

Top 5 Things I Wish I Had Known as a Director

BY FLORA GOMEZ

“We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience.”

– John Dewey

I often think about my time working as a director in a child care program and wonder how different things would have been if I had known then, what I know now. As time passes and I gain new experiences and insights on leadership in early childhood education, I frequently ask myself what I would do differently if I could relive that period of time. In my reflection, I have realized that my conclusions are from my point of view. Recognizing that the experience I had as a program administrator affected so many, I thought it would be interesting to learn what my team would like for me to have known.

In a series of conversations with teachers I have worked with in the past, here are five common themes I discovered that the teachers wanted me and other directors to know:

1. Relationships matter!

As the old saying goes, “People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care.” Directors come with education, experience, and skill sets needed to get the job done. What tends to get in the way is the failure to build authentic relationships with the people in the program; primarily teachers, parents, and children. As a leader, it is important to build strong individual relationships with those in your program and just as important to foster relationships between them.

2. Building a community of collaboration means everyone wins.

The child care program often involves very specific tasks to be done by specific people. However, there is still an opportunity to establish collaboration as opposed to working as separate entities. Create an environment where communication is frequent and information is shared among teams. Some roles and responsibilities may overlap, and, even if they don’t, staff members should be aware of how they can support others while still fulfilling the obligation of their own jobs.

3. Don’t assume that teachers know how to meet YOUR expectations.

July 5, 2017 | *This document may be printed, photocopied, and disseminated freely with attribution. All content is the property of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership.*

Teachers also come to the table with a wealth of knowledge and experience. It can easily be assumed that they know how to fulfill the expectations of your program. Not necessarily! Each program has its own culture and way of operating that may be unlike what teachers have done in the past. Some concepts and ideas in the field are universal but the way they are carried out can be very different. Take the time to train teachers in the way you want things done.

4. Involve those involved.

When possible, involve those affected by a change to participate in the decision-making process. While it is not feasible to seek suggestions and input for every program decision that needs to be made, allow staff, parents, and children an opportunity to be included as much as possible. Solicit their suggestions and feedback and incorporate their ideas. This validates their place in the program and relieves you, the director, from carrying too much weight on your own.

5. Don't take the job too seriously.

Sometimes, it is perfectly acceptable to leave the pile of papers on the desk to go and enjoy the scented playdough and bubbles in the toddler classroom—or even pull a prank or two with the teachers! Directors can become so overwhelmed with the business of running a center that little time is taken to have fun on the job. Find opportunities to participate in the early childhood activities you love with the children and teachers in your program and all of your hard work will be that much more rewarding.

Flora Gomez is an Assessor and Training Specialist at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University. She is an experienced preschool teacher and trainer, mentor, and coach for early childhood educators. Her mission is to teach teachers to impact children!

July 5, 2017 | *This document may be printed, photocopied, and disseminated freely with attribution. All content is the property of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership.*