

Why Did I Believe Being an Early Childhood Administrator Would Be Easy?

BY IRIS CORRAL, M.ED.

If you had told me that I would become an early childhood administrator, I would never have believed you. After graduating high school, my goal was to become a school counselor or a social worker to work with families. That was my plan, and after earning my degree in social service-family welfare, I was happy to be working as a Parent Support Coordinator in an early childhood program.

One day my supervisor asked to speak to me. She said that she had observed qualities in me that could make me an excellent program administrator. I had never given any thought to being a program administrator until she mentioned it. Her words stayed with me, and after much thought and consideration, I made an important decision. I enrolled in graduate school to pursue my new goal of becoming an early childhood administrator!

Graduate school was an amazing learning experience for me. [Dr. Paula Jorde Bloom](#), founder of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership, was one of my professors. I was surrounded by cohort members who consisted of classroom teachers with administrative duties, support staff (such as myself), and administrators whose experience levels ranged from novice to proficient. I received so much support from each of them.

After two years, I earned my master's degree in early childhood administration. I had so much confidence in myself; I believed I could be the amazing administrator I was told I could be. So, I stepped into a new administrator position, believing I could handle anything that came my way. I did not know that I would need much more than confidence, a degree, and words of affirmation to succeed and reach my highest potential.

The first day I entered my new position, I quickly realized I still had much to learn. It is true, book knowledge is very different from life experiences. I struggled to fulfill my responsibilities in the new role, and finding my balance became difficult. These new tasks, as eager as I was to learn them, seemed to be over my head and almost unreachable. In addition, I now supervised a team of four. The supervisory role was new to me. I struggled so much that my passion for the field slowly diminished. Part of me wanted to return to my previous position, where I did everything "right." I had been a star as a Parent Support Coordinator but not so much as a Director. However, I knew I could not go backward. I had paved a new path and needed to move forward to see where it would lead. Samuel Beckett wrote, "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." That is exactly what I did; I gave it another try.

If you are wondering if my passion returned and if I reached my highest potential, the answer is "YES!" I stayed in an administrator role for ten years. As I took additional training, I learned to delegate, manage

my time, and absorb all I could from experienced colleagues. I felt my passion return! My experiences ranged from assisting with creating a new preschool building to teaching early childhood courses at the university level. I accomplished so much and never doubted that my ambition would take me far. I took risks and fell many times, but I got back up and learned from what life had taught me.

As a Leadership Training Specialist at the McCormick Center, I have the privilege of working with administrators who are trying to find their balance. They ask me, “How did you do it?” I usually respond that it took dedication, commitment, and time. I also mention that some additional knowledge would have made my transition into being an administrator smoother. I would have focused on the following subjects:

- [Prioritizing time](#)
- Managing conflict between staff
- Building trust with staff
- Enlisting community support
- Delegating
- Finding balance between work and home
- De-stressing from the pressures of work

Being a new administrator is difficult, and we may question whether or not we made the right choice when leaving a position we performed competently. The challenges are real until you learn the skills and gain the experience needed to move from struggling with all your tasks to feeling you have a handle on them and finally being able to manage them. I knew I had made the right choice because it meant that I would play an important role in the lives of children and their families, and I did. I still see families today who stop me to ask how I am and remind me of their wonderful experiences at the preschool. I smile and respond that I had a wonderful experience as well working with their families.

REFERENCES

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Are you new to your role as a director? Find support and a professional learning community through the *Ready to Lead* leadership academy. To check out all of our leadership academies, go to <https://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/services/leadership-academies/>.

Iris Corral, M.Ed., is Leadership Training Specialist for the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University. In this role, Iris assists with trainings for the Taking the Lead, Ready to Lead, and Taking Charge of Change leadership academies. Iris holds an associate degree in social service from Harold Washington College, a baccalaureate degree in integrative studies from Governors State University, and a master's degree in early childhood administration from National Louis University. She has also earned her Illinois Director Credential-Level III and an ECE Credential-Level V. In addition to her role at the McCormick Center, Iris serves as adjunct faculty at Morton College, where she teaches early childhood education courses. Before joining our team, Iris spent eight years working as a preschool director in a Preschool for All (PFA) program. Iris also worked for eleven years as a teacher assistant and a parent support/health coordinator.