



RECRUITING TEAM PLAYERS

to Achieve Your Program Goals

by Shiketa Morgan

*Coming together is a beginning;
keeping together is progress; working
together is success. —Henry Ford*

Do you ever have trouble accomplishing the goals that you set for your center? If your answer is yes, then it's time to promote some teamwork among your staff. Teamwork is needed to accomplish the day-to-day tasks of operating a childcare center—or any business. Establishing a vision, sharing the vision, and promoting teamwork among your staff are very important. A visionary director sets goals for his or her center. A goal gives you and your staff direction, something to strive for.

Teamwork

Being a team player means:

- working together.
- helping a coworker when needed.
- doing what's in the best interests of the team.
- standing up for your teammates.



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- working hard even when other team members are not performing well.
- staying focused on the goal.
- doing more than your job description requires.
- sacrificing for the team or center.
- having an attitude of "we" instead of "me".

What Poor Teamwork Looks Like

Let me describe two incidents that illustrate the challenges presented by poor teamwork among center staff. One day I sent two lead teachers, Jane and Lynn, on a field trip to the St. Louis Zoo. I received a phone call from Jane informing me that Lynn was not helping with a child with special needs. The teachers began to argue while on the phone with me, and I instructed them to return to the center and not to argue in front of the children. I was very upset. I listened in disbelief as two educated professionals argued over how long each staff member "had to deal" with a child who needed their attention. When they returned to the center, we discussed our center's vision, talked about the incident, and came to a mutual agreement. Not long after, Lynn elected to leave our center.

A few years back I took a well-deserved vacation to Branson, Missouri. Only hours into my vacation

I received a phone call from Susan, the person I had left in charge. She informed me that the refrigerator was not working and that Jane was causing problems. Jane was not cooperating with Susan or the other teachers. Susan was confused about what to do. I instructed her to send Jane home, to allow her time to cool off and start over tomorrow. The next day it was the same issue. At this point I called and spoke directly with Jane, who agreed to stop causing problems. She explained to me that her problem was that in my absence the center was not being managed the way that I normally would manage it. She agreed to get along with everyone and after our conversation I received no more phone calls.

Identifying Weak Links

Jane, the lead teacher in our two-year-old room, was always complaining. In addition, she loved to gossip with staff and parents. I recognized the problem and frequently confronted Jane about her negative attitude and failure to support the center. I explained why teamwork was so important to the success of our center and asked Jane to share her concerns with me, rather than with the other staff. I invited an early childhood instructor from the local college to observe the staff. She immediately pointed out that Jane was

the weakest link on our team. I didn't want to fire Jane because she was an excellent teacher, so I dedicated myself to developing Jane's teamwork abilities.

If you have a weak link on your team, I encourage you to address the situation before it ruins staff morale. Here are some ways to help your staff member become a positive team player:

1. Frequently solicit feedback from the staff member.
2. Be a positive role model and mentor for the staff member.
3. Get to know the staff member and let him or her know that you appreciate them.
4. Say something positive to the staff member everyday.

Over time you will begin to see the development of a positive team player that supports your vision of the center and the team because you showed him or her that you cared.

Strengthening the Weak Link

Photo provided by author



I decided to get to know Jane and find out if she could grow and become a positive fit for our center. I frequently observed Jane when she was working with the other staff members. I discovered that Jane was misunderstood most of the time by other staff members. Some staff members felt that she

was negative, didn't work well with others, and should be fired. I called a staff meeting that focused on staff members getting to know each other and respecting each other. After a few of these meetings, my staff were more understanding and tolerant of one another. Also, Jane began reporting her concerns directly to me, and even began sharing some of her personal life with me. Three years later, Jane mentors new employees, works well with the other staff, and is left in charge when I am away from the center.

Teamwork as a Tool for Program Improvement

In addition to the incidents shared above, I noticed a few years ago that my staff as a whole were not working well together. There was arguing, gossip, resentment, and a negative work environment. When I realized that it was my role to promote teamwork, I used staff meetings and social events to accomplish my goals. Each week I met with the staff and I discussed how each person on the team had a very important role. I explained to the staff that the only way to accomplish our goal of receiving Missouri accreditation was for everyone to work together. At one of our staff meetings I asked my staff, "Have you ever been to a football game where the players were fighting?" The staff responded with a definite, "No." Using a football team as a metaphor for our center team helped me explain to my staff the critical factor that teamwork plays in the success of our center.

Once we had a cohesive team, we were ready to pursue our goal of receiving Missouri accreditation. When the budget allowed, I provided lunch at accreditation meetings for staff. We reviewed the self-study materials and discussed the importance of each quality indicator. The ultimate incentive was a 5 to 20 percent salary increase to staff for their efforts in helping the

center receive accreditation; the average increase was seven to ten percent. This was made possible through an accreditation incentive from our local Department of Social Services.

After much hard work and teamwork we received Missouri accreditation. One year later, we enjoyed an all-staff retreat at Lake of the Ozarks to celebrate the achievement. In sharing breakfast, lunch, and dinner with my staff, I showed my staff that I appreciated their hard work and dedication to high-quality early care and education.

Recruiting Team Players

Teamwork is one way of evaluating prospective employees who will play a major role in achieving your program's goals. Prospective employees should know upfront that their ability to work as a member of a team is critical to their performance. Here is a list of questions to ask potential applicants during the interviewing process:

1. Are you comfortable working with others?
2. How do you view your role as a member of the child care team?
3. How do you view the director's role as a member of the team?
4. Describe your relationships with your coworkers at your prior place of employment.
5. Do you prefer to work as a member of a team or to work alone? Why?
6. What does it mean to you to be a team player?

Let your staff know that their ability to work as a team is being evaluated. Follow through on your expectations by conducting periodic evaluations; these can be done annually or biannually. A sample format follows. Scores will range from 14-42. Lower scores indicate the need for improvement; high scores recognize outstanding

TEAM PLAYER EVALUATION

To be completed by staff member and supervisor.

As a member of this team, I...	Need to Improve (1)	Satisfactory (2)	Outstanding (3)
1. Have a "whatever-it-takes" attitude			
2. Am focused on the "Big Picture."			
3. Support the spirit and culture of the center.			
4. Am productive.			
5. Contribute helpful ideas.			
6. Am a loyal and reliable member of the program team.			
7. Have a positive attitude.			
8. Avoid gossip.			
9. Am trustworthy.			
10. Speak with coworkers about personal and work issues.			
11. Am self-motivated.			
12. Am passionate about my work.			
13. Am enthusiastic about my work.			
14. Arrive early for work and stay late, if necessary.			
TOTAL			
GRAND TOTAL			

team players.

Boosting Team Spirit

Be sure to reward your staff's efforts to prioritize the needs of the team and the program, and to regularly evaluate and reward their ability to work as a team. Here are some great ways to reward teamwork:

- Post memos or notes where visitors can see them, recognizing teamwork efforts among staff members on the center bulletin board.
- Offer monthly certificates that recognize individuals' efforts and teamwork.
- Give staff "I'm A Team Player" bumper stickers.
- Make teamwork badges and issue them at staff meetings.
- Plan annual staff retreats to reward your staff for their teamwork and dedication to your center.
- Post inspirational quotes (such as the one at the top of this article) around your center where staff members can see them or include these in your staff memos. Exemplify these messages in your interactions with staff and encourage them to do the same.
- Have staff recognize coworkers who exemplify team spirit with "Teamwork Works!" or kudos for "Team Player Extraordinaire." Display these where families can see them so they can be part of the winning team.

Creating and maintaining a team atmosphere involves a lot of work, but it has big pay-offs. Begin by screening job applicants for great team players. Once you hire team players, keep them!

Resources

Covey, S. (2006). *Everyday greatness*. Nashville, TN: Rutledge Hill Press.

Maxwell, J. C. (2001). *17 indisputable laws of teamwork*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.