

The Director's Link

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Dedication Doesn't Have to Mean Deadication

Paula Jorde Bloom



Being an administrator of an early childhood program is not just a state of employment; it is a state of mind. So many individuals who don the director's hat with noble intentions of creating exemplary centers end up leaving the field frustrated, depleted, and disillusioned. They burn out. They find that there is simply too much to do and too many people tugging on their sleeve for help, advice, and support. Are you at risk of burning out? Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you dread leaving your center for a long weekend or a short vacation because of the mountain of work that will pile up in your absence?
- Do you feel you do the work of several people and many things not in line with your job description?
- Does your work consume your whole life, rarely allowing you time to pursue outside interests?

If you answered affirmatively to these three questions, you may be at risk of becoming another burnout statistic; a member of the Director-Has-Been Club. The irony from a mental health perspective is that while many directors express concern that they cannot

continue to perform their jobs at their current level of intensity, they feel helpless in knowing how to modify their jobs to be more manageable. The frustrations that directors experience are not inconsequential.

Notwithstanding all the pains and pressures inherent in their positions, many directors find their jobs stimulating, challenging, and personally rewarding. They have developed a repertoire of skills and personal strategies as well as the mental attitude that allow them to grow, indeed thrive, in their roles. They are thrivers.

I use the word *thrivers* purposefully. Some people talk about coping with stress, but to me coping implies you're hanging on by a thread. Why not strive for something higher—creating a job suffused with excitement, engagement, passion, challenge, creativity, and joy. Drawing on the collective wisdom of those happy, healthy thrivers in our profession, here are a few things that you can do.

Tune in to life's stressors

Research into the psychological characteristics of job stress is an imprecise science, but it is clear that stress and tension are a part of the everyday lives of early childhood administrators. Even the best-organized director is bombarded daily with frequent interruptions and petty distractions.

Job stress covers a wide range of physical, behavioral, and psychological symptoms. Physical symptoms include such things

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as a headache, backache, a stiff neck, an upset stomach, a tight feeling across the chest. Psychological symptoms include all those feelings that can be associated with stressful situations—for example, feelings of inadequacy, guilt, or worry. Behavioral symptoms are the things people do when they are under stress—eating, biting their nails, or smoking to name a few.

The key is to become sensitized to the stress indicators in your own life. Observe what gives you energy and what drains you. Listen to your body. Tune in to the inner tension, aches, and subtle changes in your energy level. For each individual the symptoms will be different. Sensitizers are keenly aware when their body is experiencing stress. Repressors, on the other hand, ignore the signs or try to counter negative symptoms by pushing harder and working longer.

Strive for balance

To be sure, balance means different things to different people. One person's stress is another's welcomed stimulus to peak performance. When we talk about balance we mean the balance between giving and receiving, talking and listening, planned and spontaneous, alone and together, now vs. later, variety and routine, seriousness and silliness—the yin and yang tensions that make up a life.

So many directors who work in early care and education are also parents who leave their full-time jobs to go home to another full-time job. So how do you

structure a job to achieve a balance between your personal and professional lives? Psychologists use the term *affective neutrality* to describe the capacity to balance compassion with emotional detachment. This is the key to becoming a long-term thriver in the field—the ability to emotionally close the door at the end of the day.

Every year *Working Mother* magazine summarizes the accomplishments of 25 influential working mothers in America. One of the recent honorees said, “I don't believe in juggling. What you have to do is create a life that is a web of work and home, community, family, friends, teachers, and neighbors. Webs are strong.” Think about ways that you can create better balance in your life by strengthening your own social support network.

Set realistic expectations

You'll always have parents who want you to change your program to be more academic and others that want you to lighten up and allow more unstructured play time. You'll always have teachers who have personal issues they'd like you to help resolve. And you'll always have professional colleagues who want you to serve on a committee or volunteer for a project. No matter how hard you try, you will always disappoint some people some of the time; and that is okay.

The teachers and support staff you work with daily, the board or agency executive to whom you report, the families you serve, and your professional colleagues all have grand expectations for you—some of them realistic, and some of them not. Part of becoming an effective leader is accepting that you will never be able to win the approval of everyone you work with. There will always be someone eager to tell you how you could do your job differently (better) or use your time more wisely (to meet their agenda).

As blasphemous as it may sound, one of the best ways to become a more effective leader is to lower your expectations. Especially for perfectionists and high achievers, this may be the only prescription that really works. Destructive stress can result from setting unrealistic expectations. How about becoming the director that 80 percent of the people want to work for 80 percent of the time!



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Our Mission

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership is dedicated to enhancing the management skills, professional orientation, and leadership capacity of early childhood administrators. The activities of the Center encompass four areas: training, evaluation, research, and public awareness.

<http://cecl.nl.edu>



Simplicity Is Power

Simplicity is the art of doing less of what doesn't matter and focusing more on what does matter. Effective directors strive for substance over bureaucracy. They keep memos short, policies crisp, words to a minimum. They go for the essence. They are constantly looking for ways to streamline their programs without compromising quality.

"If you get rid of it, you don't have to organize it."

Elaine St. James

If you are serious about embracing the wisdom of simplicity, here are a few things you can do:

- Meet with your office staff to think of ways you can reduce the amount of paper generated and routed to others.
- Ask your team, "What things are we doing today that if we were not already doing them, we would not start doing?"
- Create standard templates for forms, memos, newsletters, and minutes.
- Keep paper communications lean to reduce the amount of mental clutter people have to wade through to get to the essence of your message.
- Cut red tape for your teachers. Eliminate the obstacles to their success.
- Don't allow things to accumulate that no longer have a real function. This means being selective about using your storage space.

Source: Bloom, P. J. (2005) *Leadership in action: How effective directors get things done*. Lake Forest, IL: New Horizons.

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So take in the unsolicited advice, friendly suggestions, and stinging criticisms that come your way. Weigh them against your core values, and then decide what is best for you to do given the time, resources, and personal energy available. This will help you be true to yourself and comfortable with the knowledge that you can never please all the people all the time.

Make time for yourself

A common theme expressed by many directors is that they are expected to be all

Everyone deserves and needs time for renewing body and spirit.

things to all people. Women in particular often define themselves as moral agents in terms of their capacity to care. Their sense of self-worth is tied to how much they give to others. The result of this orientation is that many women put their own needs at the bottom of the list after children, staff,

and family members—even to the point of depletion. One preschool director captured this feeling poignantly when she used the metaphor of an ATM machine to describe her job. "Just like an ATM machine, I'm always ready to give different amounts of time, energy, and care to different people at a moment's notice."

Everyone deserves and needs time for renewing body and spirit. Those who have no fire in themselves cannot warm others. Become deliberate about your self-care. Managing personal time means consciously

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Planning Ahead

Professional Development Opportunities

Computer Training for Early Childhood Administrators—Intermediate Course

May 30 and June 6, 13, 20, 2008

Sessions convene from 8:30 p.m. – 12:30 p.m. each day.

Administering an effective and efficient early childhood program requires expertise in technology. Let us help you improve your computer skills and integrate technology into the management of your child care program. This intermediate course, funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), consists of four hands-on training sessions as well as additional content and activities delivered online. For Illinois Director Credential (IDC) purposes, this training equals 28 contact hours or two IDC management competency points. Enrollment is limited and priority will be given to administrators whose programs serve IDHS-funded children.

Location: National-Louis University, North Shore Campus, Skokie, IL

Fee: \$75, includes text and all course materials

Participants may also receive two semester hours of graduate credit (ECE535, Technology in Child Care Administration II) by paying an additional fee.

Taking Charge of Change

August 4-9, 2008

Follow-up Retreats: November 13-15, 2008 and May 13-16, 2009

Join the ranks of over 400 directors in Illinois who have taken part in this extraordinary professional development experience. *Taking Charge of Change* is guaranteed to transform how you think about your role as an early childhood leader. Topics focus on individual and organizational change and the director's role as change agent. Through interactive learning, group discussions, guided reflection, reading, and visits to exemplary programs, participants explore the components of quality programming and how to implement change to achieve program goals. The training begins with an intensive six-day residential summer institute. A follow-up retreat in the fall is held to report on progress in implementing a program improvement plan. The training culminates with attendance at the Leadership Connections conference. Mentors are available for consultation during the year to assist participants in implementing their program improvements.

Space is limited to 28 participants. Priority is given to directors whose programs serve IDHS-funded children. Application deadline is June 20, 2008.

Location: McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: \$400, includes text and materials, lodging, meals, and Leadership Connections conference registration

Participants may receive undergraduate or graduate credit (ECE525, Strategies for Supervision & Staff Development and EPS526, Organizational Theory, Group Dynamics, & Leadership Applications) by paying an additional fee.

Program Administration Scale Assessor Reliability Training

August 11-14, 2008

The *Program Administration Scale* (PAS) measures leadership and management practices of center-based early care and education programs. Assessor reliability training includes an overview of reliability of the instrument, interview protocol for collecting data, and information on how to score indicators and items. Individuals who successfully complete the training are eligible to become certified PAS assessors.

This four-day training is designed for technical assistance specialists, quality monitors, management consultants, researchers, and other professionals interested in using the PAS to reliably assess early childhood leadership and management practices and help center directors improve the quality of their programs.

Location: McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, NLU Wheeling Campus Annex

Fee: \$850, includes all texts, handouts, and meals

Participants may receive two semester hours of graduate credit (ECE582C, Early Childhood Program Evaluation) by paying an additional fee.

For more information on any of these special development opportunities, contact Debra Trude-Suter at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056 or debra.trudesuter@nl.edu.

NLU Online Courses for Directors

Spring term begins April 7, 2008

EPS500A: (3 sh)
Human Development with a Focus on Early Childhood

ECE547: (2 sh)
Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

For more information about the Early Childhood Administration degree program, contact Douglas Clark at douglas.clark@nl.edu or (800) 443-5522, ext. 5062

Take Time Out to Chat with the Experts Online

The McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership hosts nationally renowned early childhood experts on its Web site. Join the discussion to chat with the people who have written the books and helped shape early childhood policy and practice. Each expert will be the featured guest for a week-long open discussion on issues of interest to early childhood center administrators.



Monday, April 7 – Saturday, April 12, 2008

Guest expert: Chip Donohue
Director
Center for Early Childhood Professional Development & Leadership
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Conversations on Teacher Education: Global Perspectives



Monday, June 2 – Saturday, June 7, 2008

Guest expert: Keith Pentz
National Education Advisor
Kaplan Early Learning Company
Mindful Learning: Making the Body-Brain Connection

Check out the Center's Web site (<http://cecl.nl.edu>) for information about how to log on and updates about future online guests.

Full-Day Technology Workshop

Exploring the World of Digital Photography
April 23, 2008

John A. Logan College, Carterville, IL

Learn about pixels and image sizes; capturing, storing, and sharing images; and displaying your images in marketing and promotional materials. The workshop will be held from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. (A lunch break will be provided.) Funding is provided by IDHS. Participant portion of the training cost is only \$45. Scholarships are available to cover this fee. Participants may also receive undergraduate credit from John A. Logan College.

For more information, contact Debra Trude-Suter at (800) 443-5522, ext. 5056 or debra.trudesuter@nl.edu.



Space is limited – Sign up soon!

Creating a Brighter Financial Future

What if you were able to provide the families you serve with information about a brighter future for their children? What if you could be on the ground floor of a program that would address this issue? The Illinois Asset Building Group (IABG) has proposed that every child born in Illinois be provided a savings account at birth. Think about the impact that such a program could have on the children and families you serve. If enacted, this proposal would promote financial education, teach children and families to plan and save, and lay a solid foundation for helping them reach their full potential.

The efforts of IABG have been carried forward with the unanimous passage of legislation and signature by Governor Blagojevich to create a task force for developing a plan for Children's Savings Accounts (CSAs) for all children born in Illinois. CSAs are savings and investment accounts for children. They help ensure that all children have the opportunity for lifelong learning and asset-building by providing youth and their families with the tools and incentives to accumulate savings. Opened at birth with an initial deposit and linked to financial education, CSAs could be used for college or post-secondary training, buying a home, or starting a business. CSAs enhance children's aspirations, parents' and teachers' expectations, and contribute to the social and economic fabric of the state.

Early childhood directors are strategically positioned to support this proposal. You can help the families in your program understand how CSAs and financial education can work to build a sustainable future for their children. According to Senator Dale Risinger, co-sponsor of the legislation, "It is a wise investment to support an increase in the number of children who save and can actively pursue their dreams, attain higher education, purchase a home or start a small business." This proposal will generate a more prepared and competitive workforce, more savings and investment, stronger communities, and contribute to a thriving state economy.

For more information about Children's Savings Accounts and how you can play a role in the Illinois Asset Building Group and asset-building efforts in Illinois, contact:

Debra Trude-Suter at (847) 947-5056 (debra.trudesuter@nl.edu) or

Chris Giangreco at (773) 336-6073 (support@illinoisassetbuilding.org).

LEADERSHIP Connections

New Date and Location!

May 15-17, 2008

The Westin Chicago North Shore
601 N. Milwaukee Avenue
Wheeling, IL 60090

The Westin Chicago North Shore is located at Lake-Cook Road and Milwaukee Avenue, just 15 short miles north of O'Hare International Airport.

Our new conference home features:

- Modern spacious meeting rooms and accommodations
- Easy accessibility from major highways
- Free parking
- Free shuttle bus to/from public transportation
- Beautiful forest preserve views and walking paths



For more details and to register online, log on to <http://cecl.nl.edu>.

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setting aside a portion of each day for pursuits that enrich your mind and replenish your spirit. William Glasser calls these commitments to self *positive addictions*. Ceramics, guitar, yoga, meditation, photography, jogging, or just soaking in a tub full of bubbles in a candlelit room—it doesn't matter what the particular indulgence as long as you have one. Something that makes you feel special.

Advocate for yourself

The thrivers in our field take seriously the old adage, *You are the architect of your own future*. They have consciously crafted interventions to redefine their roles, their workload, and their interpersonal relationships. The most common strategy they share is their ability to say *no* with sensitive assertiveness. They can say no with unapologetic directness to someone who asks them to join yet one more committee, bake cookies for one more fundraiser, or

solicit donations for one more cause. They have reexamined their need to be needed—the one that others can always count on.

In order to advocate for yourself, you need to have a clear sense of what you stand for, what you believe. Try to get more intentional in your focus about what is really important. Be clear about your core values and how they shape your decisionmaking.

In sum

Individuals in control of their lives have a deliberate game plan. They are well informed, sensitive to the stress indicators in their own behavior, and realistic in assessing their skills and resources. They have learned to put their jobs in perspective by adding diversity and interest to their lives. In other words, directors who thrive in their administrative roles do so not by happenstance. Their actions declare that they are not passive about their destiny, not

controlled by events. Rather, they are social engineers shaping their environment to meet their needs.

Paula Jorde Bloom holds a joint appointment as the Michael W. Louis Endowed Chair of the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership and Professor of Early Childhood Education at National-Louis University.

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