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Self-Motivation: Motivation at Its Best

by Roger Neugebauer

The director of Mother Goose Child Care Center was concerned. Incidents of lateness and absenteeism among her teachers were increasing. The teachers had stopped planning activities in advance and showed little enthusiasm in working with the children. They also complained continually about everything from inadequate equipment to low wages.

She decided that what was needed to improve staff performance was to tighten discipline. She required teachers to submit daily lesson plans for her approval. She had them sign in and out and deducted pay for lateness and unexcused absences. She kept a closer watch on the classrooms and reprimanded teachers who were sloughing off.

The results were mixed. Lateness and absenteeism declined, and lesson plans were being developed; but teachers' attitudes became even worse. They complained more and acted as if working in the classroom were a drudgery.

Next the director tried the opposite approach. She sought to cheer the staff up by granting them wage increases, setting up a comfortable teachers' lounge, and holding occasional staff parties.

Once again she was disappointed. Although the staff acted happier and complained less, they still exhibited little enthusiasm in their work with the children.

The Jackass Fallacy

One reason the director's remedies failed is that she was operating from overly simplistic notions about what motivates people to work hard. She acted as if the teachers were naturally lazy and irresponsible, as if they could only be made to work hard through fear of punishment or promise of rewards. This carrot and stick approach may work perfectly well in motivating a jackass, but it is wholly inappropriate in motivating people. As Harry Levinson, creator of the *Jackass Fallacy* analogy, explains:

"As long as anyone in a leadership role operates with such a reward-punishment attitude toward motivation, he is implicitly assuming that he has control over others and that they are in a jackass position with respect to him. This attitude is inevitably one of condescending contempt whose most blatant mask is paternalism. The result is a continuing battle between those who seek to wield power and those who are subject to it."

What Does Motivate Teachers?

This author interviewed 64 child care teachers about what satisfies them and what frustrates them in their work. In reviewing the major sources of satisfaction see summary), it can be seen that they relate directly to the *content* of the teachers' work. These factors — observing progress in children, relationships with children — result directly from the way teachers perform their work. On the other hand, the major sources of frustration — rate of pay, supervision, personnel policies — relate to the *environment* in which the work is performed.

Based on similar findings in studies in a wide variety of professions (see Herzberg), organizational psychologists

have reached a number of conclusions on what can be done to motivate workers. When the environmental factors are not adequately provided for (i.e. when pay is low or the environment is oppressive), workers will become frustrated. However, when these factors are adequately provided for, this will usually have no important positive effect — these factors do nothing to elevate an individual's desire to do his job well. The content-related factors, commonly referred to as *motivators*, on the other hand, can stimulate workers to perform well. They provide a genuine sense of satisfaction.

A director seeking to bolster the sagging morale of her teachers, therefore, will have only limited success if she focuses solely on the environmental factors — increasing pay, improving physical arrangements, making supervision less rigid. If the teachers' lounge is renovated, teachers may become less frustrated, but they won't necessarily work harder on the job because of this change. To truly motivate the teachers, a director needs to focus her attention on restructuring the teachers' jobs so that they can derive more satisfaction directly from their work.

Examining Motivators More Closely

But how does one go about restructuring a teacher's job to take advantage of these motivating factors? Taking a cue from organizational psychologists, a director should strive to meet the following criteria in restructuring a job (Hackman):

1. **Meaningfulness.** A teacher must feel her work is important, valuable, and worthwhile. If a teacher believes her work is unimportant, it won't really matter to her whether or not she does it well. If she believes her teaching does have a significant impact on children's lives, she will work hard to see that the impact is a positive one.

2. **Responsibility.** A teacher must feel personally responsible and accountable for the results of the work he performs. If a teacher is simply carrying out the plans and instructions of a supervisor, he will derive little personal satisfaction when things go well. If he has complete control over the planning and implementation of daily activities in his room, he will know that when children are thriving it is due to his efforts.

3. **Knowledge of results.** A teacher must receive regular feedback on the results of her efforts. If a teacher exerts a major effort on an activity but receives no indication as to whether or not it was successful, she will gain no satisfaction. A teacher can only derive satisfaction from the positive results she knows about.

The remainder of this article will be devoted to describing specific examples of how to apply these criteria.

Clarifying Goals

Before teachers can be satisfied with the results of their efforts, they must be clear as to what results were expected in the first place. The center must have goals which teachers can use as yardsticks to evaluate their accomplishments. To be effective, a center's goals must:

1. **Be compatible with the personal goals of teachers.** Teachers will work hardest to accomplish organizational goals which are most similar to their own goals. Some centers achieve a close fit between organizational and personal goals by involving the teachers in developing the goals at the beginning of the year. Other organizations accomplish this by holding planning conferences between the director and individual staff members. In these conferences the employee outlines her personal interest and career goals. The two then develop ways in which the individual can work toward the accomplishment of her goals and the organization's goals at the same time (McGregor). For example, if one of a teacher's goals is to develop her creative movement skills and one of the center's goals is to stimulate children's imaginations, the teacher might be assigned to develop and use movement activities which challenge children's imaginations.

2. **Provide a moderate challenge to teachers.** Experiments have shown that most workers respond best to goals which are moderately difficult to achieve (Gellerman). The goal must not be so ambitious that it cannot possibly be achieved, nor so easy that it can be accomplished with little effort. Such moderately challenging goals should be established for the program as a whole (for example, to double the amount of cooperative play among the children) as well as for individual children (i.e. to help David control his temper).

Encouraging Self-Control

A key to outgrowing a jackass style of management is shifting control over teachers' performances from the director to the teachers themselves. Ideally, a teacher and a director could agree upon a set of goals for a classroom at the beginning of the year. The teacher would then be fully responsible for planning and implementing daily activities to achieve these goals. At the end of a set time period (the less experienced the staff the more modest the goals and the shorter the time period) the teacher would be held accountable for having accomplished the goals. The teacher would work hard, not because he was being closely watched by the director, but because he was personally committed to achieving the goals.

Centers have developed many ways of supporting teachers in controlling their own performance. One center has the teachers write and periodically revise their job descriptions and the rules for various classroom areas. Another provides teachers with sufficient petty cash so they won't have to keep running to the director to request money to buy routine supplies and equipment. A third has teachers bring problems with children before their peers so that teachers can learn to solve their own problems.

Major Sources of Satisfaction and Frustration

In a survey of 64 teachers in 24 New England child care programs, the following were identified as their major sources of satisfaction and frustration in their work. (They are listed in order of frequency.)

Sources of Satisfaction

1. Observing progress in children
2. Relationships with children
3. Challenge of the work
4. Pride in performing a service
5. Relationships with parents
6. Recognition shown by staff

Sources of Frustration

1. Rate of pay
2. Prospects for advancement
3. Physical work environment
4. Style of supervision
5. Number of hours worked
6. Inflexible personnel policies

Not all teachers will be willing or able to function so independently. Some will always feel more comfortable having someone else take the lead and issue directions. Other teachers may be ready to accept responsibility, but not for a full classroom. These teachers could have their self-control supported by being assigned full responsibility for a small number of children, for a certain activity area, or for performing a specific function (such as offering support and encouragement to children).

Providing Feedback

When teachers were asked what satisfies them, they happily cited incidents such as: "When children beam after finally accomplishing a task"; "Seeing examples of children's cooperative play steadily increase"; or "When a parent comments on how a child's behavior is dramatically improving at home thanks to the school."

Given the high motivational impact of incidents such as these, a director should give high priority to seeing to it that they happen as often as possible. To get an idea of how a director might do this, the hundreds of motivating incidents supplied by teachers were analyzed. The majority of these incidents were found to fall into three primary categories which are listed below. With each category, ideas are listed which a director can use to encourage that type of motivation.

1. Immediate reactions of children to an activity or to accomplishing a task.

- Help teachers develop their skills in observing children's subtle signs of change or satisfaction.
- Ask teachers to list incidents of children's reactions and changes (pro and con) on a single day or week. This will force them to be alert for such feedback which they may otherwise be too preoccupied to notice.
- Periodically ask parents for incidents of children's progress or follow through on school activities. Pass these on to the children's teachers.
- Recruit volunteers to teach so that teachers can occasionally step back and observe what's going on in the classroom.
- Provide feedback to teachers focusing on effects of teaching on children rather than on the teachers' methods or styles.
- Set aside a time on Fridays when teachers can pause to reflect on what went wrong and what went right during the week. Devote occasional staff meetings to having teachers share their good experiences from the week.

2. Warm relationships established with the children and their parents.

- Provide times and places where teachers can have relaxed intimate conversations with individual children.
- Make teachers responsible for a small number of children so they can get to know each other better.
- Before the school year begins, have teachers visit children's homes to establish rapport with the families.
- Encourage families to keep in touch with the center after their children *graduate*.
- Assign each teacher responsibility for maintaining regular communications with specific parents.
- Bring in volunteers at the end or beginning of the day so that teachers can have informal, uninterrupted conversations with parents.

3. Indications of the long-range progress of children.

- Make teachers responsible for long periods of time for complete units of work. If teachers' responsibilities are continuously shifting from one group of children to another, or from one curriculum area to another, they will never be able to attribute any long-term changes in children primarily to their own efforts.
- Keep diaries of children's behavior so that changes in children can be tracked.

- Videotape classroom activities periodically and compare children's behavior as the year progresses.
- At regular intervals tabulate the number of incidents of specific behaviors which occur in a set time period to determine if there are any changes in these behaviors.
- Conduct tests on the developmental levels of children throughout the year.
- In regular parent conferences, with teachers present, ask parents to discuss changes they have noted in their children's behavior.

Promoting Staff Development

One of the most important ways a director can help motivate teachers is to provide them with opportunities to improve their skills. The more skilled teachers are, the more likely they are to experience, and be rewarded by, incidents of success. The director should help teachers identify their specific training needs and secure appropriate training resources. These resources may be in the form of reading material, in-house staff training sessions, or outside workshops and courses.

Encouraging Broader Involvement

Most teachers will tend to feel better about themselves, as well as more excited about their work, if they are involved in their profession outside the classroom. If teachers are involved in the overall management of their center or in children's advocacy efforts in the community, they will get a stronger sense of their efforts being an integral part of a vital profession.

At the center level, teachers' involvement can be broadened by keeping them continually informed on the status of the organization as a whole, by assigning them limited administrative responsibilities, as well as by involving them, wherever feasible, in major center decisionmaking.

Centers have also experienced positive results from encouraging their teachers to become involved in professional activities outside the center. Such activities might include participating in advocacy coalitions, working for professional organizations (such as NAEYC chapters), or promoting various child care alternatives in the community. Active teacher involvement in these areas will also relieve some pressure on the director to be the agency's representative on every committee and function.

Motivation — A Final Perspective

The message of this article is that teachers are their own best source of motivation. If a teacher's work is properly structured, she will be motivated by the results of her own labors, not by external rewards and punishments manipulated by someone else. The director's prime concern should therefore be with helping the teacher achieve control over and feedback from her work.

This is not to say, however, that the director need not be concerned with environmental factors such as wages, personnel policies, and physical environment. Highly motivated teachers will be very tolerant of unavoidable inadequacies in these areas. However, if conditions deteriorate markedly, especially if this appears to be due to the indifference of *management*, teachers' motivation will rapidly be cancelled out by their growing frustration. Therefore, in motivating teachers by concentrating attention on job content, the director should not ignore the teachers' basic needs.

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Why Do They Stay?

by Susan Catapano

Why is there a core group of teachers in every early care and education program who have worked in the field and, many times, at that program for ten or more years? Why do some teachers make a career in the classroom with young children and others move into administration or leave the field?

As the former owner of two child care programs, I remember one idyllic period of time when I had a group of dedicated, well-educated, wonderful teachers. That lasted about two years, and I saw them leave one-by-one for very good reasons. Two moved out of state with their new husbands, one left to attend graduate school, one moved into administration, and one completed her student teaching and got a job in the public schools. Yet, there were about three who stayed on and continued the work that all eight had devoted themselves to for the two years they had worked as a team. I comforted myself with the thought that they were self-confident and talented enough to seek out new challenges and that maybe I had helped support them in developing their confidence and talent.

What about the ones who did not leave? They had been in my program soon after I opened, and they were still there many years later after other teachers had moved on. Had I done anything to keep them at the program? Was there something I could do to keep teachers while still supporting their growth and development?

Moving to the university I was able to conduct the research that could answer the questions I pondered when I was a director. In the fall of 2000, I interviewed 31 teachers who had worked in the classroom for ten or more years. These teachers represented seven full day, child care programs from a variety of affiliations and corporate organizations: a hospital sponsored program, two not-for-profit programs, a for-profit program, an employer-sponsored program, a school district-sponsored program, and a university lab school. I asked the teachers a series of questions that I thought would lead me to the key to staff retention. The answer that directors everywhere would want to know is: Why do teachers stay in the classroom? I expected to hear that the true key to retention was the leadership skills of the director. My hope was to list those skills so directors everywhere would acquire the skills and be able to retain their staff. We would all live happily ever after.

Retention of good, quality staff is the greatest challenge the director of an early childhood program faces. More challenging than attracting and hiring quality staff, how to keep the good teachers is a constant worry. The reason for the high turnover (38% in 1999), varies with some common themes (NAEYC, 1999). Low wages and limited benefits are usually listed as the top two reasons teachers leave their jobs (CDCA, 1998). Additional reasons teachers leave their jobs are to return to school or to stay home with young children (CDCA, 1998).

I spent approximately 30 minutes with each teacher and asked each one a series of questions. Basic data on the teachers

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gives a picture of experience, wage, and level of education. Most of the teachers worked with preschool-age children and had been in the classroom ten or more years. The highest level of formal education for most of the teachers was a high school diploma. About half of the teachers (15) reported that they were currently in school, working on a degree. Teachers who had earned an associate's degree stated that they were not going to go on for a higher degree because the program where they worked would not increase their pay for the higher level degree. Teachers earned between $6.50 and $10.50 per hour, with most of the teachers earning $8.50-$9.00 per hour.

When I asked teachers why they stay in the classroom, they all said, "I love the kids!" This could have been the shortest research project in history: "Thirty-one teachers working ten or more years, say that they do it because they love the kids." After the first few gave that answer and then sat and looked at me, I started asking them, "What do you love about them?" That changed the responses dramatically. The teachers squirmed as they tried to put into words why they do what they do everyday. All 31 stated that they enjoyed working with the children, the children made them happy, they loved the children, and the children loved them. Half of the teachers commented that their job and the children were a constant challenge and that challenge kept them interested in teaching.

Several of the teachers became emotional as they described to me what they loved about working with young children. At first, they spoke slowly, as they reflected on this question. It was as though they had never thought about why they chose to work with children. When they began to talk and feel confident in the feelings they were sharing, they spoke for several minutes on what their job really meant to them. Many times they seemed surprised at what they said, questioning what they were saying, then repeating what they had said with conviction.

One teacher described how she had left the field to do something else, only to return to the classroom within the year. She said that she was really good working with two year olds. She paused, as if to consider what she had said, and then repeated it with force, "Yeah. I'm good at this, I know what to do that will help children." Then she began to cry and apologized for her emotions. She seemed embarrassed and bewildered with what she had said.

One of the teachers called several weeks after I had interviewed her to say that she had thought of something else to tell me. She said that every few weeks she felt as if she were in a state of disequilibrium as she struggled to solve a situation with a child or group of children. The disequilibirum caused her to reflect, think about her practice, search for new information, and question what she was doing and why. The episodes of disequilibrium kept her interested and motivated. She thought that was the reason she had stayed in her classroom for 22 years.

Half of the teachers commented that they understood how children developed and this let them recognize when children were learning from them. I asked them if they had learned child development from a course they took in their degree program or in workshops that they attended. All teachers responded that they had learned child development through a class or workshop; however, they did not fully understand what it all meant until they were able to connect what they had learned to what the children were actually doing. They said this did not happen until they had many years of experience working with children. They recommended that teachers learn child development in a setting that includes children rather than in the usual college classroom or workshop setting. The children help the teachers to make the needed connection from theory to practice.

I also asked the teachers if there was anything about the program where they worked that kept them in the classroom. I thought that the teachers would describe the support and guidance that their director provided to answer this question. Out of the 31 teachers, 26 did talk about the administrative support that they felt at the program where they were currently working. However, a specific administrator or director was not typically discussed as a factor in their job satisfaction. The teachers attributed the administrative support to philosophy and procedures that were administrative policies.

In addition, 23 of the teachers talked about the relationships they had developed with other staff at the program. The word "comfortable" was used by many of the teachers to describe how they felt at the program. They viewed the other teachers and the administration as part of a family, and their role in the family was important to them and the other members of the family. Several talked about how difficult it would be to leave the program; how much they would miss the relationships they had formed with the other staff.

All of the teachers talked about the autonomy they had to make decisions within their classroom. Most of the teachers commented that they had duties outside of the classroom that they performed for the program. One teacher developed the menu and prepared the food order, another teacher kept the art supplies ordered, and another teacher was responsible for keeping the playground safe and the toys available. One

of these teachers stated that she felt like the program belonged to her, too. She felt ownership and responsibility to be there. Many of the teachers mentioned the philosophy of the program and the director being compatible with their own philosophy. They commented that this also made them feel comfortable in the program.

As a result of one comment made by a teacher, I added a question to the survey and went back and asked teachers with whom I had already talked with to comment on what kind of early childhood experience they had growing up. Of the 31 teachers interviewed, 28 reported that their families were supportive of them growing up. Twenty-four of the teachers reported that they served in a nurturing role as a child. Many were babysitters for young children and others commented that their home, as a child, was a gathering place for neighborhood children. As young children, these teachers grew up surrounded by adults who had respect for young children. They had learned from their models. It was also interesting that 21 of the teachers came from families of four or more siblings. Two of the teachers came from families with nine children, one came from a family of eleven children, and two of the teachers came from a family of thirteen children. These teachers had grown up in "early care settings"!

As a final question, I asked the teachers where they would be in ten years. They all said they would still be working in the early care and education field. A few were looking forward to retiring and only one hoped to move into an administrative job.

Next Steps

What did I find out? Why do teachers make a career in the classroom? It was not the leadership skills of a particular director, because most of these teachers had kept their jobs through several changes of directors at their programs. What should directors do to retain teachers?

Teachers need support.

Teachers clearly rely on the relationships with other staff members within the program. The feeling of being "a family" is important to the teachers who stay in the field and in their programs for long periods of time. Teachers need to feel "comfortable." What that means will be different from program to program; however, it is essential to retaining good teachers. Also, teachers need a supportive organizational structure with a supportive administrator or director.

Although the person was not as important as the structure that was established, the teachers mentioned the need for the director's goals and philosophy to match the teachers' goals and philosophy. Several of the programs where the teachers worked had fairly new directors, within the last three years. Even those teachers talked about having a supportive administration. The longevity of the director is not as crucial as the structure that the director follows. The consistency of policies and procedures were important to the teachers. Knowing what to expect was a key.

Directors should:

1 **Support the development of close relationships among the staff.** Although staff need to develop close, personal relationships with each other, it is important that the administration establish a climate of professionalism and support. Ask staff, "What do you need to feel comfortable in your job?" But keep in mind what Moisey Shopper, a therapist in St. Louis who works with the early care and education community, has cautioned: if the program is organized like a family, then the staff will take on the roles that are typically found within a family. Some of these roles may not be appropriate for the workplace, and directors should not want the role of *mom*. Administrators need to model respectful treatment of each other and of staff. Striking a balance between supporting close relationships among the staff and maintaining a professional relationship with the organization will be a challenge for the director. The organizational climate that is established within the program will be important for this delicate balance. (See Bloom, P. J., *Blueprint for Action,* for help and guidance on establishing an appropriate and effective organizational climate.)

2 **Establish clear, consistent expectations for teachers.** The program philosophy and the administrator's philosophy must be communicated to everyone working in the program. Teachers should be encouraged to write their own philosophy and hang it in their room and provide copies for parents. In addition, teachers need clear, concise job descriptions that are based on the philosophy of the program and administration. Finally, the evaluation tool used to conduct periodic observations and performance evaluations of the teachers should be based on the job description. In many programs these three things — philosophy, job description, and evaluation, are totally separate. Making them dependent on each other helps keep the expectations for the teachers clear and consistent. Give teachers duties beyond the classroom when teachers are ready for a new challenge.

Teachers recognize child development.

As directors, we have always known that the best teachers could see what

children were doing developmentally and why it was important for them to be doing what they were doing. Teachers working in the field for long periods of time recognize developmental milestones that children reach. The teachers said that it took time for them to start recognizing the developmental things that were so important to know.

Directors should:

3 **Help teachers learn about child development.** This is not a new thought or recommendation. We have always known this. However, the theory of child development must be merged with their classroom practice. The best way to do this is through modeling and mentoring rather than formal classes offered in a sterile environment without children. Teachers must be able to discuss why children do what they do, not just describe the action. This reflective thinking takes time, experience, and practice to develop with someone acting as guide. Teachers need opportunities to see examples of development in the children they work with, apply the theory they have learned, and have the mentor scaffold the understanding of the development theory with the teacher. The mentor and the teacher must have time to engage in an open discussion about what was observed and what the developmental implications are.

Teachers grew up in large, supportive families.

When asked about their own childhood, many of the teachers talked about growing up in homes filled with love and about parents or other adults who were there to support their own growth and development. Because the teachers were nurtured, they found themselves in nurturing roles for as long as they could remember. The teachers felt that they had been valued and respected as a child and they then learned to value and respect children.

Directors should:

4 **After seeking legal advice, structure interview questions to discover the early childhood experiences of the applicant.** If you consult with an attorney, you will probably be told not to ask anything of the applicant except name, rank, and social security number. However, that is not realistic in the world of staffing for early care and education programs. With care, questions can be asked that will not violate anyone's rights. Some suggested questions would be:

- Describe some of your early childhood experiences.
- What did you do for fun as a child?
- Who did you enjoy playing with?
- Who nurtured you as a child?
- How did your family view children?
- What is the most important thing you can do for a child?
- Do you still see your childhood friends, or do you still get together with your siblings?

The questions listed above are open-ended and could lead an applicant for a teaching position to discuss some of the key points that the teachers I interviewed mentioned. If the teachers do not answer or seem uncomfortable, move on and that may tell you what you need to know.

These four things for directors to do probably will not solve the retention issue in the early care and education field. They will help directors work to meet the individual needs of the teachers on their staff. We work hard to meet individual needs of families and children, we need to also meet individual needs for teachers. Retention, rather than recruitment, will lead to a quality teaching staff.

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Working with Generation Y

Understanding and supporting their workplace needs

by Alan Ekblad and Timothy Hathaway

The new groove is entering the workforce now! Generation Y's 32 million U.S. workers will increase to approximately 21% of the workforce in the next 3 years. In a child care and early education industry dominated by young workers, that means Generation Y-ers (16-30 year olds) are members of your staff.

- Are you working to move them professionally forward or does it feel like you are fighting with your teenager about cleaning his or her room?
- How can we engage young workers' interests, knowledge, and skills to greater effect?
- How can the early childhood community successfully support professional development in this dynamic workforce?

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In a recent survey by Lee Hecht Harrison (2005), a leading workforce development firm, more than 60% of employers say they are experiencing tension between employees from different generations and more than 70% of older employees are dismissive of younger workers' abilities. Much of the tension occurs when Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and Generation X-ers (born between 1967 and 1984) perceive Gen Y-ers' vibes as lack of commitment to the job, unreal expectations for advancement, or attitudes that reflect, "I'm not going to give this 100%." For us lifers in early education, that sounds a bit like blasphemy! All is not lost; there is hope for us, and yes this Gen Y group can be trusted to care for our youngest children.

Who is Generation Y?

Generation Y's view of their role in the work world reflects a change in what is considered important for the 21st century. Since the late 1980s our accelerated technological advancement has supported rapid social change in a world that has become increasingly unstable and insecure. Young workers find security in this 'high connectivity' environment that allows for anonymous intimacy; filling a generational need for both secure association and safe emotional distance. For those comfortable with this fast paced technology, rapid change is not daunting, but commonplace. Technology has not only created new professions, but it has revolutionized the support structure of current professions. In a recent e-community meeting (an online blogging session), a 50-something colleague lamented, "Why can't we just call each other?" This example of fundamental change in how we build connection is fertile ground for opportunity and unfortunately misunderstanding. Technology has changed the learning curve experienced by young employees. To keep up with this fast pace, young workers move in and out of jobs faster and put more emphasis on individual satisfaction and development. Movement, change, and challenge become the motivating factors behind job selection and retention.

Strategies for employers

The challenge for established professions trying to entice and retain a younger employee base is to understand how central the above-mentioned motivating factors are to

the Generation Y identity. Employers wanting to meet this challenge and create an effective workforce will:

- **Provide access to technology.** Generation Y-ers know how to use technology and they are good at it. They can use this ability to improve their (and your) work environment. With fast-paced technology and sharing of information, they are accustomed to immediacy in information sharing, feedback, and turnaround for others. In addition, Generation Y-er's tend to be success-oriented and view their adeptness in multi-tasking as an intricate component of their success. Finally, Generation Y-er's have been found to be increasingly tolerant of differences. This may again be attributed to technology, as with it the world has become more accessible and therefore more understandable. The unknown, no matter from what perspective, is viewed as less of a threat and more of a challenge.

  Example: Gina, the infant room teacher has expressed interest in creating a blog that parents could link into to receive information about the happenings in the infant room — lesson plans, interesting information, and also a way of broadening parent/staff communication.

- **Establish mentoring as a means of providing supportive direct feedback.** Generation Y-ers have grown up with more parental involvement and structured time from adults (Wray, 2008). Therefore a 'community of learners approach,' where workers are supported through activities such as mentoring, job shadowing, and shared project assignments may be viewed by Generation Y-ers as less intimidating. They want to participate in tasks and learning experiences that support their growth, are relevant, and can be applied immediately.

  Example: Fiona began working with preschoolers five weeks ago. Although she has a great approach with children and is eager to learn, she is having difficulty connecting with parents effectively. Maria, a lead teacher from the toddler room whom Fiona seems to respect, is excellent in this area. Recognizing the need, the program director creates a six-week mentoring experience with specific outcomes in mind for Fiona. The planned experiences consist of Fiona observing Maria working with her children, Maria observing Fiona with her children and time together to debrief and to read and discuss an article on building links with parents.

- **Support their values by inviting input in decision making.** Generation Y-ers are used to being active participants in family and other decision-making matters from an early age. They bring a similar expectation of active participation and decision making into their work environment. They demonstrate little understanding or tolerance for work environments thought to be governed by top-down methods or driven by a seniority system.

  Example: Andy, a part-time college student and after-school caregiver, really enjoys working with the school-age group, and his energy and enthusiasm is a bright spot for the program. He is working on his marketing degree and has expressed interest in contributing to the marketing plan of the center. The director invites him to come up with a few ideas for an upcoming newspaper advertisement.

- **Individualize and customize career and growth opportunities.** Generation Y-ers are innovative. They are used to change, personally and professionally, and have experienced change at home, school, in the community, and at work. This flexibility is needed to navigate change successfully and to help ascertain a sense of security. Motivation to remain in a situation is based on movement, however not just upward. In fact, some Generation Y-ers have no desire to 'climb the corporate ladder' but want to feel valued, appreciated, and challenged where they are.

  Example: Schedules in the infant room will need to be revised again due to staff turnover. As a result, the lead teacher, Ramona, a young woman in her early twenties, has expressed frustration and a desire to try a new approach with the staff orientation plan to combat the staff turnover. Also, the director discusses a lateral move with Angie from the toddler room who has been looking for more challenge but not a supervisory position. This provides some stability for Ramona, a new challenge for Angie, and fresh perspectives on how new staff can be supported in the environment.

- **Provide training and skills development that can be connected with broader work applications.** Gen Y workers get the idea that they may be changing jobs more frequently throughout their lives. Despite perceptions by older generations, Generation Y-ers are goal oriented. They have high expectations for themselves and those around them: employers, family members, and peers. Example: Alyssa spends a lot of time talking to the other staff in her room and sometimes seems less interested in attending to children's activities. After discussion with the teacher it is decided that more training is a

potential solution. Alyssa is given an article on developing great customer service and another on the importance of adult-child interaction. The teacher follows up with a discussion a week later at nap time. Alyssa is asked if she will complete observations of children's interactions with adults and peers and report what she sees to the teacher, coordinator, and director in two weeks.

So great! We have a new set of workers with a new set of expectations. Most early childhood programs do not have unlimited flexibility and resources to cater to employees' wishes and desires, nor does any employer. However, programs can identify specific strategies to implement, prioritize those strategies for maximum impact and map out stages of implementation to create an environment that achieves the level of support desired by these staff.

Creating a supportive work environment

Above all else, involve your staff. They can be a great source of ideas. Inviting staff to brainstorm ideas by texting in suggestions or creating a Google® Group to post discussion ideas might get the ball rolling. Other examples of enhancements that result in a supportive environment for this new generation of workers include:

- Upgraded use of technology in the program. This may entail investment in new equipment such as palm pilots — perfect for data collection and brief observances noted throughout the day — and advanced cell phones to video children in action and capture visual artifacts.

- Rethinking use of current technology to facilitate conference calls among staff, parents, and professionals to save time and travel, and technology- based games — to add new dimension to children's learning opportunities.

- Use of e-community meetings, via My Space,® Facebook, ® blogging, or texting — to communicate with parents and expand parent communication. Many parents are also from the Y Generation and tech savvy. Use of such forms of communication extends and deepens relationships between them and the program.

- Involve Gen Y-ers in policy-making processes. Two examples of how that may be accomplished are: establish a non-voting staff representative position on the parent committee — perfect for staff and parent relations, sharing of information, and building a better understanding of program functioning — and choose promising young staff to lead mini development/self-improvement teams responsible for improved program functioning.

- Use 15 minutes of staff meetings for staff sharing of innovative ideas they would like to explore. This could be paired up with individualized career development activities and/or self development plans.

- Create a staff training plan that includes 'transferable' skills such as customer relations, team development, public speaking, and critical thinking. Each of these improves the general ability of your staff and provides you with better qualified workers.

In conclusion

Many other ideas may be available to your team; the key is selecting a few that fit your programmatic style and setting them in motion. Given the pressures facing early childhood programs, there is no alternative but to maximize every staff person's ability and energy. Providing technology, supporting values, customizing growth opportunities, and creating an open work environment are all vital in providing this, as identified by Gen Y-ers themselves. Organizations engaging Generation Y-ers with growth opportunities that match well with their generational experience build leaders in quality care.

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motivating entry-level employees

When you can't give them a new BMW

by Silvana Clark

Motivating entry-level employees to perform at their highest capabilities is easy. Simply offer lucrative stock options, three-day work weeks, and generous salaries. Oprah Winfrey actually gives employees new cars and trips around the world. On the other hand, if you are like most early childhood programs, it takes creativity to motivate employees when your budget is tight.

Contradictions

Motivated employees rely on their own resources to get the job done. They have an inner drive that causes them to provide outstanding customer service. Unmotivated employees simply want to get by doing the minimum amount of work possible. Experts agree you can't force someone to be motivated. Supervisors can, however, provide a workplace environment that encourages employees to make decisions, deal positively with co-workers, and receive recognition for hard work. A key factor is knowing that 'entry-level' is not the same as 'unimportant.' Your entry-level toddler assistant or after-school staff is very important in projecting a professional image to your parents.

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In a January 1998 Roper Poll, it was found 9 out of 10 employees will work harder for you if you show an interest in their growth outside of work. This statistic opens up a wealth of ways to motivate employees. One preschool had a bulletin board with the caption 'Greatest Pets In The World.' It was constantly covered with pictures of adorable puppies and all types of pets owned by the staff. Here are some other ways for you to show entry-level employees you care about them as *people*.

- Provide a lending library of books on a variety of topics. Include popular fiction as well as books on money management or self-help skills.
- Discover your employee's interests. If an employee loves gardening, give them a small plant in appreciation for their hard work. (I don't drink coffee, yet people are always giving me coupons for specialty coffee shops.) People appreciate knowing you gave
- Generation X employees especially like social events. Plan pizza parties or group activities in acknowledgment of their work.
- Never underestimate the power of meaningful conversation. Asking a teacher, "How did your daughter do at her gymnastic competition last weekend?" shows you care about more than the employee's ability to teach preschoolers.
- Some child care facilities offer brown bag lunch seminars on non-work related topics. Contact free local speakers to give presentations relating to your employees' lives. How about a mini-workshop on healthy cooking or vacation travel possibilities?
- Acknowledge birthdays. One center honors birthdays by drawing a large card on the white board in the staff lounge with, "Happy Birthday Jeanette!" at the top. Throughout the day, other employees sign their names, write birthday greetings, or draw comical pictures on the giant card. The completed 'card' is one you'll never find at Hallmark®, but

These types of activities help employees feel management cares about them as individuals, not simply employees.

The University of Kansas psychology department studied other ways to motivate employees. Their results showed recognition was a strong factor in developing employees with high work standards. Again, giving recognition doesn't take a huge budget. One supervisor gives 'psychological paychecks.' When employees receive their paychecks, he attaches a Post-it ® note on the envelope with a specific positive statement such as, "Helen, Thank you for the extra work you did decorating for the Open House. The decorations were amazing!". Employees take pride in knowing their extra efforts are acknowledged. If a parent writes a positive letter about an employee, enlarge it and post it where other employees can see it. Begin staff meetings with public praise for an employee's efforts or contributions to the department. Wouldn't you enjoy being in a meeting that starts with, "Last week, Jennifer came in as a ***sub***stitute on incredibly short notice. I'd like to thank her by giving her this gift . . . a ***sub***marine sandwich!"

In a survey for American Express®, pollsters asked employees, "What do you want most from your employer?" The results: 46% of employees said they wanted personal feedback and 32% stated financial rewards would motivate them. Personal feedback involves communication on a regular basis. Sound simple? Here's a startling statistic: In a study of 22,000 shift workers, almost 70% said there's little communication between them and management. Communication can be as simple as asking, "How's it going?" as staff watch children on the playground. Be specific in what you want staff to do. Stating, "Be friendly to parents" is too vague. Communicating your expectations helps employees know what is expected of them. This, in turn, means employees feel comfortable on the job. They don't have to wonder if they are performing up to your standards, because you've communicated clearly.

One of the easiest ways to discover what motivates your employees is to simply ask them. The results might surprise you! Ask employees to fill out a 'Motivation Rating Form.' It could look something like the form shown above6. (Add any items appropriate to your workplace.)

After compiling the results, see what you can do to put some of those motivating factors to use.

Working in the early childhood industry often involves long hours with minimum pay for entry-level employees. The following are additional general

Motivation Rating Form

On a scale of 1 to 10, #1 would be what motivates you the most.

Please rank the following items:

___having flexible hours
___chances to get together like picnics or potlucks
____periodic raises
___able to wear sweatpants to work
___10 hour days, four days a week
___milk and cookie break every afternoon!
___more promotion opportunities
___free lunches
___getting appreciated by upper management
___generous retirement plan
___encouraged to get more training
___get to bring my dog to work
___getting more responsibility
___knowing more about what is going on at work
___able to occasionally use work time to volunteer at an outside organization
___more vacation time
___able to set my own goals
___being on a team
___*not* being on a team
___having my own business cards
___going to training
___none of the above

Here's what would motivate me the most:

_____

ideas for motivating employees:

- Recognition in front of peers. One child care center offered 'standing ovations' to employees demonstrating outstanding customer service.
- Ask for employee feedback . . . and acknowledge their input. The Towers Perrin survey polled 250, 000 employees. Only 48% said, "My boss listens to my opinions."
- Have FUN at work (see sidebar for ideas).
- Reward positive actions. Let employees know when they are dealing professionally with children and parents.
- Keep people informed. As much as possible, let employees know what is going on. Rumors and uncertainty do little to motivate employees.
- Work on a project together. Can employees compile a kid-friendly cookbook or help paint the kennels at a dog shelter? An easy volunteer project is to ask staff to donate their gently-used used shoes to the non-profit, Soles4Souls. Simply collect the shoes and ship to their warehouse. Soles4Souls distributes the shoes to people in need around the world. www.soles4Souls.org.
- Offer discount (or free!) tickets for movies, bowling, pizza.
- Reward employees who recommend new employees.
- Empower them to make decisions within specific guidelines.
- Try to keep their job interesting. Can employees switch jobs with another employee occasionally?
- Give a sincere, specific "thank you." Saying "Thanks Jason, for your hard work building the puppet stage for the after-school program" is more effective than, "Good job, Jason!"
- Send balloons or flowers to an employee's home if he/she does something outstanding.
- Wash their car! One director selected an 'Employee of the Week' for the 12 weeks of summer. The winning employee received coupons for pizza, a certificate, and the joy of watching the director wash his/her car . . . in front of other teachers and children!
- Rotate staff to run portions of staff meetings. This gives them additional responsibility and a chance to develop leadership qualities.
- Select employees to help interview other entry-level employees. They'll learn valuable job interviewing skills.
- Ask employees this simple question: What would help you do a better job? Follow up on as many suggestions as possible.

Alice Issen, a professor at Cornell University, researched ways to help people work together and be creative in problem solving. Her solution? Candy. She states, "Giving someone a small gift of candy can significantly raise their creative problem solving skills." So the next time you want to encourage and motivate employees . . . pass out the chocolate!

Oprah Winfrey has the budget to motivate her employees with exotic gifts and luxury vacations. Most supervisors and managers need to rely on creativity and a few pieces of chocolate. The point is the same . . . letting entry-level employees know you appreciate their efforts and hard work results in highly motivated employees.

Bringing Fun to Work

Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager,* states, "Humor and laughter in organizations can increase the amount of feedback you get, the honesty, and their capacity for people to tell you good things. It is through humor you open the lines of communication." So try these simple ideas to bring a little fun to work.

- Set up a humor bulletin board for people to contribute cartoons, funny postcards, or jokes. Keep it updated and ask different departments to contribute for certain time periods.
- Begin staff meetings with a non-threatening ice breaker.
- Celebrate some untraditional holidays. Did you know National Trivia Day is January 4? How about celebrating International Left Handers Day on August 13 or National Better Breakfast month in September? For a listing of 320 crazy holidays (along with suggested activities), try *Every Day A Holiday* written by yours truly, Silvana Clark.
- Announce spontaneous contests such as "Whichever employee had pancakes for breakfast, come to the front desk and pick up a prize." Or place a jar full of peanuts in the staff room. Have staff guess how many peanuts the jar contains. Closest guess wins – you guessed it – the jar of peanuts! For a great source of inexpensive trinkets and holiday decorations, try Sally Distributors, www.ssww.com – (800) 243-9232.

For additional books on employee motivation, try:

- *10 Minute Guide to Motivating People* by Marshall Cook
- *Ultimate Rewards: What Really Motivates People to Achieve* by Steven Kerr
- *1001 Ways To Reward Employees* by Bob Nelson

9 + 1 = Fun!

"Good management begins with good people"

by Dennis Vicars

Dennis Vicars is presently CEO of Human Services Management Corporation (HSMC) and Executive Director of the Professional Association for Childhood Education Alternative Payment Program (PACEAPP). Dennis has guided both organizations' growth to where the Professional Association for Childhood Education (PACE) is now the largest early care and education association in California and HSMC has become a significant child care management company. In his career, Dennis Vicars has served as a child care corporate executive, preschool company founder, and advocate on both the public and private side of early childhood education. Dennis has a unique understanding of early childhood education and has experience in every area of the profession. Dennis has been a speaker and workshop host for various organizations including the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the National Child Care Association (NCCA), PACE, and the World Forum on Early Care and Education. Dennis is presently a featured writer in *Exchange* magazine, which is the most recognized early childhood magazine in the world. Dennis has assisted and been a consultant on numerous early care and education advisory boards including Blue Ribbon Commissions in Maryland, Virginia, Oregon, Washington, and Arizona. Dennis served on California's Master Plan for early childhood education and was recently chosen by Governor Schwarzenegger as his representative on the 13-member Early Learning Quality Improvement System Advisory Committee.

Dennis is presently involved in Sacramento County's Superintendent Preschool Committee and participates on PACE's Public Policy Committee and is President of Child Development Policy Institute (CDPI).

All organizations are different in nature, culture, programs, and services. However, every truly successful enterprise ('successful' meaning their mission statement and strategic goals are followed and achieved) that I have encountered:

1. Employs strategic leadership
2. Is organized in a way to promote maximum individual staff performance
3. Promotes maximum individual growth and self-actualization
4. Is relationship oriented
5. Is always recruiting, always interviewing, and always prepared to hire positive people who will improve the organization
6. Is committed to ongoing training and the promotion of individual growth
7. Is efficient and effective
8. Has a culture of excellent service (to parents, vendors, and each other)
9. Is nurturing, with an emphasis on making mistakes early so that eventual success is guaranteed
10. Is a fun place to be!

So what does all this mean in an early care and education environment? Let's explore:

1. *Employs strategic leadership* means that someone (hopefully the director) not only has their hands on the wheel, but knows where the center is headed. In other words, there is a well thought-out plan (roadmap) of where the center is headed, how it's going to get there, and what it's going to look like when it arrives. Not unlike driving, alternative routes (contingencies) are part of the plan, with flexibility inherent in the process. However, the goals of the center are unwavering and not subject to debate. This is true for program quality, financial stability, and any other component which is an organizational goal within the greater vision.
2. *Is organized in a way to promote maximum individual staff performance* means creating a professional atmosphere where professionals are not burdened by bureaucracy, procedural manuals, and infrastructure that can hinder success. In other words, policies and procedures, schedules, trainings, mentoring, and even center rules are thought-out and not left to chance. The question that needs to be asked is: "Will this promote our professional's ability to perform?"
3. *Promotes maximum individual growth and self-actualization* means that the growth of your staff, both as professionals and individuals, is a priority to you and your organization. Continuing education is extended through staff benefits or is facilitated

for staff through on-campus trainings or distance learning capability. Workshops for personal growth beyond the classroom are integrated into the mix and demonstrate to staff that they are appreciated as people.

4. *Is relationship-oriented* —This should extend to every person that enters the center: children, parents, staff, visitors, vendors, and even licensing representatives. The entire early care and education ideal is built upon creating an environment where children feel safe, protected, and cared for (loved). When that ideal is extended to everyone, things seem to work a lot better, including both performance and attitudes.

5. *Is always recruiting, always interviewing, and always prepared to hire positive people that will improve the organization*. This seems obvious. Unfortunately, it is rarely done. We seldom recruit and too often interview only when we have an immediate need. Therefore, we are forced to make a hasty decision that seldom results in anything positive. The truth is, there will always be turnover for even the most positive of reasons. Therefore, if we hope to improve our operation we need to be proactive — not reactive — in our personnel planning. Unless we are actively recruiting better professionals than we presently have, we will never improve. Additionally, when a job opening does arrive, which it will, we are doomed to repeating the 'hire in panic' behavior that always results in problems.

6. *Is committed to ongoing training and the promotion of individual growth*. This will continue to improve your program of education and care for young children and help bond your staff to your mission. If constant training becomes a cultural norm, your center's primary tenets about the program, curriculum, teacher preparation, and customer service become ingrained. This will attract prospective parents and new staff. The kind of parents and staff you want are drawn to those early care and educational environments that seek constant and consistent improvement in quality.

7. *Is efficient and effective*. This means that there is little left to chance. Everything is organized, including curriculum, work schedules, training opportunities, budgets, parent communications, etc. To quote a parent, "This place has it together." Organization allows children, parents, and staff the ability to enjoy a positive atmosphere that is 'together.'

8. *Has a culture of absolute excellent service*. In the same way that a quality program is a stated parental expectation, absolute excellent service is the unspoken priority of every parent. Absolute excellent service is a benefit that costs you nothing to produce and will make you stand above the pack if it is imprinted in your center's DNA. Absolute excellent service should go beyond warm smiles and courteous thank yous. For it to be effective, it must be a total commitment, which then becomes habit in the way we care for people in our center.

9. *Is nurturing, with an emphasis on making mistakes early so that eventual success is guaranteed.* This concept can be difficult for most new employees to understand. Comedian George Carlin once said, "The two worst days in your life are when you lose a job and when you find one." No one wants to make mistakes, especially a new employee. However, making mistakes is how we learn. When we create a safe atmosphere where a person knows that it's okay to not get it right the first time, we create a true learning environment. In promoting learning through making mistakes, we create an atmosphere for our staff that is consistent with what we hope to do with young children. When everyone knows it's okay to fail, we only encourage people to succeed.

10. *It's a fun place to be!* If this needs explanation, then the previous 9 points are meaningless. A children's place must be a fun place or something is dreadfully wrong. So go have fun!

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

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.

. . . true caring can be felt

- 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.

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

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Using Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers

by Kay Albrecht

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.

Motivating Staff

by Sue Baldwin

Sue lives and owns her business, INSIGHTS Training & Consulting, in Stillwater, Minnesota. She has been working in the field of Early Care and Education for 30 years and is a recognized international presenter at conferences. She is the author of four books and has also been involved with other publications and videos for directors that have been sold nationally. Sue is an adjunct faculty member of St. Paul College where she is teaching the Minnesota Director's Credential; a swimming teacher for infants and preschoolers; a certified doula (birthing coach); a Hospice volunteer; and a very active grandparent. For more information about Sue, please visit her web site at: www.suebaldwin.com.

When you started in your current position as director, did you receive a job description that included "motivate staff"? Probably not. However, experienced directors report that having a motivated staff is vital for having a quality program.

Within this article you will be able to read about how different people are handling this topic; a list of dos and don'ts; and specific suggestions that are recommended for your consideration.

When exploring the topic of motivating staff by interviewing staff, students, and directors; reading articles in books, magazines, and the Internet; and reviewing material that I use when offering training and consulting, I have come up with various techniques that are effective with early care and education professionals at various stages of their development.

All of the following people (who are currently working in child care at different levels) were asked the same question: "What is it that motivates you in your job?"

Nancy (who has been working as a preschool teacher for two years): "I do not need my director to say anything or do anything to motivate me. If I end the day feeling good about what I have done with the children, then I feel good about my job. I do not need external motivations."

Paul (who has been working in a school-age program for six months): "I like to hear positive things from parents. When parents come back and tell me how much their child is enjoying their time with me at Adventure Club, then I feel good about what I am doing in my job."

Alicia (who has been working in a child care center for three years): "My director does really fun things at our monthly staff meeting. There are door prizes from local merchants, and there is always food at the evening meetings. Although I do not like working in the evening, I do like the possibility of winning something."

Wanda (who has been teaching preschool for over 30 years): "What motivates me is knowing that the program I work for is parallel with my values about the program. I feel good working in a quality program that goes out of its way to provide what children need. I have a passion for what I do and cannot imagine working in an environment where I do not value myself and what I do."

Alicia (who has been working in a Head Start program for two years): "I feel good about my teaching when my site supervisor and parents make positive comments to me. I also enjoy receiving notes that I can keep about how people appreciate me and my teaching abilities."

Gabriella (who has been working in a child care facility for six years): "Our program budgets money annually for staff to attend conferences. Because I have taken so many local training in-service classes, I like to go and meet other child care professionals at conferences that are held regionally and nationally. There is a plan for how staff are picked to attend the conferences so that not the same people attend. After we go to the conferences, we are expected to come back and report on our attended sessions to the other staff in our program. We also write brief articles that go in our program's newsletter for the parents."

I am sure that you can relate to many of the staff comments above. Individuals are motivated by different things and in different ways and as you can see by some of the staff you supervise, for some people motivation comes from within. The director begins the process of staff motivation by evaluating what motivates their staff. Ask the staff to rank the following topics from 1 to 12 as far as what motivates them in their job. In addition to asking the staff to do this exercise, you also might want to evaluate what motivates you in your position:

- money
- promotion
- families
- loyalty to director/owner
- working conditions
- interesting work
- making a difference with children
- appreciation
- personal development
- recognition
- flexibility of work
- other

You might need to individualize motivation of staff related to your questionnaire findings. We often assume that if staff receives more money for their work, they will be motivated to do a better job. This is an assumption and can be clarified with the previous questions. Twyla Dell writes about motivating employees, "The heart of motivation is to give people what they really want most from work. The more you are able to provide what they want, the more you should expect what you really want, namely: productivity, quality, and service." (*An Honest Day's Work,* 1988). This theory is certainly applicable in the field of early care and education.

There are some dos and don'ts pertaining to motivating your staff:

Do:

Recognize that you don't have all the answers. *Directors can spend hours trying to think of what would make the staff feel more valued, but we need to ask them for their ideas.*

Offer constructive feedback on a regular basis. *People need to know that you are aware of what they are doing in their jobs. Make sure that your comments are specific, rather than general (I appreciated the suggestions that you offered to Taylor's mother about biting.).*

Praise in public (staff meetings, newsletters, bulletin boards). *As part of the monthly newsletter, highlight staff who has gone above expectations with encouraging staff morale and motivation.*

Encourage staff to recognize their peer's positive behavior. *In the staff area, have something on the wall (pertaining to the season, like a tree with apples or snowflakes) where staff can write notes of appreciation to their peers that recognize positive support ("Josh, thanks for helping out with zipping kids' jackets today.").*

"What is it that motivates you in your job?"

Take time to find out what makes others tick and show genuine caring. *Listening is about understanding how the other person feels — beyond merely the words that they say. Find the time to truly listen to what your staff are saying about themselves.*

Have staff participate in developing motivators. *Develop a "Sunshine Committee" with a small percentage of your staff who would be responsible for planning social events (once a month) for the program staff.*

Lead, encourage, and guide staff — don't force them. *Encourage and help your staff to grow and develop, and performance improvement is inevitable. Lead by example and encourage them to have ownership in the program by supporting each other.*

Don't:

Make assumptions about what motivates other people. *Ask staff what motivates them. Given time to reflect on this answer, most people will be able to give you the information you need to offer positive motivation.*

Assume others are like you. *What motivates you as a director will not necessarily be the motivator that is needed for your staff.*

Forget to empower staff who are ready for added responsibility. *Make sure that your staff feel they have job descriptions that give them some autonomy and allow them to find their own solutions.*

The director begins the process of staff motivation by evaluating what motivates their staff.

Force people into things that are supposedly good for them. *Make sure that staff are adequately trained before adding more or new job responsibilities. If people feel unskilled with new tasks, they will feel overwhelmed and resentful rather than empowered.*

Neglect the need for inspiration. *Continually evaluate what inspires an individual to feel better about themselves, thus more motivated to perform at a higher level. If you cannot instill that inspiration, offer the opportunity for them to experience it with a mentor, or at a conference with a motivational speaker.*

Delegate work — delegate responsibility. *Delegating should not be dumping! The person who is being delegated to should feel ready to assume the added responsibility so that they leave the experience with positive feelings.*

For those directors who are looking for some specific tangible motivators to offer staff, please consider any of the 20 following suggestions:

- Write the staff person a personal note catching them in the act of doing something positive.
- Gift cards from local merchants that can be used for:
  - Perfect attendance
  - Tasks completed on time
  - Cleaning the storage room
  - Door prize at staff meeting
- Highlight a "staff of the month" on the bulletin board.
- Give a dollar amount that can be spent for new equipment for their room.
- Offer an unscheduled break after a difficult situation within their classroom.
- Close the program to have a staff retreat at a local motel or bed and breakfast.
- Offer in-service training during staff meetings.
- Chocolate!
- Close the program during low attendance (before Labor Day or during the holiday season) so staff can redesign their classroom.
- Solicit positive comments from parents and pass them on to the teachers.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BONNIE NEUGEBAUER

- Send staff to conferences and have a staff meeting following to report on new ideas that can be incorporated into the program.
- Develop a mentorship program for new and experienced staff.
- Encourage staff to pursue their education, thus qualifying for possible promotions.
- During Week of The Young Child have a "staff appreciation" day.
- Have early childhood magazines available in the staff room.
- Provide staff with information about special field trip information to local attractions.
- Provide substitutes for staff so that they can observe other child care programs in the area.
- Celebrate staff birthdays at the program.
- Have a program sports team (bowling, softball, etc.) so that staff can participate in a fun activity together outside work.
- Celebrate holidays outside the program with a pot luck evening activity, which could also include different self care activities.

In addition to any of the above items, it must also be said that if the director can tap into and support the staff person's own motivations then the director begins to help people to realize their full potential. Ultimately, motivation must come from within each person**.** No director is ever the single and continuing source of motivation for a staff person. While the director's encouragement, support, inspiration, and example will at times motivate staff, the director's greatest role in motivating is to recognize people for who they are, and to help them find their own way forward by making best use of their own strengths and abilities. In this way, achievement, development, and recognition will all come quite naturally to the staff person, and it is these things which truly fuel personal motivation.

Ultimately, motivation must come from within each person.

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Using Beginnings Workshop to Train Teachers

by Kay Albrecht

What motivates you?: Take the time to increase your understanding of each teacher's unique motivations. Use the questionnaire idea proposed by Baldwin to gather data. Then, use what you learned to make a plan to address the different motivations of each staff member.

Implement the "Do List": Baldwin shares wonderful ideas for getting started. So, implement her "do list" and see where it leads.

Consider the "Don't List": Managers and administrators might want to take a look at the "don't list" as well. There are good suggestions for avoiding these pitfalls that deserve attention.

Tangible motivators: What a wonderful list of tangible motivators. Baldwin gives us a jump start on considering motivation with this great list. To find out which ones teachers think might work best, ask them to rank order the list with the idea they like the best at 1 and least at 20. Use the information to individualize motivators, find trends, and identify differences in what motivates.

Beginnings

Celebrating Teachers and Their Work

by Margie Carter

The more I work with teachers in early childhood programs, the deeper my gratitude grows for their efforts to stick with this difficult work. Most spend many unpaid hours in and out of their classrooms organizing, planning, getting further training so as to provide the best quality care and education they can. They often do this while continually helping to train new staff, working second jobs to make ends meet, going without health insurance, driving an unreliable car, and postponing their own parenting to avoid further economic stress.

The work and skill of child care teachers is generally invisible in our society. Even parents who see them every day take teachers' efforts for granted, often adding insult to injury by requesting that they baby-sit for their children on the weekends. The handful of parents who do acknowledge respect and gratitude to their child care providers are, in the words of Lilian Katz, "transients" — by the time they understand the issues involved in providing quality care, their children move on to school and they lose sight or interest in advocating for the early childhood profession. Can we really feel like celebrating under all these conditions?

The temptation is to try to cover up this discouraging situation with banners, balloons, and banquets to celebrate the work of the teachers within our programs. To be honest, I hope that as we consider alternative celebrations for the children in our programs we are also rethinking what we do for the teachers. We face many of the same pitfalls in our current practices of teacher celebrations as we do with those for the children — assuming everyone values the same celebration, celebrating nothing for fear of leaving out or alienating someone, cheerleading with a celebration hype that has more stress than real meaning for teachers.

Recognizing What Teachers Need

To be sure, budget limitations severely constrict how we tend to shape teacher celebrations. We write notes with happy faces and buy flowers, balloons, a program logo t-shirt, and maybe even a wrist watch to recognize special efforts, teacher birthdays, or anniversaries of employment. These tokens are all within our price range. Some programs pair teachers up with secret pals to spread around the task of remembering to do something special for weary staff members.

While these gestures are commendable, they don't often engender what I associate with a true feeling of celebration — deep delight or meaning, exhilaration, a sense of pride or self-esteem, or the marking of history, continuity, connectedness, and renewal that comes from time honored ritual. Again I'm reminded of admonitions from outgoing NAEYC president Lilian Katz in her writing about efforts to create self-esteem in children. She takes to task the shallowness of emphasizing success at trivial tasks or compiling self-celebration Lists — "All the Good Things about Me." As others have done, Katz points out the distinction between praise and giving specific feedback and rewards.

The truth is, we need to give teachers more to celebrate. They need paid time for reflection, for planning and meeting together. They deserve regular feedback, coaching, and ongoing opportunities for

paid professional development. I'm sure they would feel like celebrating if they had the resources and support staff they need — regular custodial services, secretaries, pedagogista, public and mental health consultants, not to mention adequate salaries, benefits, and a career path that went somewhere.

We need to hear more from teachers about what kind of celebration would really mean something to them, would truly honor who they are and the accomplishments and contributions they've achieved. It would help if we got over our fears of singling out individuals for recognition and, in fact, formalized some "master teacher" mentoring programs, such as those underway in California, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and North Carolina. Testimony from teachers involved in these mentor teacher programs indicates this is a source of tremendous personal and professional recognition and strength for them. And tandem with any meaningful recognition or celebration of teachers' work must be budget planning that provides tangible rewards far beyond the accolades we typically see.

Celebrations That Truly Recognize Teachers

How do we provide a place in our programs, indeed in our communities, which honors the work and contributions of teachers, one which really translates into an internal sense of celebration for a teacher, or a public recognition which is meaningful to the individual as well as the child care profession at large? Consider how Lella Gandini and Amelia Gambetti speak of celebrating the work of children. What if teachers got that kind of continued recognition, affirmation, and attention called to their questions, their thinking, projects, and accomplishments? What might it look like?

I picture walking into a program with documentation and displays of teachers' lives and work, side by side with that of the children's. This would bring about genuine recognition — and also a sense that our programs are really about human development, not just child development. It would serve to connect the daily lives of the children and their teachers — and also build community with the parents as they see the teachers for who they are, as opposed to faceless baby-sitters or lifeless nannies.

✔ **Strategy: Document and Broadcast**

A few years ago, Betty Jones and I had a dialogue about directors modeling attentiveness to and documentation of children's play (**Child Care Information Exchange**, September/October 1990 and January/February 1991). Strongly influenced by the power and meaning of the documentation and displays in the Reggio schools, last year I decided this idea was not only a useful training strategy but also a genuine way to celebrate what teachers are doing in their classrooms.

I began taking photographs and writing anecdotal stories about the wonderful learning environments teachers were creating, their masterful coaching of children in resolving conflicts and acquiring skills, efforts at teamwork with colleagues, and building partnerships with parents. I put these on staff or parent bulletin boards in centers and developed some into traveling display panels to take other places. My hope is that we can arrange some installations of these displays at our local R&R, in downtown bank lobbies, and shopping malls. More than one teacher came to me with tears of gratitude that someone had actually recognized and valued their work to the point of making the effort to have it more visible to others. This work further enhanced my ability to celebrate what teachers are doing. It is news I want to broadcast, seeds I want to spread around.

✔ **Strategy: A Book of Celebrations**

Wouldn't it be nice if teachers could actually take the time to reflect on and document an insight they gained, a skill they mastered, a hurdle they climbed over? (Why is this sort of record only kept in baby books?) Building on Byrd Baylor's book, **I'm In Charge of Celebrations**, I could imagine dedicating a portion of staff meetings, or a place in the staff room, for creating pages for a personal book each teacher might compile to have a record of what they deemed memorable and worth celebrating year after year.

Teachers put so much creativity into the service of children. They deserve to have some of it dedicated directly toward themselves. Books of teacher celebrations not only give personal touchstones for marking their human and professional development but also help build the collective memory of our early childhood education community.

✔ **Strategy: Give Ongoing Feedback**

Despite the data indicating the importance of giving

ongoing feedback to teachers, they continually complain that they rarely get it. Typically I hear things like "My director's way too busy to even notice what I do." "The only time I ever get feedback is when there's some problem or criticism." "She says I'm doing a great job just to make me feel good, but it doesn't mean that she actually knows what I'm doing." "How am I ever going to get better at teaching if someone doesn't actually give me feedback?"

We need to get past our worries of making someone feel uncomfortable with our observations and feedback. AND we must stop making excuses for not taking the time to do it. Directors have to build this into their schedules and deem it as important as doing the payroll or USDA reports.

Thoughtful, focused feedback means so much more to teachers than general praise. It lets them know what we think without having to guess or worry. It gives them something concrete to consider. And it's especially great when they regularly hear us offer specific recognition of a skillful interaction, an effort at a difficult task, or a risk taken.

✔ **Strategy: Budget for the Full Cost of Care**

To provide quality care, teachers need paid time for planning; discussions with colleagues, consultants, and parents; and ongoing professional development opportunities. We have a valuable resource from NAEYC on learning to budget for these types of things which constitute the **Full Cost of Care**, the title of this resource book. Until we muster the necessary determination to drive this budgeting campaign forward without apology, our ability to provide a meaningful celebration of and for teachers and their work will be limited. Let's get on with this task, stopping to celebrate our successes, but not settling for anything less than what we really need.

Margie Carter lives in Seattle, Washington, where she is an ECE instructor, consultant, writer, and video producer. Her book, ***Training Teachers: A Harvest of Theory and Practice****, co-authored with Deb Curtis, is available from Redleaf Press.*

Helping Teachers Love Their Work

by Lynn T. Hill

When teachers love their work, it is easier for them to be innovative, nurturing, and responsive to the needs of the children in their classrooms. But when teachers are dissatisfied with their work, they can be dull, distracted, and self-absorbed. Even though they feel dissatisfied, many teachers remain in their jobs, spreading the gloom of burnout. However, over 40% of child care teachers do leave their jobs each year (Whitebook et al., 1990).

When child care teachers leave their jobs, they leave behind a chaotic stream of events. The children who were once in their care not only lose a teacher but often lose a sense of security and trust. Risk taking and learning may become difficult until another attachment and bond can be formed with a new teacher.

For the staff left behind, the work load intensifies until new staff can be trained. They become the "port in the storm" for children and parents who are struggling with the transition. This responsibility is often a draining one. And for the administration, the process of interviewing, hiring, and training yet another new staff member can be overwhelming, as can be the explanations and reassurances to anxious parents.

With turnover in the child care profession at epidemic proportions, enormous care must be taken by directors and administrators to attempt to alleviate some of the most common reasons for leaving the profession.

Reason #1
No Sense of Achievement

"I don't feel challenged by this job. I'm bored by the day-to-day routine."

"I don't feel that my job is respected by the parents or by the administration."

"I don't feel that I'm being paid fairly."

Strategies for helping teachers love their work by promoting a sense of achievement:

• Teachers need to be celebrated for the jobs that they do. They need to know that their work has not gone unnoticed. Center newsletters can be a good vehicle for acclaiming the work of an individual teacher. Publishing an account of a successful classroom activity is a simple yet powerful strategy for saying "GREAT JOB" in a public way.

• Use a prominent bulletin board to spotlight an innovative teacher. Documentation of the teacher's ideas from inception to implementation can make an exciting display. These bulletin boards are of interest to parents and an inspiration to other teachers, and are most appreciated by the spotlighted teacher.

• Assist teachers to participate in their own action research (Elliot, 1985). Enabling teachers to pursue their notions by researching their own classrooms can promote a strong sense of worth and self-esteem. Teachers will need support during their research period. Providing substitutes so teachers are free to observe, furnishing data analysis assistance, supplying a forum for talking through the conclusions, and promoting an arena for sharing results will all contribute to the teacher's feeling of achievement.

• Give a seminar on presentation skills to teachers who have achieved a high level of classroom skill and who may be ready to share ideas with others. Teachers will know that their good work has been noticed and will enjoy being chal-

lenged to learn a new way to showcase their talents.

• Have each teacher keep a professional portfolio. Portfolio assessment can be a powerful tool for adult learners as well as for children. Teachers who set personal and professional goals and receive support for sticking with timelines are teachers who have a strong sense of achievement.

• Ask an experienced teacher to mentor a novice teacher. Mentoring relationships have been shown to be extremely empowering experiences for both mentor and protege (Bey, 1990). The mentor feels validated and affirmed as a professional, she becomes more skillful in articulating her philosophies, her own classroom will be improved in quality, and the overall sense of satisfaction increases.

• Become an advocate for Worthy Wage. Explore all avenues toward the enhancement of wages and benefits for the child care employee. Adequate compensation and strong training will bring about a stable work force. Teachers need to know that their directors and administrators care about their financial predicaments. Meet with parents in an annual "State of the Center" meeting where you take a hard look at the financial issues. Help families to understand their direct link to teacher salaries. The present child care system is based on high parent costs and on poverty-level wages. Parents will have to get just as angry about the predicament as we in child care are in order for a solution to be forced. A solution must be forthcoming in order to ensure a system where child care employees can afford to work in their field.

Reason #2
No Sense of Affiliation

"My director doesn't understand who I am. She doesn't seem to care about my personal life at all."

"I don't feel that I can trust my co-workers. They're competitive, critical, and hard to get to know."

"I feel like I'm drowning and no one will throw me a life line."

Teachers need to be with friends and colleagues who are caring, supportive, and appreciative.

Strategies for helping teachers love their work by promoting a sense of affiliation:

• All people need to feel a sense of belonging. There are several simple ways to enhance this sense for teachers within the center environment: Make sure that the teacher's identity is displayed in important places. Make an "Up Close and Personal" display in the center lobby. Include a picture of each teacher with biographical data and classroom assignment. This display promotes a sense of teamship. Make sure that every teacher has her own in-center mailbox where paychecks and messages can be delivered. This promotes open communication within the center and enhances the sense of belonging.

• Supervisory styles should be matched to the individual teacher's needs. Developmentally appropriate staff development should consider each teacher's stage of career development, life stage, personality type, concomitant roles in life, personal history, and learning styles (Jorde-Bloom et al., 1991). To assume that all of the teachers in a center would benefit from the same series of in-service trainings is to set yourself up for disappointment and complaints. Instead, try to get to know each teacher as an individual. Assist them with the crafting of a personal development plan.

• Make a pact to be honest, direct, and caring with one another. Promise each other that you will be accountable to one another for the good of the center. Use the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct as a guide to problem solving. Have everyone sign an agreement as they are hired, acknowledging that they have read the Code and that they will uphold it. Set up hypothetical situations at staff meetings, and practice confronting a colleague in a direct but caring way about a breach of agreement.

• Promote a sense of humor and nurture a sense of creativity within the center. The language of laughter binds us together in strong and lasting ways. Make sure that there is lots of time given to this important activity. End your staff meetings with "Our funniest moments," a chance for each teacher to tell of a hilarious event in their classroom. Reward creative problem solving and diverse expressions of ideas. Make sure that teachers feel safe when they offer disparate comments. Be open to new ideas.

• For the teacher who feels like she's drowning, supply a mentor. This is especially important for teachers who are trying to survive their first years of teaching. This important relationship allows an avenue for venting frustrations, brainstorming solutions to problem areas, assisting the development of new strategy and technique, and connection building on both personal and professional levels.

• Create a sense of tradition and history within the center. The feeling of belonging to an establishment with a past can promote a strong sense of loyalty and membership. Be consistent about center rituals —

talk about them and plan for them. Look forward to them.

We always have a staff happy hour after parent conference week is over.

The Red Room always plants the tomatoes in the center vegetable garden.

We have a major fund raiser each year to earn enough money to attend the state conference.

We always have homemade bread on Thursdays.

Reason #3
No Sense of Control

"The teachers don't have an opportunity to make decisions about things that affect us."

"I don't agree with the center's policies and procedures."

"Every time I have a good idea, it gets shot down."

Strategies for helping teachers love their work by promoting a sense of control:

• Plan an annual staff retreat during which the entire staff participates in the yearly goal setting. Use a nominal group process where every member's voice can be heard. Commitment to change and growth are outcomes of a democratic goal setting process. And when our voices have been heard, it is easier to pledge our loyalties to an organization.

• Once your annual goals are established, develop committees to manage the attainment of each goal. When teachers are responsible for researching solutions to problems and for handling the conflicts that come with debating the issues, they become energized by the idea of the process. Set up an in-center system of checks and balances for policy setting. Once the committee has hammered out the details of a new policy, they should be responsible for presenting it to the entire staff.

Always allow for plenty of discussion time during this phase. The committee members who have a commitment to the new policy proposal will be empowered by the opportunity to manage the discussion period. Then once a vote has been taken from the staff *assembly*, the *bill* goes to the *executive branch* (the director or board) for either approval, return to committee, or veto. This system allows the director to give teachers a strong voice in center management.

• Another strategy that will allow teachers to feel a sense of power is to delegate. When directors are willing to give up some control and to trust their teachers to make thoughtful decisions, everyone wins. Teachers experience a much needed perception of authority, and directors can reduce their workloads!

Delegation should be handled with care. A match between skill and challenge is essential for the teacher to have a positive experience. You wouldn't, for instance, assign the editing of the center's newsletter to someone who has difficulty with writing and deadlines. Rather, talk with the individual and understand the types of duties that would be most inspirational to her. Then keep a running list of chores that need to be accomplished. Whenever you've got a teacher who has reached that boredom phase and needs a shot of pizzazz, be ready to hand over a job.

• When teachers don't feel they are being heard, it is often a sign that the director is not doing enough listening. Active listening takes practice. Make time to carefully attend to what is being said. Make sure that you have created an environment where teachers feel that they can safely disagree with you. Ask them to help you to understand their perspectives. Even if you don't arrive at a consensus, a frank and honest discussion of the issues can lead to a meeting of the minds that can go a long way toward enhancing job satisfaction.

Helping teachers to love their work is a complex and time consuming aspect of the director's job. But it may be the key to a quality program. When teachers are happy, they are more productive and more anxious to try new ideas. Ambitious feelings will carry over, and children will definitely enjoy the benefits of having an innovative and nurturing teacher.

The director holds the key. While other duties may seem more pressing — bills to pay, substitutes to call — can there be any more important job than that of helping teachers to love their work? For when teachers feel challenged, in control of their lives, and a sense of belonging, their basic needs have been met; they can then become the adult attachment figure that children must have in order to have their own needs satisfied (Maslow, 1954).

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36 Ideas That Work

You Say Staff Deserve Respect? Energize Your Words with Action!

by Karen Stephens

Whether they represent folks in rural areas or big cities, political leaders in the spotlight routinely pronounce children as our nation's greatest resource. And now with hard-core brain research echoing their claim, the "pols" pronounce even louder how vital quality early childhood programs are to our country's welfare. They couch their support in terms of investing in our future workforce, our future bevy of taxpayers. Rarely is it frankly said it's simply the right thing to do.

And so leaders (?) continue to skirt comprehensive measures that would put money behind their rhetoric, behind our children and programs that serve them. You know the economic culture in the United States as well as I do. If one truly believes in something, they back it with greenback. So far, our nation has been mighty measly. We've yet to muster collective commitment to children.

And, by extension, our country has been measly with its child care providers. Oh sure, people of note now proclaim child care is a noble calling, not merely babysitting. (How long did it take us to get THAT idea across?!) And they publicly commend child care folks for the lasting contribution we make to society. Astute leaders even cite studies that reveal the best path to quality child care is to maintain a well educated and trained staff.

But coming through with the resources to compensate quality caregivers — well that idea seems to cool as fast as news camera's spotlights dim. Perhaps positive steps have been made in your program; but on a national scale, the necessity of taking a vow of poverty to work in child care still reigns.

So while you and I and our fellow child care directors wait for voters to hold leaders accountable for their rhetoric, we're left shouldering the task of maintaining a stable child care workforce for American families. You may say I'm being overly dramatic, even pessimistic. I say I'm being realistic.

So how do directors motivate professionals who are usually undercompensated (I'm talking minimum wage even with a four year degree); their skills typically underestimated (Oh, you're so lucky to sit around and play with kids all day); and their commitment often discounted

In 1980, Karen Stephens became director of Illinois State University Child Care Center and instructor in child development for ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. She writes the weekly newspaper column, "Keeping the Young at Heart," and is the author of the high school textbook, **The Child Care Professional.**

(So when are you getting a real job?)?

I certainly don't have all the answers. In my 20+ years in child care, I've participated in innumerable salary surveys and equity wage initiatives. Some have even come through with meaningful results. But I still rarely see professionally trained child care providers paid as well as their public school counterparts.

I'm not naive. Even when better pay becomes a reality, it still takes more than money to motivate and retain well qualified staff. In fact, all things being equal (if that ever happens), intrinsic motivation is far more influential on staff performance and longevity. And the proof is visible in child care programs everywhere. Considering the average child care provider makes less than $15,000 annually, I'm not amazed 40% of us leave the child care field annually; I'm amazed 60% of us stay in it! Intrinsic motivation is the key.

So, over the years, I've tried to come up with a plethora of tangible ways to help staff feel great about the job they're doing. To feel great in their hearts and minds. I've tried to show respect for their knowledge and to appreciate their talent. And I don't take for granted their dedication to children and families. Some strategies have been simple to carry out; others require more effort. And I must warn you, some may be hokey, but they've all been effective.

I'll share my ideas below. Hopefully, they'll trigger your own imagination. Despite the miles that distance us, together we can work to keep our nation's child care infrastructure — our staff — stable, experienced, motivated, and proud. Until child care professionals receive proper monetary compensation, the least we can do is feed their generous spirits with respect and appreciation.

Tangible Ways to Show Staff Respect and Appreciation

1. Post staff photos near entrance. Include position title, length of service, credentials, and brief biography.

2. Include staff profiles in program newsletters. Distribute newsletters not only to parents and your board but also to program funders and supporters.

3. Include staff in community meetings whenever possible. Introduce them, with title, to *movers and shakers* in attendance. Recognize staff at appropriate events, such as program dedication ceremonies or other public functions.

4. Supply each staff member with a professional business card for networking purposes.

5. Post announcements for parents whenever staff acquire in-service training or renew certificates such as in first aid training.

6. Recommend qualified staff as workshop presenters and training consultants.

7. Send staff's *parents* clippings of program news coverage. (Yes, I'm serious. No matter what your staff's age, they always like to make their parents proud.)

8. Send staff's hometown newspapers press releases, such as announcements of your program's accreditation.

9. Publicly (as well as in evaluations) give staff credit for program improvements. If someone comes up with a creative idea or solution, they should bask in the glory!

10. Organize *regular* events for *team bonding*. Team spirit and camaraderie solidified when we instituted monthly staff dinners. It's a great tradition.

11. Recognize and utilize each staff member's unique talents. I have a teacher with a strong background in physical education. I turn to her for recommendations on new gross motor equipment; she knows I count on her expertise. Another teacher is a wizard with children's computer programs. She's our leader when purchasing decisions are made. AND she gets a subscription to a newsletter on children's software so her input can be well informed. (Meaning, I try — even in small ways — to help her be successful in her job.)

12. Take time to regularly observe in classrooms. At least yearly, *write up* your observations for the room's staff to read within a few days. The speedy feedback is always appreciated. The process is time consuming, but it allows you to document for personnel files as well as to congratulate staff

on skillful child guidance or inventive curriculum.

13 Provide one-on-one mentoring when possible. If not, try to find a mentor to fit a staff member's needs. Is a teacher having trouble arranging his environment? Help him with new arrangements or ask for another staff member's expertise.

14 Encourage staff's hobbies and interests. Is a teacher into bunnies big time? Go ahead and buy a bunny wind sock for her play yard. The kids will learn about wind and she'll appreciate the individualized attention.

15 Make copies of complimentary letters from parents for staff keepsakes.

16 Solicit staff input on decisions that affect them. For instance, they can identify best times to hold parent-teacher conferences.

17 Before preparing supplies and equipment budgets, ask staff to submit a list of recommended purchases.

18 Provide staff with articles, videotapes, or conference information that address topics of special interest. Are teachers interested in learning about the Project Approach? If so, secure funds to send them to a workshop. (My personal dream is to find travel funds so our teachers can visit the Reggio Emilia programs in Italy!)

19 Encourage staff to serve on professional boards and committees. Recognize their efforts when talking to staff, parents, and board members.

20 Compliment staff when they participate in wellness and stress management programs. Literally, they deserve a pat on the back for staying healthy!

21 Recognize staff talent in simple and spontaneous ways. When I go to a conference, I bring something back from the exhibitor's venue. One year, my treasures included a white rabbit puppet that popped out of a magician's black hat. I left the puppet as a surprise on the teachers' desk. An attached note said I marveled at the magic they do with kids. Yes, it's sappy and sentimental, but the teachers appreciated the thought all the same — and who doesn't need another puppet for the classroom?

22 Provide staff with as much personal space for organization and planning as possible. In days of old, our teachers had lockers, not an office. We've made a bit of progress since then, but not lots. Now four head teachers share a cramped office with one desk, a file cabinet, and a computer. Their office has a love seat for comfort, but also stores our children's library, two refrigerators, and its walls are stacked — literally to the ceiling — with *junk* supplies creative teachers love to squirrel away. They don't have the separate work stations, staff lounge, or make-it-take-it resource room of their dreams, but they know I'd jump for space that would give it to them.

23 Provide staff time to observe other programs. Mutually decide with staff where they'll observe, why, and when. Arrange for substitutes so staff can leave without burdening those left with the kids.

24 Once a year, take a *fun and interesting* retreat or staff trip together. Visit an outstanding children's museum or go hear a famous children's author speak. Staff will appreciate the time you take to facilitate and organize their enjoyment.

25 Committed caregivers get a lot of enjoyment out of being partners with parents as they nurture children's development. To provide time for the communication the partner requires, bring in extra staff or volunteers at the beginning and ending of the day (that's when parents are most likely to be in the classroom).

26 Bring in a bouquet of wildflowers or a new compact disc to classrooms *just because*. Employees and children respond to aesthetics.

27 Involve staff in any changes in their work environment. We recently renovated one of our site's play yard. I can't tell you how many times I volleyed construction ideas between architects and teaching staff. I continually asked if a purposed design would help or hinder our teachers' job performance. And boy did

it pay off! Our program ended up with a much better play yard because the people who used it day in and day out provided guidance. And the staff were pleased to be included in making decisions with other professionals. (In truth, they prevented the committee from making numerous design mistakes!)

28 Serve on committees that organize a community-wide child care provider recognition day. If there isn't one already, start one yourself. Staff will note your efforts to celebrate the important work they do.

29 Teachers love books. Make it a program practice to treat them with birthday or holiday gift certificates to a bookstore. Whether they purchase a book for relaxation or for reading to the children, your program will win either way.

30 Occasionally surprise teachers with helpful supplies that are *tools of the trade*. This could be a big-ticket item, like a laminating machine. But most likely your budget will better afford something simple, like notepads with motivational sayings. "To teach is to touch the future" is a perennial favorite.

31 Encourage and facilitate your program staff and parents' involvement with Worthy Wage Day!

32 Buy each program site a subscription to the newsletter *Rights, Raises and Respect* — the biannual publication of the National Center for Early Childhood Workforce, $30/year. Send fee to: NCECW, 733 15th Street NW, Suite 1037, Washington, DC 20005-2112.

33 Nominate deserving staff for awards bestowed by the community or profession.

34 Ask staff for recommendations of curriculum books to add to their resource library. (And if they don't have an on-site resource library, create one. Our staff's is located in my office.)

35 Reimburse staff for part or all of their professional dues to organizations, such as local affiliates of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (to identify your local, call 1-800-424-2460).

36 Reimburse staff for part or all of continued education costs, whether they be through conferences or college classes. Be sure to recognize staff each time they complete a course that improves their job skills.

So there you are, 36 tangible and specific ways to value your staff and the life affirming work they perform. As you put these ideas into practice, you'll put action behind your hopes and dreams for children. It's the ethical thing to do — the right thing to do. And may the rest of the world follow your lead.

Twenty Small Acts of Kindness

Tips for parents looking for a way to thank their child's teacher

Thank-you's come in many forms. Sometimes the ones that don't cost anything are the ones that mean the most. Talk with other parents at your child's school. See how many ways you can think of to let your child's caregivers or teachers know how much you appreciate them. Here are some ideas to start with:

1. **Smile:** Say hello and smile, even when you're in a hurry.

2. **Talk:** You can brighten up a teacher's morning simply by passing along your child's enthusiastic comments. (Sometimes children will tell their parents about something that they especially liked at school — but never think to mention it to their teachers.)

3. **Label:** There are few sights more welcome to a teacher on a hectic winter day than boots or mittens with a child's name clearly marked on them.

4. **Write:** After parent-teacher conferences are over, send a note of thanks for all the time the teacher has put into preparing for them.

5. **Tell a friend:** Say something positive about your child's teacher or caregiver to another parent in the class. Positive comments have a way of spreading.

6. **Tell a boss:** Make time to say something complimentary about your child's teacher to the director or principal, too. Most administrators will pass compliments along. . . . Besides, directors and principals enjoy hearing from satisfied parents — sometimes people only go to them with complaints.

7. **Tell the teacher:** And, of course, stop in and say something nice about your child's teacher to (who else?) the teacher herself.

8. **Watch:** Here's something teachers might not mention, but considerate parents do anyway:

   If you bring younger brothers or sisters into a classroom, always keep an eye on them yourself.

9. **Cook:** Try fixing a special box lunch or coffee break snack for the teacher you want to thank. Do it as a surprise on an otherwise ordinary day. Your child can decorate the box, bag, or napkin the night before.

10. **Laugh:** Share a joke, a cartoon, or just a good laugh.

11. **Plan ahead:** Stick to the center's guidelines about sick kids. Anyone who works with young children and tries to keep illness from spreading through the group will truly appreciate your efforts in making back-up care plans ahead of time.

12. **Copy it:** Write a thank-you note to your child's teacher for all she's done. Then make a copy and ask that it be put in his or her file.

13. **Fix it today:** If the zipper on your child's jacket is broken or sticks, fix it. It's a small matter, but it makes a big difference.

14. **Make an extra effort:** Most parents are polite to teachers and caregivers, but it never hurts to make an extra effort to be courteous. (Even though early childhood educators don't dress in suits to go to work, they are knowledgeable professionals.)

15. **Make a card:** Find out when the teacher's or caregiver's birthday is and send a card. Homemade cards from your child are always the best ones.

16. **Set aside time for figuring out jackets and boots:** Show your child how to put on his or her own jacket, boot, and mittens.

17. **Help out:** Pitch in when something special is going on at school. Offer to lend a hand whenever you can.

18. **Turn it off:** If you really want to do something nice for your child's teacher, try planning an alternative activity for your child during the Power Rangers' TV time slot.

19. **Check the time:** Make it a top priority to arrive on time at the end of the day. Your child's caregiver, like everyone else, has family, appointments, and errands to get to.

20. **Smile again:** Say good-bye and smile, even when you're in a hurry.

Consider thoughtfulness as a way of saying thank you to your child's teacher. It may not cost anything — but it means everything.

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Taking a fresh look at routines and interactions

28 Fun Ideas to Motivate Your Staff

by Sandy Roberts

We hear the usual voices, we use the same words or phrases, we do some things the same way every day, and we so often overlook the obvious. For example, I placed an ugly broom in the corner of my office one day, forgetting to put it away when I was done with it. Throughout my day I didn't have time to get back to the broom. Day after day the broom just stood in the corner — a rather unpleasing sight to visitors, yet eventually it became just a part of the office and I never noticed it. One day a staff member was looking for a broom and I answered her request with, "I have no idea where one is, I haven't seen one around here." There the broom stood, in plain view, yet I didn't see it.

The following ideas were developed to be used as motivators to your staff and to enhance their understanding of their role as teachers. The ideas are meant to be helpful in heightening awareness of each staff's personal daily behaviors. Use them to encourage your staff to take a close look at their daily routines and verbal interactions with children and co-workers. They're fun activities that will hopefully make your staff's daily routines not so routine any longer.

1. Name Tags. Place art materials in the middle of the floor and ask staff to make name tags that tell something about themselves without using their names. Give them a chance to explain their tags to the group and have them wear the tags the rest of the day. When children ask about the tag, it gives the teacher a chance to talk about herself and promotes a positive self-image.

2. Treasure Hunt. Have staff collect items from around the school that reveal something about themselves. They need to say where the item came from and how it relates to them. This helps them to pay close attention to their surroundings and aids in observation skills.

3. Personal Recordings. Have staff tape record themselves during the day. Ask them to take the tape home and listen to it. They should jot down things that were said in a negative way and write a positive way they could have said it. This helps teachers to become aware of what they say and how they say it.

4. Don't Say NO. For one entire day staff members may not say the word "NO." They are to say it in another way. If "NO" is said, a piece of masking tape is to be put on the "NO" sayer's shirt. People are amazed at how much tape they are wearing by the end of the day!

5. Observe a Candle. Give a small unlit candle to each small group. Each group is to write down as many observations about that candle as they can. Then do the same for a burning candle. Ask the groups to discuss their observations. Say to the group, "You have many of the same observations yet many that are different. It is the same way with observing young children. We all see some things that are the same and some things that are different. Study a child in the same way."

6. Back-to-Back Observations. About halfway through the meeting, ask each staff member to sit back to back with the person next to them. Have them write the answers to these or other questions.
- What is she wearing?
- What type of shoes is she wearing?
- What is something she said during the meeting?

- What color eyes does she have?
- What is her full name?
- How old is she?
- Write 10 things you observed about her today.

7. "A Teacher Is . . . ." Have staff give *one* word adjectives to finish this sentence. This will be silly, fun, and yet very serious. You'll get an idea of how staff are feeling.

8. Skills and Talents. To foster staff awareness of other's skills and talents, have staff stand in a line according to their feelings about their ability in music (towards the front of the line represents they feel they have a strong ability in the area). Follow the line idea for abilities in art, science, circle time ideas, etc. This allows the staff to know who to go to for support knowledge.

9. Clarity of Instructions. Give one group very vague instructions, and give another group too many instructions.

Written instructions to Group 1: You have received inflated balloons. Greet the other group.
Instructions to Group 2: You have received thumbtacks, pipe cleaners, and tissues. Move around in a triangular motion, covering the entire area. If someone should come up to you, you are to say "What?" or ignore them. If they keep bothering you and actually touch you in some way, pop their balloon with something. If they still insist on talking to you, give them your tissue, but be sure they take it in their left hand. If they put it in their right hand, wrap the pipe cleaner around their right ring finger. If someone says something to you who has a pipe cleaner on their finger, begin playing patty cake with them. If another person says something to you, just sit down. This is to show, by extreme, how too many directions may be overwhelming while not enough direction can be frustrating.

10. Back-to-Back Drawings. Two people sit back to back. One person is given a blank paper and a box of crayons. This person is the *receiver* and may only say the words "go on" or "repeat." The other person is given a piece of paper with a picture drawn on it. This person is the *giver* and must give verbal directions to the receiver to enable the receiver to draw the same picture. The giver may not say what the picture is, such as "draw a cat." The giver must give verbal directions such as "draw a circle in the center of the paper" or "draw a triangle on the upper left part of circle." He must not say "draw an ear on the head." If the receiver does not understand, she may say "repeat" — nothing else. When the receiver has drawn the giver's direction, she must say "go on." You'll find, when all is done, that the pictures are not the same. It is impossible to place blame on who made a mistake. Both people feel they did the best they could — listening and speaking; but communication is difficult and inexact.

11. I Am Unique. To help staff discover each person's individuality, answer the following questions:
- What kind of car do you drive?
- Where is your dream vacation destination?
- What are your two favorite pizza toppings?
- What is something that really bothers you?
- What is something you enjoy?

12. Black Box. Set a box in the middle of the floor as you begin a

Watch what you say:

"I've told you a hundred times not to do that, now look what has happened."

"How many times do I have to tell you . . . ?" (Do you really expect the child to answer that one?)

"I don't know why you act like that."

"Why did you spill your milk?"

"If you do that again, you'll have to sit out for the rest of the day!"

"I know how you feel." (Do you really?)

"Don't you ever listen?"

"Do you do that at home?"

"When are you ever going to learn?"

"Why do you do that?"

"Can't you ever sit still?"

"Do you want me to pinch you?"

"Just a minute, OK?"

"Don't you ever do that again, or else. Do you understand?"

staff meeting. At some point in the meeting, ask if anybody has anything to add or any questions. You can bet they'll ask about the box. This creates an opportunity to remind staff to "teach for the moment." Kids want to know "what's that?" — don't ignore their wonderment. Until they know what that new thing is, they won't be able to concentrate on you. The contents of that box is a wonderment to the teachers. Place a box of M&Ms or a coupon for a lunch inside the box for whoever asks about the box first.

13. Follow Directions Test. Write a 30 question test or survey about anything. Tell the teachers to read over the test, answer the questions, and hand it in before the meeting is over. On question 19, write: "Do only question 27." On question 27, write: "Please write your name on the top lefthand corner of this page and give it to the director." See how many people actually follow the direction about reading over the test first.

14. Staff Survey. Some questions might be:

- The people in my job who make me feel the best are those who . . .
- The most important factor affecting morale on my job is . . .
- The greatest satisfaction I get from my job is . . .
- If I could make one change in my work, it would be . . .
- The most irritating part of my job is . . .
- When something at work really aggravates me, I usually . . .
- When I can't get help with problems at work, I usually turn to. . .

15. Inventing Games. Ask staff to develop a few *games* to help get a point across. Staff will discover that the best way to work on problems or concerns is to ask those they work with every day. If a teacher is concerned that she gets easily frustrated and raises her voice too much, ask co-workers to develop a positive game that the whole group can work on together. This will show support for co-workers and the concerned person will know he is not alone. A game is also a good way to help with a problem in a fun, relaxed atmosphere with peers.

16. Marble Jar. Place a glass jar and a box of marbles in the staff room. Each time a staff member has had a good day or she handles a problem effectively, she is to put a marble in the jar and tell why. All the other staff can clap or cheer. When the jar is full, the staff can have a party! (Then start all over again!)

17. We All Need Space. To find your personal comfort space, try this. Have two staff members stand facing each other. One is not to move; the other begins saying the alphabet and, with each letter, moves closer and closer. See how far you get through the ABCs.

18. Look Ma, No Hands! Ask staff members to try telling a story while sitting on their hands.

19. Explain Yourself. Ask staff members to share their feelings and tell why. Say "I (feeling) when (behavior) because (concrete effect on you)." Example: I get excited when you share your feelings with me because it makes me feel like your friend, or, I get upset when you yell because it bothers my ears when we're inside. Language use is very important and this idea should be practiced frequently.

20. Job Description. Post the following in your center:

You —
The Excellent Preschool Teacher

Individual with early education background; loving; caring; outgoing; silly; enjoys playing in mud, wet sand, and shaving cream; loves crawling around on hands and knees, meowing like a cat, or slithering like a snake; has a calm speaking voice; has eyes in the back of her head; changes wet pants or diapers with a smile; can do plumbing (broken, clogged toilets, etc.); reads endless stories with zest; can do manual labor (shoveling snow, hammering bookcases, fixing broken tables, bike, and so on); creative; imaginative; fun; is able to hug a child who has a slimy runny nose and clean up vomit; artist; scientist; interior decorator; psychologist; mathematician; puts in long hours; enjoys parent contact on a regular basis informally and formally; spends many an evening working on school projects well into the wee hours of the morning; can do ten things at one time (calm a crying child, talk calmly to an upset parent, take a phone call); never tires of giving a hand even when not asked; responsible for lives of young children all day; takes criticism with a smile; accountable for every word and action; does volunteer work; always busy; receives little benefits and annual salary, well let's say that's little too. Your biggest reward — a young child smiles at you.

21. Testimonial Writing. Each staff member writes her name on a piece of paper. These are put in a can. A name is picked from the can weekly at the staff meeting. One by one, staff state positive things — attributes and favorites of the chosen one. The statements are written on chart paper which is signed by the group, displayed, and then given to the honoree. The procedure can only enhance a positive self-image.

22. Back-to-School Headbands. Have staff play this *get to know you* game. Teachers write their names on construction paper headbands. Collect all headbands in a box. One teacher chooses a headband and puts it on without reading the name. He

A questionnaire to get staff thinking about what they do, how they do it, and why they do it:

How do I react when I'm rudely interrupted?

Do I tune into what children are feeling?

Do my words match my actions?

Can I admit mistakes and recognize my limitations?

Can I separate the act from the child?

Do I teach for the teachable moment?

Am I tuned into the children's special needs?

Do I avoid showing favoritism to meet my own needs?

Am I enthusiastic about teaching?

If I were a child, would I like me to be my teacher?

sits in front of the class and asks questions answerable by "yes" or "no" until he guesses his headband's identity.

23. Suggestion Apples. Give each teacher an *apple sheet* the first day of school. Let them write a letter to you suggesting projects, discipline, meeting suggestions, and any ideas that might make the year interesting. Use the letters to help plan the year!

24. Expressions. Explain these to the kids: He's in the doghouse. You're behaving like a fish out of water. She thinks she's hot stuff. He's all steamed up. I'm sitting on pins and needles. I'm all thumbs. She spilled the beans. Keep it under your hat.

25. Finish the Definitions. Delight is. . . . Relief is. . . . Imagination is. . . . Loneliness is. . . . Discomfort is. . . . Appreciation is. . . .

26. Reading Material. When you want staff to read information in a magazine, place a dollar bill (gift to finder) in the magazine article. You can bet that the person who does read the article will read other assigned readings, as will others who hear about the dollar.

27. Special Days. Find a calendar that has a special event for every day. Example: June 5 is *Doughnut Day* — be sure each staff member is wished a happy Doughnut Day and give them a real doughnut. June 15 is *Hug Holiday*. Show the others you appreciate them and give a free hug away! The staff will catch on quick and start giving hugs to the kids. *National Hat Day* — all wear a special or silly hat. *Birth of the Safety Pin* — use a safety pin to attach a special message to each staff member. *Joygerm Day* — make a tag for each staff member and catch them smiling during the day; give them the tag and let them know they are now a member of the Joygerm Club. (**Copycat Magazine** has a good calendar of special days and events.)

28. Positive Words. To enhance positive vocabulary, ask staff to write 100 different ways of saying "Very good."

Sandy Roberts is the director of Rainbow Express Preschool in Lansdale, Pennsylvania. She has been in the child care field for 20 years.