

## Recruiting, Selecting, Orienting—and Keeping What You Have

JANE HUMPHRIES, Ed.D.

The pandemic has turned our world upside-down and has caused many significant challenges, including the “great resignation,” a term coined by [Anthony Klotz from the Business School at Texas A&M University](#). The great resignation has impacted all industries and fields, including early childhood education. It has launched the field into a state of crisis and has captured media attention. For those in leadership positions, seasoned or new to the field, this has been a time of extreme challenges. From competitive wage increases in other industries to re-thinking their career choices, professionals in our field are contemplating change due to the insecurity created by such tough economic times. As a result, early childhood leaders are desperate to employ staff and are seeking ideas to do it well.

To address requests for ideas in this area, this article contains a few current tips for directors to consider and an opportunity to glean insights from the robust content from the McCormick Center’s [Aim4Excellence™](#), which is a fully online, nationally-recognized early childhood director credential. Specifically, the Aim4Excellence module, *Recruiting, Selecting, and Orienting Staff*, addresses necessary considerations when effectively implementing ethical and lawful employment practices. This module supports the Administrative Leadership domain of the [Whole Leadership Framework](#) and concentrates on several critical areas tied directly to managing people and day-to-day operations.

How does one recruit in a field where face-to-face, in-person work is critical to the job function? We all know that the pandemic made working from home the new norm for many and has transformed employee expectations. Having a more flexible home life and work schedule has been attractive to many. However, there will always be industries with employees who need care for their children. The hotel, restaurant, and medical service fields are just a few areas that need early childhood teachers and quality care for their children.

There has been a great deal of introspection during the pandemic. Individuals who were once on the corporate ladder had time to reflect upon their career choices. Long working hours, time spent away from home, and stress involved with high-stakes business decisions prompted parents to contemplate what is important to them. Slowing down helped them to value the time spent with their children. It is this population that could potentially be an excellent recruitment opportunity for you and your program.

A career change is scary for these parents. They invested years of their lives into their first career choices. This may have included receiving an extensive education that had little to no coursework about understanding children’s developmental needs. They know only their own experience as a child and now as a parent with children. However, this is your opportunity to seize the interest and motivation to make a career change by using the following recruitment strategies:

- Offer volunteer or “try-out” days to work alongside children of different ages

- Provide opportunities for your staff to talk one-on-one with the interested parent about the complex job role of working in the field of early childhood education
- [Uncover funds](#) appropriated by local and state funding streams for professional development that will be necessary to support the transition into working in the field
- Invite local community college and university professors to speak about what their institutions have to offer to support parents interested in making a career change and who will need more formal education

Once there is established interest in early childhood education, have a process in place that provides a formal opportunity to interview the parent as a job candidate for an open position. During this time, clear boundaries for interviewing “Jane Smith” rather than “Alex’s mom” will be important for the parent to understand and necessary for the staff who will be collaborating with you during the interview process. Consider these ideas to support the selection process:

- Set the stage by having a solid job description to review with the candidate
- Include questions that invite the candidate to share their experiences working with children, not just their children
- Allow staff to share their observed experiences of the candidate when they participated in volunteer or “try-out” days
- Ask the candidate what would be most helpful to them as they make this career change

After the selection process takes place, engage the new hire as you would any new addition by orienting them based on the interests shared in the interview process. While most programs typically choose to place the candidate with a different age group than their child, work to build a strong network of support by:

- Never making assumptions about what any new candidate may or may not know, invest time in regular communication, verbal and written
- Assigning the candidate a strong mentor, preferably one from the interview process who will be a friendly face for the long term
- Strengthening work relationships between the teaching staff and the new candidate by checking on them regularly
- Providing classroom coverage so that the team has one-on-one time to talk about classroom planning, management, and next steps together

Last but not least, take care of the staff you already have. This means maintaining the relationships established during time together in the workplace. The group has endured a lot together this past couple of years and recognizing that regularly is important. Heartfelt expressions of appreciation can go a long way. It is also essential to consider utilizing a strategy known as [stay interviews](#). These informal conversations provide insights:

- Reasons why teaching staff like or dislike their job
- Uncover concerns or issues that no one was aware of
- Provide insights that can help motivate and retain staff
- Make improvements in program culture and delivery of quality services

The delivery of high-quality early childhood care and education will always depend on in-person interactions, and there will always be individuals looking for rewarding, “face-to-face” careers that allow for a healthy work-life balance. The key for an early childhood leader is to re-think what might have been past recruitment strategies and adjust to today’s changing climate. Learn what people are looking for and leverage what the field has to offer. Be the pivot point for the potential candidate who needs your help to realize that the daily investment in working with young children is exactly what they were meant to do.

Do you want to learn more about Aim4Excellence? Check out our [online learning management program](#) for more information on [earning college credit](#) while taking the modules. In addition, the Aim4Excellence modules are recognized in over [20 states](#) to support professional development within their quality rating and improvement systems.

*Jane Humphries, Ed.D., serves as the Aim4Excellence™ Program Specialist and curriculum developer for the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University. She has written curricula and facilitated online learning in graduate and undergraduate level courses since 2004. The Aim4Excellence program is the online National Director Credential recognized by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation. It is incorporated in multiple state quality rating and improvement systems.*