggests that if a team has more than 15 members (the maximum size of aboriginal hunting teams), it becomes unwieldy. Teams larger than this tend to exhibit a lack of clarity, little sense of responsibility by team members, and an over concern with internal procedures and politics.

Although small teams seem to work best, they can also become too small. They should not be so small that team members collectively do not possess all the skills needed to perform their common tasks. Nor should they be so small that team members fail to exhibit a diversity of experiences, talents, and perspectives.

work. Conversely, it is vital for team members to know as soon as possible if their efforts are not moving them closer to the accomplishment of their goals. The sooner they know their efforts are misdirected, the less time they will waste before making necessary corrections.

Monitoring progress against goals, or program evaluation, can take many forms. Ideally, the team should be able to express its goals in measurable terms so that there can be some direct yardstick of progress. For example, a team's goal might be expressed as *reducing incidents of aggressive behavior by 30%*. At the beginning of the year, someone could observe the number of incidents of aggression occurring in a classroom over a set period of time. Then, every two or three months, a similar count could be made to see if the number of incidents of aggression was actually declining.

More often than not, however, goals in early childhood settings are not measurable. In these cases, the team must rely on less direct indicators of progress — parent satisfaction surveys, comparisons of behavioral descriptions from diaries, period observations by outside consultants, etc. While such techniques may not yield any cut and dried indications of progress, they can provide team

members with significant amounts of helpful feedback.

The second type of monitoring which a team can and should engage in is the assessment of team functioning. At least two or three times a year, team members should take time out to assess how well they are working together as a team. The longer the gap between assessments, the more likely it is that minor shortcomings will degenerate into major problems.

Monitoring of team functioning need not be a complex process. Typically, what happens is that team members anonymously rate the team using a checklist of functions and then discuss the findings and their implications at a team meeting. One such checklist for rating team effectiveness was presented in "Assessing Team Performance" (see page 5).

As can be seen from the preceding discussion, getting a team approach launched and up to speed is not a simple process. It requires time, patience, and the willingness of all involved to open themselves up to new ways of working and relating to each other. However, in a profession that demands so much creativity, so much flexibility, and so much in terms of interpersonal skills, the team approach offers an excellent vehicle for achieving peak performance.

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Create a climate where teams can flourish

Cohesive Teaching Teams — What Makes the Difference

by Julie Powers

“I have to work with her?”

One of the unique features of our field is that we work closely with a diverse group of people. While most elementary schools have one teacher/one classroom as a model, preschool environments tend to have teaching teams. In fact, many of us “teach in a fishbowl,” as boundaries between classrooms, office space, and playgrounds blur. The ability to work together to meet the needs of children and families is crucial. One of the greatest impacts we can make as directors is to create the atmosphere and organizational structures which allow adults to work together in teams.

What Staff Need

Leo Tolstoy said, “All happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” We can learn from talking to happy team members. When members of successful teams are asked “What makes it work?” the common issues of caring and commitment are frequently cited.

1. Caring

A climate of caring is very important to many preschool staff. Many talk about wanting to work with people who care about the families they serve as well as caring about each other. Kindness, support, understanding, respect, concern, and trust are needed for staff to collaborate. Perhaps because early

childhood settings are commonly thought of as female in orientation, the ethic of caring takes on added importance.

How can the director set a climate of caring?

Respect for the views of staff

- Provide the time and structure for group problem solving. As staff “co-construct” or invent the curriculum, they bond and construct the best solutions for them as a team. This process will take time. It takes discipline to keep daily crises from interfering with this process.
- Involve staff in administrative issues that impact their work; team decisions meet with a lot less resis-



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tance. Teams care about such issues as changing group size, moving children to a different class, and purchasing new inventory, and should be involved in these decisions whenever possible.

- Listen to staff before reacting to problems; don't assume that you have the whole picture. Sometimes a problem can be resolved by encouraging the team involved to talk about it. Action by the director may not be necessary.
- Make time to meet with teaching teams on a regular basis and encourage the team to set the agenda. Demonstrate to the team that their work is important enough for you to schedule time to talk about it. As a result, they will begin to view you as a resource and involve you in their teaching team.

Support and trust

- Encourage teams to address the problems that affect them and create solutions. Accept their solutions rather than employing your own unless there is a very solid reason not to.
- Set the tone by discouraging team members from complaining to you about each other. Teams typically go through a "storming" stage the first few months and are able to work through this stage with time and support. After relationships are repaired, it may be difficult to continue as a team if the director has taken sides.
- Encourage team members to take care of themselves and each other. Advising staff to take "mental health days" can help avoid the burnout that is so detrimental to teams. Set the stage for staff helping each other through the difficult times that may arise in their personal lives. The people we work

with become surrogate families in some ways, and we can offer each other assistance in unique ways.

A relaxed work environment

- Encourage playfulness at appropriate times. At our end-of-the-year staff party, staff members write humorous reports on each other's development in the same format we use for children's year-end reports. The reports also serve as a fun way of revisiting and bringing closure to our year together.
- Give team members the opportunity to socialize together. A director in Tokyo has arranged to take over classrooms with the help of parents to allow team members to have a relaxed lunch together from time to time.

2. Commitment to ideas and professionalism

People are more willing to invest the time needed to develop good working relations if they feel other team members are committed to the team and its goals. Dedication to the job and a sense of belonging create a strong work ethic on a team.

How can the director set a tone of commitment?

Similar philosophical beliefs

- Include team members on hiring committees. Team members who choose each other usually start out on a positive footing. Group interviews can be a little intimidating, but the friendliness of the interview team can help the applicant to relax.
- Organize classroom teams based on similar philosophies of members. People who have similar interests and approaches can energize and encourage each other. Similar philosophies can be more important

than arranging teams based on work schedule or special talents of members.

Common vision and goals

- Assure that the program's vision and goals are revisited with the staff each year to include everybody's input. The vision and goals of the school should be emerging and growing, not an archaic document.
- Give less confident or articulate members time to pull their thoughts together before speaking. Too often group goals are set by those who "think fast on their feet." Prepare staff members for topics to be discussed or decisions to be made before meeting.

Mutual work ethic

- Give people meaningful tasks. Distribute the "mindless" tasks among people and allow everyone a chance to take part in the fun and challenging tasks.
- Offer flexible work schedules. Assure individuals a reasonable work schedule and don't allow people to over-extend themselves. When team members take on too much, their work will suffer and the rest of the team will resent them.

A cooperative work environment

- Minimize hierarchical structures. A focus on what each individual enjoys and does well rather than rigid job descriptions helps to create a team climate. A teacher may be an exceptionally good writer; giving her time to work on the school newspaper, while you work with the children, can bring out the best in everyone.
- Recognize and communicate to all children and families the contributions of all team members. If

parents and kids treat teaching assistants as the important member of the teaching team that they are, the whole team benefits.

- Walk the talk. Set a tone of everyone pitching in for the greater good. Supervising a child in the bathroom to allow a staff member to take a phone call communicates a true cooperative environment.
- Examine how staffing helps or hampers teamwork. Staff need opportunities to plan together. Ask the staff to help you examine their schedules and duties to find optimal teaming time.

Support for professional growth

- Dedicate financial resources to training and education. Even a little bit of money spent on professional development communicates your appreciation of the increased knowledge and skill that staff develop. We have found resources to bring all or most of our staff to the NAEYC conference when it is not too far away. The excitement and feeling of professionalism cannot be duplicated by any other means. Team members roomed together and bonded through the disasters as well as the fun.
- Work with staff to make professional development easier. Offering flexible work schedules and leaves of absence can pay off in the long run.
- Encourage risk taking. Allow staff to try out new ideas even if you have your doubts. They may surprise you!
- Provide professional resources. A good library can be enjoyed by all staff members. Sometimes a well written article is more accessible and useful to staff members than a long book.

Acknowledge the Importance of the Teaching Team

In our competitive society, we haven't had a lot of training or experience in teaming. We can support the hard work and time it takes to build a good teaching team by the actions we take as directors. Good teaching teams model to children and families important values including cooperation, caring, and learning together.

"Martha and I want to work together next term!"

As the importance of good teaming is understood, programs put more time and resources into increasing team effectiveness. Children will experience a model of cooperation, parents will become active team members, and staff will be retained as work becomes a more satisfying experience. As directors, we can set the stage for learning for the teachers just as they do for the children.

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Ideas for Training Staff



Indicators of Effective Teamwork

by Margie Carter

In the past few months I've received a number of calls from directors and teachers asking for help with team building on their staff. The problems they describe vary from site to site: a Head Start teacher with a decade and a half of experience finds she can't work with her new assistant; a director of a child care program is concerned that some staff are highly involved in decision-making, while others under participate and don't lend their voice or time; another director worries about constant bickering among her teachers over what seem like petty issues; a Reggio-inspired program is struggling to understand what the Italians really mean by this concept of collaboration among teachers, children, and families.

The language of teamwork and collaboration is taken for granted in our professional discourse, but walking the talk is quite another thing. These accomplishments require time to build relationships, an ability to take multiple perspectives, and a willingness to hang in there when tensions escalate. The typical child care setting has difficulty providing time for meaningful adult interactions away from the children. Directors and other program supervisors have many demands on their atten-

tion and find it difficult to be proactive in building a cohesive team. Many lack the experience to know how to specifically nurture the dispositions and mentor the skills of being a collaborator and team player.

Beyond the nice gestures of birthday acknowledgments and creating a secret pals activity, directors often overlook the importance of team building work until faced with a significant problem. Then the task becomes remediation, akin to weeding a garden that has gotten out of control, rather than a thoughtful plan of fertilizing and cultivating harmonious growth.

Working with programs to build strong teams and the ability to collaborate, I focus on recognizing key indicators that can be found in a program. Getting each person to identify what they look for in each of these areas begins an important dialogue where mutual understanding and accountability can be shaped.

Clear Communications

It goes without saying that people have different communication styles and skills, but these often go unacknowledged and become the source of growing tension on a staff. Part of our new staff orientation and ongoing development work needs to include guidelines for effective communications and clarity

on the communication systems and policies of the program.

STRATEGY:

Develop, distribute, and role play communication guidelines

Take time in a staff meeting or retreat to brainstorm and develop written guidelines on what people want from each other in the way of good communications. Make sure each person states her or his view and that concepts such as listening, talking, writing, and body language are discussed. Choose the ideas that everyone agrees on to begin your list and then negotiate what to write for areas where there are different views. Remember to include something about how you want communication channels or protocol to work in your program.

To be sure everyone understands and agrees, develop some short role plays for people to practice using the guidelines. As you debrief the role play, review your written guidelines to see if they need more clarity. If your role plays reveal that staff need more communication skills, build that into your staff development plans.

Distribute, post, and periodically revisit your communication guidelines and make sure they become part of your

new staff orientation packet and are referenced in your annual staff evaluation process.

Respectful Interactions and Demonstrations of Trust

Respect and trust are words easily thrown about in conversations, but what do they look like in the day-to-day life of a child care program? Taking the time to identify the attitudinal and behavioral aspects of respect and trust is a wise investment of your precious staff meeting time.

STRATEGY: *Identify the elements of respect and trust*

Using a process similar to the one described above, devote some of your staff development hours to getting everyone's views on what respect and trust specifically look like in given situations. To launch the discussion, ask people to first read and finish the following sentences with their own ideas:

A person who shows me respect is thoughtful about. . . .

A person I give respect to knows how to. . . .

I feel trusted by someone when she or he. . . .

I will trust someone after she or he. . . .

From the ideas generated, make a list of specific behaviors that generate trust and respect. Then present several short scenarios of typical encounters in a program where trust and respect can become an issue (i.e., arriving late to work, sharing personal information, giving a criticism, asking for help, or taking a different approach than your co-workers).

Divide into two groups with one developing a list of things that a staff member

could do that would erode the possibility of trust or respect in this situation, while the other group identifies actions that could build trust. As a whole group, compare your lists to give staff a mirror on how their own ideas might play themselves out in real situations. Review your beginning list one more time for any additions or changes before it gets written and posted as a reference point for future interactions.

Using Conflicts to Discover and Negotiate Different Perspectives

Whenever a group of people come together, especially with the conscious intent of influencing a group of children, the personal and professional growth available to them is enormous. This benefit of the work is worth stressing again and again, especially as you enter areas of conflict. Having some initial practice in consciously naming and working with different viewpoints establishes a foundation before the going gets rough.

In many early childhood programs, there are policies and practices that are taken for granted with little discussion or questioning. Someone in the past may have set these up according to a personal preference, or the policies may have been adopted from professional definitions of best practices. In any case, it is useful to periodically explore the assumptions underlying certain practices so that everyone is clear about why the program has specific policies. A chance to discuss these issues also provides an opportunity to identify and negotiate any conflicts of values among staff, and possibly between a teacher and parent.

STRATEGY: *Explore different values*

Teachers and caregivers benefit from the opportunity to examine and name the influences on their own values and pre-

ferred practices. A simple way to do this in a staff meeting is to write on separate pieces of paper possible opposing viewpoints on policies and then post them around the room. Ask everyone to find one viewpoint they wish to discuss, go to that paper, and talk with others there. They don't have to agree with the viewpoint, but they should at least have strong sentiments that they would like to discuss. Things you write on these papers could include:

- Children should primarily be allowed to make choices and negotiate with adults.
- Children should primarily be offered limited choices and non-negotiable guidelines from adults.
- Children should call adults by their first names.
- Children should address adults by Mr. or Ms. or Teacher with her or his name.
- Children should be separated from the group or put in time-out when they don't follow the rules.
- Children should be redirected and involved in other activities when they don't follow the rules.
- Children should be required to try at least one bite of all the food served.
- Children should be allowed to follow their own food preferences when eating.
- Children should be allowed to get messy and dirty when they play in our program.
- Children should be guided to keep their hair and clothes clean when they play in our program.

Some of these statements reflect or contradict prevailing views in our profes-

sional literature. This is a good place to acknowledge that our standards have been primarily shaped through a white middle-class lens. We need to open the dialogue and negotiate conflicting beliefs.

In the debriefing discussion ask whether people found similarities or differences with others in their group. Were they there because they agreed or disagreed with the viewpoint? When teachers are asked to carry out practices different from their own belief systems, the situation is ripe for resentment and subversion. On the other hand, when you create a climate to discover and negotiate different perspectives, you can often avoid the good guy/bad guy mentality and develop acceptable compromises.

STRATEGY:
Play with different communication styles

Sometimes people make judgments about each other based on differences in communication styles. This could be a personal or cultural issue, but in either circumstance, it's useful to understand what's happening. Here's a playful way to explore how we send and receive information and feelings.

Ask your staff to consider possible labels for acceptable communication styles and then choose four or five to work with. The term "acceptable" is a subjective one. Our intent here is to avoid negative labels such as caustic, attacking, manipulative, or defensive, and identify a variety of other styles that have a useful place in communicating. For instance, friendly, humorous, creative, decisive, analytical direct or indirect could be selected as styles for exploration.

Spend a minute defining what is meant by each of these styles. Then divide the large group into as many small groups as there are styles, and assign one style to each small group. Ask each group to generate a list of common phrases that you might hear someone from that style use. For example, the lists might look something like this:

Friendly Style:

- You have great ideas.
- I like what you said.
- They might not like that.

Creative Style:

- Anything is possible.
- Let's keep brainstorming.
- What if we flipped that around?

Decisive Style:

- Let's not waste time.
- We have to decide one way or another.
- I want to know what we're going to do.

Analytical Style:

- I think we should do a survey.
- The facts speak for themselves.
- We need more evidence.

Once you've given each group the time to come up with a list of three or four phrases, ask for a volunteer from each group and conduct a communications role-play. Choose a topic that isn't emotionally loaded for the volunteers to discuss. An example might be what color the center should paint its walls, what kinds of plants to get for the lounge, or what software should be purchased for your computers. As you facilitate the brief discussion, ask each volunteer to try to use as many of the phrases on their list as possible in the situation. Along with being able to laugh and get a new perspective on how style might look in a group setting, you can debrief this activity to explore the strengths and weaknesses of each style and the barriers that can occur when we judge a person's contribution by their communi-

cation style. Staff members might enjoy identifying their own style and exploring how it can potentially conflict with another.

Building on Each Other's Ideas and Strengths

As with children, adults need coaching on how to participate in collaborative thinking and work projects. It doesn't come automatically. Activities such as the above can help identify the strengths that each person's style brings to the process. These should be named and celebrated. From there you can practice finding ways to get everyone's perspective, experience and skills acknowledged and involved.

STRATEGY:

Pass the paper to build on ideas

Whatever the topic, you can divide your staff into small groups so that there is more time for everyone to offer their ideas during your staff meetings. Give each group an identical piece of chart paper, divided into three columns. If the topic is an anti-bias issue, a child guidance issue, health and safety, or a parent concern, label the three columns, Issues Identified, Immediate Response, and Further Plans.

Give each group a scenario related to the topic to discuss and write out their responses to the first column. After some time, have them pass their papers and scenario to the next group and, after reading what the previous group wrote in the first column, begin working on the second. Pass the paper and repeat this process for the third column. Then give each group their original paper to get the benefit of all the other groups' thinking and consider additional perspectives.

Reliability and Responsibility

You can be a thoughtful, sensitive person with terrific ideas, but if you don't show up on time for work, forget to fill out your paper work, or neglect to make that critical call to a parent, you can hardly be called a team player. Reliability and responsibility are the ultimate behaviors that indicate whether clear communications, respect, trust, negotiating different perspectives and building on each other's strengths are alive and well and reflecting effective team work in your program.

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The leader's role in making the team work

Ten Teamwork Terminators and Some Sure Cures

by Hawaii retreat attendees

Teamwork is one of those all-American concepts like motherhood, apple pie, and developmentally appropriate practice. No director should lead on without it.

*How to be a team builder was the focus of a **Child Care Information Exchange** management retreat in Hawaii in February of this year. Participating directors shared a wide range of experiences and insights at this retreat, and these form the basis of this article.*

One interesting insight at the retreat was that, as much as a director may want her staff to function as a team, she may be the biggest stumbling block to making it happen. Participants identified ten behaviors that directors may engage in that unwittingly undermine team performance, as well as some keys to making the team work.

1. Playing Favorites

Nothing sours team spirit more quickly than a perception that some team members enjoy a privileged status. If you consistently single out one or two teachers for praise, give them preferential treatment in scheduling, or tend to seek their input more than anyone else's, other staff members will feel more like outsiders than team members.

2. Tolerating Laxity

If one staff member frequently arrives late, fails to help with clean up, or is lax in attending to the children, and you let this misbehav-

ior go unchallenged, other staff members will resent having to work harder. They will blame you for caving in and will be less inclined to work hard for the common good.

3. Cowering from Conflict

Teacher A lashes out at Teacher B and stomps out of the staff meeting. You continue as if nothing has happened. Afterwards you make small talk with the two teachers separately hoping to jolly them out of their angry moods. Efforts to maintain an outward appearance of harmony may ease tensions in the short run, but the hostility remains and may draw others into the conflict.

4. Fuzzy Roles

To the extent that there is confusion about roles and responsibilities, energy that could be directed toward working with children and parents will be consumed by anxiety and frustration. For teachers to feel secure and focused, they need to know exactly what is expected of them. They need to know what tasks they hold final responsibility for, what tasks they share responsibility for, and what decisions they must clear with someone in authority before going ahead.

5. Inconsistency

In January, the director announces to staff that building self-esteem is going to be the center's number one goal. In February, she holds a staff meeting in which she shares her excitement about implementing a new environmental awareness curriculum.

In March, she decides it's time that the center took a stand on violence in the lives of children. Such vacillation, whether it be over curriculum goals, operating practices, or personnel procedures, contributes to a sense of uncertainty among the staff

and a loss of credibility for the leadership.

6. The Tyranny of Taboos

Teamwork tends to bring out the best in people, to motivate team members to work hard for the common good. The focus of the team is on uniting the talents of individual team members. Teamwork is promoted by focusing on achieving goals, not on obeying rules. Directors who attempt to direct staff by promulgating rules and by punishing misbehavior will not build team spirit.

Staff who are motivated by team spirit will focus their energies on accomplishing goals. Staff who are directed by rules and admonitions will focus their energies on avoiding punishment.

7. Holding On to the Reins

Many early childhood leaders have a difficult time releasing the reins of authority. They want to have the final say on every decision. By tightly controlling every activity, a knowledgeable director may assure that everything is done right — but with a significant cost in terms of staff morale. Staff will get the message that they are not trusted. They will see themselves more as dispensable machine parts than as valued team members. The bottom line is: Just let go.

8. Fake Participation

Even more demoralizing than an authoritarian director is a director who goes through the motions of inviting staff participation in shaping decisions and then ignores staff input when the final decisions are made. More often than not such behavior is not intentional.

A director may believe in the value of staff involvement and genuinely reach out for advice. However, when it comes to the final decision, he may be so locked into his own point of view that he can't understand or be influenced by conflicting views. But whether or not the behavior is deliberate, the impact on the staff will be the same. Staff will feel misled, frustrated, and angry — certainly not in the mood to work hard for the team.

9. The Hindering Hierarchy

To be an enthusiastic team player, you need to believe that your contribution makes a difference. You need to feel valued and respected. In an organization with a formal or informal hierarchy it is hard to develop team spirit among staff who perceive themselves to be on the bottom rung of the ladder.

Many centers have evolved into a quasi caste system whereby the administrators are viewed as *the bosses*, the head teachers as *the educators*, and the teacher aides as *the workers*. In such a system, the workers will not feel valued or respected, and certainly will not be motivated to become team players. In addition, any feelings of superiority the educators possess will get in the way of their ability to participate with fervor in a team effort.

10. Lack of Recognition

Being part of a smoothly functioning team is a gratifying experience. Working together to try out new ideas, to solve problems, to help each other grow, and to achieve results can be invigorating and fun. However, sometimes, especially in the early, rocky stages of team building, these intrinsic rewards

are not enough. Team members who feel their hard work and special contributions are not appreciated will eventually want off the team.

Keys to Building a Successful Team

- **Make team building a priority**

Teamwork doesn't just happen. A staff will not naturally evolve from a collection of individuals into a well-oiled team. The leader needs to identify teamwork as a high priority, gain the support of staff for the idea, and develop a deliberate process for making it happen.

Built into this process will need to be (1) an open assessment of the talents and interests of all team members; (2) the development of goals that all team members are committed to accomplishing; and (3) the organizing of tasks and responsibilities in such a way that the talents and interests of all team members are put to best use.

- **Keep your finger on the pulse**

Periodically the leader should encourage the staff to stop and take a look at how the team building process is going. Initially you may want to use a simple instrument such as the "Twenty Questions about Team Spirit" that appears with this article (you have the permission of Exchange to reproduce this freely for internal use).

Ask staff members if they would agree to fill this out, and ask them to do so anonymously. Tabulate the results and share them, unedited, with the entire staff. Focus on the areas where good things are happening, and then talk about those areas where progress needs to be made.

Elicit from the group first what suggestions they might have, add in your thoughts, and then try as a group to arrive at some specific steps to make. (Note: If at this point you simply step in and say, "Okay, here is what needs to happen!," staff members may not be inclined to share the responsibility for results.)

Try to use the same form to measure progress every six months or so. Then as your team begins to jell you should be able simply to hold open discussions periodically to air concerns and develop solutions.

- **Make meetings meaningful**

Staff meetings that are boring, unfocused, or unimaginative actually can sap team spirit. Who cares about being a part of a team that can't get excited or that isn't fun to be with.

Staff meetings are the connection points that enable teamwork to develop. They should be the hub of your deliberate team building process.

To be successful, staff meetings must engage the interest and enthusiasm of all participants. They must provide a safe environment in which staff members can challenge basic assumptions, take risks, stretch their thinking, ask stupid questions, and share their feelings.

Establish ground rules for team building staff meetings that provide everyone equal opportunity to be heard and all ideas to be open to question. Every meeting appoint a different staff person to be the process monitor to make sure in a kindly way that these ground rules are observed.

Make meetings unpredictable so that people come to meetings eager to see what will happen next. Move meetings around to different rooms, different locations. People are more open to new ideas if they come in expecting something new than if they come in turned off expecting the same old stuff.

Twenty Questions about Team Spirit

A Child Care Information Exchange Center Evaluation Form

- 1. I understand the curriculum goals of the center.
- 2. I am in agreement with these goals.
- 3. I am proud to be associated with this center.
- 4. I have no fear about expressing my opinions and concerns at the center.
- 5. When I have something to say, people here really listen.
- 6. I am kept up to date on developments at the center.
- 7. I find staff meetings to be informative and productive.
- 8. I have a clear understanding of my role at the center.
- 9. My full range of skills is tapped in my work at the center.
- 10. When important decisions are made, I am consulted, and my opinions are taken seriously.
- 11. When decisions are made, new policies announced, or new goals set, the director sees to it that they are implemented.
- 12. When conflicts arise between adults in the center, the director moves quickly and effectively to resolve them.
- 13. When other problems arise at the center, the director moves quickly and effectively to solve them.
- 14. When dealing with a problem, the director involves the appropriate staff members in helping work out a solution.
- 15. I believe that I am treated fairly as an employee.
- 16. I have not observed anyone else being treated unfairly.
- 17. I don't believe any employee is granted favored status.
- 18. I enjoy a friendly relationship with other staff members.
- 19. I receive support from other staff members when I need help.
- 20. I consistently receive valuable feedback about my performance.

The most important step the organization could take to improve team spirit is . . .

I am eager for team spirit to improve at our center, and here is what I am willing to do to help . . .

Referee or Team Builder?

The director's role in managing staff conflict

by Yvonne Jeffries

Nine blind men encountered an elephant. Each walked around the elephant, rubbing, studying, and talking to it before announcing, with confidence, his conclusion. Each offered one of the following descriptions: A big city, a giant snake, a flexible spear, a tree

trunk, frayed rope, a big fan, a thick rug, a mighty pillar, a solid wall, a wide sail.

— A tale from the oral tradition

There are as many different definitions of conflict as there are reasons for conflict. For the purpose of this discussion, I offer the following definition:

“Conflict is the struggle for some-

thing that is scarce or thought to be scarce. In a group, it may be attention, power, status, influence, the right to fill a role, and so on” (Johnson, 1992).

Do these scenarios sound familiar?

- Barbara and Claire can't stand each other.
- Sarah has the children in her classroom bless the food before they eat.

- Management wants this today and that tomorrow.
- Before Donna can do something, she has to ask a million questions.
- Four months ago, you scheduled the conference room for 2 p.m. today. A red “Do Not Disturb” sign hangs from the doorknob.
- Jennifer makes you uncomfortable because you never know what she is thinking.
- George and Gloria disagree on how to implement the *Parent Literacy Program*.

These situations speak to potential sources of staff conflict: access to and control over resources, differences in individual perceptions, interpersonal relationships, personal versus organizational values, preferences, expectations, communication between and among management and staff, and behaviors and mannerisms that simply get on your nerves.

Given the range of things that can cause or contribute to staff conflict, and the likelihood of workplace conflict, I offer the following principles:

Principle:

Conflict is common if not inevitable.

The familiar tale of the nine blind men who, as shown above, came to nine

different conclusions about the same elephant is a good example of why conflict is so commonplace, indeed inevitable. We, like the nine men, *suffer* from degrees of blindness. This blindness is a result of our own personal experiences, ethnic, cultural, geographic, and religious influences, education and training, gender, age, personality, and other factors that contribute to our interpretation and response to individuals and situations. In addition, the very nature of the organization may make conflict both common and inevitable. An organization's survival, growth, and sustainability are due, in large part, to its ability and willingness to compete in the marketplace. To this end, it:

- Employs individuals for their interest in the work, their expertise, experience, drive, creativity, and willingness to get the job done.
- Expects each employee to work toward the achievement of the mission, promote the values, carry out the mission and to do so in conjunction with 10, 50, or 100 other people, each of whom has his or her own opinions, perspectives, and professional agendas.
- Develops and implements an internal system of distributing rewards and privileges that fosters some degree of competition.

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- Exercises its right to renegotiate and/or terminate its relationship with employees whose performance falls below what it designates as acceptable.

Principle:

Conflict is often an opportunity for constructive change

Conflict occurs when differences in perceptions and perspectives threaten staff's willingness and ability to continue to work towards common goals and desired outcomes. Because of the nature of the workplace and the individual differences mentioned above, one can expect professional disagreements, challenges, lobbying, and other behaviors that individuals may employ to gain acceptance for their point of view. While these interactions can be uncomfortable and disconcerting, they can also encourage discussion, broaden perspectives and lead to constructive change for individuals, groups, and organizations. For example, there is probably more than one way to implement the *Parent Literacy Program*. Therefore, George and Gloria's conflict is also an opportunity to exchange program development ideas, learn more about each other's style of work, and benefit the program and its participants.

Principle:

Conflict is neither good or bad, right or wrong.

There seems to be a general discomfort with conflict, an assumption (maybe even a belief) that people in conflict do not like each other or do not get along. Conflict and anger are often seen as synonymous. Too often, we find someone to blame for the conflict. Directors and staff too often take sides — or are perceived as taking sides. These dynamics reflect a belief that conflict is not good. In conflict, people often display emotions such as anger, frustration, defensiveness, and resistance. This can certainly lead to organizational and individual disequilibrium. But if conflict is understood as part of the learning/ changing/ growing

process, the disequilibrium is manageable.

George and Gloria's conflict, more than likely, stems from differences in philosophy rather than personal dislike. Both may experience any or all of the emotions mentioned above. Even so, in and of itself, their conflict is neither good or bad, right or wrong. Of greater concern than their emotional response to a difficult work-related situation should be the potential negative, far-reaching, long-term impact their conflict can have on individuals, teams, program participants, and the organization as a whole if their conflict is unresolved or poorly resolved.

The reasons for a conflict tend to be more important than the conflict itself. How many times have you heard, "He's just doing this because he doesn't like her." This kind of remark relegates someone's conflict to the status of a personal problem rather than professional differences. If the conflict is assumed to be personal, professional differences such as philosophical, ethics, historical influences, position in the organization, longevity, and style of work are not considered. For example, it is possible the only reason Donna asks all those questions is to get on your nerves, but that is not the perspective from which a resolution should be approached. Directors do not have the power, responsibility, or obligation to change personal relationships. Directors' responsibility is running the center. Therefore, directors need to concentrate on identifying reasons that might be at the root of the conflict.

Principle:

There are conflict-makers and conflict-avoiders

Conflict-makers and conflict-avoiders represent the extreme ends of a con-

tinuum. There are individuals whose primary purpose seems to be *creating confusion*. Conflict-makers are disruptive. Their interest in *keeping up the confusion* tends to negatively affect their job performance. There are also individuals who will go to almost any length to avoid conflict. Conflict-avoiders are also disruptive. Their interest in *keeping the peace* tends to negatively affect their job performance.

Most of us, however, would place ourselves in or near the middle of the continuum. Most people prefer to work without conflict and when it occurs, want to resolve it as quickly and amicably as possible. But the desire to do so is often complicated by personality characteristics, personal history among co-workers, personal investment in the outcome, and other variables. A director who manages conflict effectively understands how to help employees work through the conflict that occurs and at the same time avoid unnecessary conflict.

There is constructive resolution and destructive resolution. When the goal is constructive resolution, the individuals involved want to resolve the conflict and protect their working relationship. There is high regard for each other's point of view, and the expectation is that the outcome will be an improved working relationship from which program participants will benefit. When the goal is destructive resolution, each person wants to win, even at the expense of others. Consequently, they are not able to focus on life after the conflict. Their resolution behaviors consist primarily of blaming, shaming, and attempting to frame each other as incompetent. While there are probably very few conflicts that are 100 percent constructive or destructive, all conflictual situations have the potential to be destructive.

Principle: Conflict costs

Every person arrives at the workplace with a conflict resolution style that is influenced by how conflict was managed in their family of origin. Some strategies used in personal situations (e.g., not speaking, withholding, telling, walking out in the middle of the confrontation, emotional tantrums, threatening, and saying whatever you think) are not appropriate in the workplace. When we get involved in a conflict, our emotions are triggered. Dealing with the conflict and managing our emotions can be challenging. Efforts to help employees understand how to handle conflict professionally need to begin at orientation and to be reinforced over time.

The cost of conflict varies. Its cost is measured in time, money, productivity, customer and/or employee relations, opportunities, and image. Employees might ask themselves, "What am I willing to let this conflict cost the organization (program, department, team or me)?"

The director who recognizes conflict, does not judge it as good, bad, right, or wrong and deals with it from the perspective of job performance is generally able to keep the cost to a minimum.

Managing staff conflict

Managing staff conflict effectively begins with a clear understanding of how your organization views conflict and how it expects conflict to be managed. This becomes the framework for how directors, regardless of comfort level, manage conflicts.

Effective directors make expectations as clear as possible. They do not concentrate on feelings and the personal aspect of the relationship. They do not focus on changing attitudes. Instead, they help employees problem-solve so they can get at the root cause of the conflict while managing their

emotions. When conflict is managed in this way, employees can afford to view conflict as a natural part of the creative process.

One cannot talk about staff conflict meaningfully without talking about organizational culture. An organization that addresses conflict directly through planning meetings, individual and group supervision, written communication, and policies and procedures, is more likely to resolve its conflicts constructively. When staff at all levels of an organization have authority that is commensurate with their level of responsibility, the potential for conflict decreases and the potential for constructive resolution increases.

There needs to be consistency between an organization's identity and its willingness to deal with conflict. If, for instance, an organization identifies itself as innovative, creative, forward thinking, customer-centered, community-based, and/or relationship-based, it is potentially inviting conflict and must be prepared for the conflict a particular philosophy may generate. Organizational efforts that require staff to cross classroom boundaries, forge new communication networks, promote dialogue and collaboration, implement a new framework, and wrestle with issues around inclusion are taking risks. Change and conflict tend to go hand-in-hand.

There are a variety of conflict management styles. One model describes these styles as avoiding, competing, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating. The value of each style is determined by the situation to which it is applied. Directors who are responsible for modeling effective conflict resolution need to have the skills to use the style that is most appropriate for the situation, even if it is not the style with which she or he is most comfortable.

Conclusion

Staff conflict is one of the realities of organizational life. Conflict will arise in organizations that are striving to manage day-to-day operations efficiently and effectively and strategically plan for the future at the same time. The question and the challenge is: How does a director manage conflict constructively with the professional sensitivity needed to avoid alienating staff?

Because staff conflict can occur at any time and for a variety of reasons, it might be helpful to remember:

- A director is meant to be a team builder, not a referee.
- Conflict resolution is a process. It begins with hearing each person's point of view and ideally ends when the agreed-upon actions are implemented. People are different. The visible part of a conflict may be over before the emotional part. Keep the focus on the work.
- The level of the organization at which the conflict occurs very often determines how it is handled. However, job title and position should not be the sole criteria for determining how and when a conflict is handled.
- Interpersonal skills are a factor in how a conflict is handled.
- The moment people in conflict begin talking about their differences, they are engaging in conflict resolution and can, with support, resolve the conflict constructively.
- Third party intervention should be used only when necessary. The third party should be selected very carefully.
- Constructive conflict resolution is more difficult to achieve in a win-lose culture.
- Conflict episodes are not behavior problems. They are potential job performance issues and should be handled as such.

- Anticipate conflict and build conflict-resolution strategies into the organizational structure.
- People do not have to like each other to work together effectively. Personalities clash. Sometimes people just do not jell. This does not have to result in conflict. Organizations and individuals have to be careful not to engage in “who likes whom” conversations. Avoid giving the impression that liking each other is more important than working together.
- A key to effective conflict resolution is managing the conflict — not the emotions of those engaged in the conflict. It is not productive to say, “You’re being defensive,” “You don’t have to get mad,” or “You’re too emotional, I just can’t talk to you.”
- Not all conflict situations require the director’s attention. Identify those that do and provide timely intervention.

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lifting as you climb

by Debra R. Sullivan

At our *Exchange* Panel of 300 Reception in Dallas, Texas, last November, we had very interesting conversations about leadership and several key themes emerged. This will be the first of a series of articles addressing those leadership themes and answering leadership questions presented to *Exchange* by the Panel members who attended the reception. There is an old proverb that encourages us to lift as we climb: “While you climb a mountain, you must not forget others along the way.” With that in mind, it is not surprising that one of the recurring themes was mentoring. Here are some of the questions about mentoring that came up as we talked:

- What is a mentor and how do we identify mentor leaders?



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- How do we grow leaders in early childhood programs?
- How do we get more people of color into leadership positions?
- How do we coordinate career development and mentoring?
- How do we support leadership in various positions within a center or program?
- What are some ‘Next Steps’ to growing more leadership through mentoring?

What is a mentor and how do we identify mentor leaders?

A mentor can be many things to someone interested in developing as a leader:

- A mentor can be a teacher, a trainer, a coach, or a friendly colleague who wants someone else to be as successful as possible.
- A mentor can provide guidance, advice, and counsel.
- A mentor can be a source of strength and advocacy.
- A mentor is a leader who creates new leadership.

If you want to find a good mentor leader, look for a great teacher or administrator who works well with adults. They can be fairly easy to spot

— easier than you might think! Look for those who:

- Are patient. Patience allows you to take the time needed to mentor another who may have some catching up to do.
- Experiment with different ways to ensure that learning happens. Mentors who make sure learners learn tend to try different teaching strategies to meet diverse learning styles.
- Like working with adults. In the early childhood field, there are those who work best with children and those who work best with other adults. Mentor leaders often work well with both children and adults.
- See others’ qualities and strengths. Those who can see what others bring to the leadership table are more aware of the various requirements of leadership and provide others with the opportunity to practice leadership from a place of strength.
- Want to mentor. Not everyone who is a good leader or teacher wants to mentor others. I have met many great administrators and master teachers who prefer to focus on their own work. Mentoring others may not be #1 on their list of priorities. Pay close attention to the leaders and adminis-

trators others turn to for help, advice, guidance, suggestions, and/or input. Those are your mentor leaders, even if they haven't taken on an official title. When potential mentees go to the same people time and again, you've identified a mentor leader. Make it official!

How do we grow leaders in early childhood programs?

We often talk about 'growing our own leaders,' but this seems to be more difficult to implement than it sounds. Growing our own leaders means that current leaders need to mentor the next generation of leaders. This is difficult in many professions, but seems to be more so in early childhood. It can be difficult to intentionally create your own replacement when you've worked so hard to establish yourself. And, given the economy, job security may begin to take priority. Of course, this usually happens when we fall into the trap of what I call 'scarcity thinking.' Scarcity thinking happens when we impose limits — in this case, limits on how much leadership is needed. Scarcity thinking tells us that there's only 'room' for so much leadership so we have to hold on to what we have. Children require an abundance of leadership. 'Abundance thinking' allows us to realize that the more leadership we have, the better off we will be. Abundance thinking relieves the pressure of making sure you're indispensable now that you've finally made it to the top, because you realize that more leadership makes us more powerful and effective advocates for the children and families we serve.

Our first task is to recognize and seek out great gardeners. Gardeners thrive on the anticipation of what they can grow and what can be done with what they grow. Growing leaders in early childhood programs will be the great contribution of those who seek a bountiful harvest. To grow leaders, you must sow

seeds — leadership seeds. As teachers of young children, we have expectations that children will grow cognitively, socially, and emotionally, and develop the critical thinking and decision-making skills that will help them be successful. To grow leaders in early childhood programs, we must have similar goals for adults. In a recent training, I was asked to talk about developmental goals for children and I was struck by how much we need to focus on some of the same goals for growing leaders. As do children, our future leaders need:

- to learn about themselves
- to learn about others
- to learn about communicating, and
- to acquire and increase critical thinking skills.

We grow leaders in the field of early childhood when we provide opportunities for teachers to grow and have high expectations that they *will* grow, that they *will* become the next generation of leaders, and that there is 'room' for limitless leadership in the service of children. We just need to put on our 'gardening gloves' and start planting seeds — planting the seed of leadership development in the minds of all those who work with and serve young children.

How do we get more people of color into leadership positions?

Historically, in the United States there have always been people of color in the early childhood profession and many of them have served as remarkable and renowned leaders. However, for most of our history, we have been unaware of the leadership provided by people of color because of the segregation that limited our experiences to people who looked like us. In present times, we are more likely to work with a diverse group of colleagues serving an increasingly diverse group of children. The time has come to rethink our definitions

and descriptions of leaders and leadership. I have met many women and men of African, Asian, Indigenous, and Latin descent who have served as leaders in other environments or who have remarkable leadership potential. Some were born in the U.S., some are immigrants, and some are refugees. Many are currently serving as instructional assistants, teacher aides, and interpreters, or have another supporting role in our early childhood classrooms.

Getting more people of color into leadership positions in the early childhood field requires increased focus on access, opportunity, and expectations. Increased access happens when more highly skilled teachers and administrators from many different cultural and racial groups are placed in leadership positions. More opportunities to practice leadership happens when we step aside or move out of the way so that others have the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership — or learn from their mistakes. Increased expectations means working on changing our perceptions of what a leader and leadership looks like. Different cultures have different expectations of who can be a leader and how leadership is demonstrated. If we truly want to get more people of color into leadership positions in early childhood, we have to recognize that leadership looks different to different people, looks different at different moments in history, and looks different in different situations around the world.

How do we coordinate career development and mentoring?

To coordinate career development and mentoring it is very important to know where people want to go, who they want to be, and what they want to do. Often, career and professional development is provided to increase program quality, and that is a very, very good decision. However, if you also plan to match career development with mentor-

ing, it is important to understand staff members' professional development priorities. And there will always be those who aren't sure where early childhood education is leading them. A good mentor always helps others 'see the next step' in their careers.

I'm always intrigued when I'm working with a teacher who cannot see herself with an Associate of Arts degree until she finally completes the Child Development Associate Certificate. All of a sudden, she begins to think about the possibility of taking the next step. One of the challenges that I hear time and again is that if ECE classroom teachers get a degree, then they will leave the field. I think we should expect people to leave and we should be willing to let them go. If we are truly growing leaders, we should have the next generation of entry-level teachers and aides already lined up! Find out what individual staff members want to do and match them with others who do their jobs well! And make sure you have a very good evaluation process. A superb performance evaluation process includes next steps for career development and mentoring.

How do we support leadership in various positions within a center or program?

A key ingredient to supporting leadership in various positions within a center or program is recognizing that everyone has leadership potential and responsibility and that leadership is needed at every level of a program or center. It is true that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, so excellence, accountability, responsible decision-making, passion, dedication, commitment, and creativity must be present at every level and must live in every individual. A mentor leader understands that leadership can happen vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and outside of any box we create. I cannot begin to count the number of times I've heard early childhood program staff dis-

count a leadership opportunity because "I'm just a cook" or "The custodian's work doesn't have anything to do with leadership." I've said it once and I'll say it again: To a young child, all grown-ups are leaders and all grown-ups have the power, resources, ability, skill, and means to do whatever they want. Children do not distinguish between roles, positions, and levels like adults do. To a three year old, all grown-ups have superhuman powers. A creative mentor leader makes sure everyone has an opportunity to be in charge of something and provides opportunities for every adult to be successful and shine.

What are some 'Next Steps' we can take to grow more leadership through mentoring?

The answer to this question calls for a two-pronged approach: One for potential mentors and one for potential mentees.

First, potential mentors:

- Reflect on your knowledge of human development. Growing leaders takes time, much like facilitating children's social, emotional, and cognitive development.
- Remember self-care. While you are mentoring another, do not neglect your own professional development. You've heard it more than once: Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others.
- Step aside! Let others lead, pay attention to the leadership skills and qualities of others, and let them practice. This may mean sharing control and/or power, so start adjusting now.
- Provide opportunities for others to be in charge and do not, under any circumstances (barring physical harm and damage or extreme loss of resources), step in and take over.

On the other hand, do not set mentees up for failure. A mentor leader does

not put mentees in positions they aren't trained for or give them projects that outweigh their qualifications.

Have high expectations for your mentees and trust that you have mentored them well. I once coached a teacher who had more than 40 years of training and mentoring experience in early childhood. A few years ago she told me that she was thinking of retiring, but felt she couldn't because she didn't believe the next generation of trainers could make the right decisions for the organization. Trust in your ability to mentor and trust in your mentee's ability to lead.

For potential mentees:

- Find a leader in your center, program, or organization and ask for mentoring! So often, I meet potential leaders who have never asked for mentoring, guidance, advice, or counsel from colleagues or supervisors.
- If you are not ready to ask for a mentor, pay attention to those whose work you admire and make note of what makes that person a good leader, a good teacher, a good administrator, a good family support advocate. Focus on successful skills and qualities and start practicing!
- Pay attention to the people who others seek out for guidance, counsel, advice, suggestions, and input. That person may be your future mentor!
- Look for opportunities to be in charge of a project or shine in some area where you know you have talent. Stepping up to a leadership role will help you get noticed and find a mentor leader.
- Remember that it is your leadership that will guide children's futures, so don't wait for a mentor leader to find you — go find a mentor leader!
- Remember that you, too, have knowledge of human development, so have patience and give yourself time to grow and develop.

I have to remind myself that mentoring and growing leaders requires attention and reflections on both sides. Mentors must remember to step back and let new leadership emerge. Mentees must remember to step up and practice leadership when the opportunity presents itself. We can have a strong leadership base in early childhood education if we all do our part and lift as we climb.

Order Debra Sullivan's book
Learning to Lead: Effective Leadership Skills for Teachers of Young Children
from the Exchange web site:
www.ChildCareExchange.com/catalog