

Someone Fetch a Child of Five!

Transforming Your Computer From Papeweight to Management Tool

by Chip Donohue

"A child of five would understand this. Send someone to fetch a child of five."

— Groucho Marx

Take a moment to reflect on the words that come to mind when you think about working on a computer. That's long enough! Now, let me ask you six simple questions.

Are the words that come to mind ones you prefer not to speak in polite company?

- YES
- NO
- DEFINE POLITE

Has your computer become a paperweight on your desk (an office version of the clothes rack your exercise bike at home has become)?

- YES
- NO
- SO WHAT, IT DOES THE JOB (I haven't seen my exercise bike in years)!

Does your home VCR have a flashing time/date light?

- YES
- NO
- SO WHAT, IT CAME THAT WAY

Can you tell the difference between your computer mouse and the cute little pet in the preschool room?

- YES
- NO
- ASK MY CAT

Have you ever said, "Today I'm going to learn how to use this #*\$%! thing once and for all?"

- YES
- NO
- NONE OF YOUR #*\$%! BUSINESS

Have you ever asked a child of five to show you how to do something on the computer?

- YES
- NO
- I REFUSE TO ANSWER ON THE GROUNDS THAT IT MAY INCRIMINATE ME

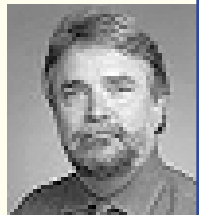
If you said "yes" to one or more of the questions above, you are not alone in needing help learning how to use your computer more effectively. These tools are new to us and it is hard to find the time to get to the other side of the learning curve. But the computer can help you improve program management and enhance quality, so the effort is worth it.

"Computers aren't intelligent, they only think they are."

— Source unknown

The first lesson to learn about working with a computer is that you, not the computer, are the smart one. Most people will admit to being intimidated by the computer the first time they sat down at it, and many confess that it is not an easy feeling to get over.

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But why do we feel that way? This box just sits there waiting for you to do something. Ahh-hah! Therein lies the secret. The computer is waiting for you to tell it what to do, and without your input it is little more than a paperweight (and an expensive one at that) taking up space on your desk.

So, there is good news and bad news. The good news is that you really are in control and the computer will do whatever you tell it to. But that's also where the bad news comes in. You have to know what to tell it to do if you hope to have the desired outcome — kind of like with partners and kids. As one administrator said to me recently, "I think my computer and I need counseling."

Computer Literacy for Child Care Administrators: Don't Leave Home Without It

Managing a child care program involves many complex tasks and daily challenges for administrators — but you already know that. The appropriate and effective use of technology can make these tasks more manageable, improve your responsiveness to parents and families, and enhance program quality. However, surprisingly few administrators possess the skills, or have access to the training and technical assistance needed, to take advantage of the opportunities that computer technology, e-mail, the Internet, and distance learning offer. Perhaps you are one of them.

As managers of small businesses, administrators are confronted with a number of critical issues related to their use of technology, including:

- Limited financial resources;
- Inadequate access to technology, training and technical support;
- Dependence on outdated systems (that obsolete computer donated by a par-

ent a few years ago);

- Limited knowledge and skills;
- Lack of resources and technology training specifically designed for child care administrators; and
- Lack of access to the Internet, e-mail and distance learning opportunities.

A survey of center administrators conducted by the Center for Early Childhood Leadership in 1997 and again in 2000 found that while there has been a dramatic increase in the use of technology as a management tool, many administrators still face these challenges. Time, money, and training were identified by administrators as the biggest barriers to their effective use of technology. Are these the barriers that you face?

Even so, computer use in child care administration is clearly on the rise. According to this survey, 65% of the administrators said they had a computer that was adequate for their needs, up from only 12% in 1997. Nearly half of the administrators surveyed use e-mail on a daily basis, compared to just 10% in 1997, but many administrators reported that they have never used the Internet and only 30% report that they currently have access to the Internet or use electronic mail on a regular basis.

To succeed as a child care administrator in our information age, you need access to technology, specific training, opportunities for on-line learning and professional development, access to the wealth of information, resources and services available on the Internet, and the ability to link electronically with parents and other child care professionals.

A child care program managed by a computer-literate director clearly has an advantage in our highly technological age, and the positive impact on program quality, the staff, children, and parents

make an investment in computer technology and training a smart business decision.

How Administrators Use Computers

Data from the Center for Early Childhood Leadership study and a survey of my on-line students indicates that administrators use computers to perform a wide range of tasks. The adjacent table identifies the applications, software and tasks performed by administrators enrolled in an on-line course — clearly a more technologically sophisticated group, but the results reveal what computers are used for, and which programs are most popular. (See table 1)

So what do you need to get started? A *must* for every director is access to the Internet and e-mail. You need to network with other child care professionals across the country, and around the world, and learn new ways to use these tools for communicating with staff, and being more responsive to the needs of parents and families.

You also need a word processing program — it's the application you'll use the most. All of the manuals, reports, newsletters, proposals, and correspondence you write will be easier to manage and look more professional with the use of word processing software.

A spreadsheet program allows you to ask "what if" questions and to do budget projections and manage other financial tasks in powerful ways. Managing records and information is a big part of your job, so you'll definitely need a database program.

You'll also want a presentation graphics program, because they are fun to use, and more importantly, they help you create eye-catching presentations and proposals. Many administrators are now using desktop publishing, graphics, and digital imag-

ing software to create brochures, flyers, and other marketing materials that *stand out in the crowd*.

These programs can be found in integrated packages like Microsoft Office and Lotus SmartSuite. Working with the Center for Early Childhood Leadership, I have written child care friendly *how to* guides for each of these packages, and developed technology training programs specifically for child care administrators. Visit their web site at www.nl.edu/cecl for more information.

In addition to an *office suite* of integrated applications, many administrators like to use a Child Care Management Software package that provides templates and guides for many common management tasks. See the annual list of Child Care Administrative Software that follows for more specific information about the features of these center management packages.

It's fantastic to see how administrators are using computers to improve their management and enhance program quality. Start out with a few simple tasks, like writing a letter using your word processing program. Experiment with the templates and pre-formatted documents included with your software to give yourself a jump-start. And follow this simple advice when the going gets rough —

"To err is human — and to blame it on a computer is even more so."

— Orben's Current Comedy

Surfing for Quality: Using the Internet as a Management Tool

The Internet has become part of our lives. We live in a *dot com* world with new ways of communicating, gathering information, and doing our personal

and professional business. Everywhere you turn you see web site and e-mail addresses, and going on-line is becoming second nature for children and adults. Perhaps you've even launched a web site for your program. Yet the Internet is still a relatively new phenomenon in our homes and child care centers.

We are just beginning to understand the awesome potential the Internet has to bring us closer together, to provide new opportunities to network with one another, to locate, gather and exchange information, to access resources, and to purchase goods and services. You can also use the Internet to market your program and to increase your access to training, continuing education, and professional development resources. In short, the Internet allows you to bring the world of early care and education directly to your desktop each day.

Each day the number of resources available to early childhood professionals and parents increases in both quantity and quality. Take the opportunity to explore the Internet to see for yourself the rich variety of resources you can use to become a better administrator and to improve the quality of your program and services for children, parents, and families.

To get a feel for what is available to you, your staff, and the parents, begin your virtual tour at www.ChildCareExchange.com, then *surf* a few of the many web sites listed in table 2 where you can find information and resources on early childhood care and education. Be sure to *bookmark* or save the sites you visit as one of your *Favorites* so you can return to them easily the next time.

E-mail is another new tool that promises to change the way you communicate. Your parents and teachers now have a means of communicating more efficiently and effectively with one another

when busy schedules make face-to-face meetings hard to arrange. And, you have another way to correspond with parents, and parents have new opportunities to seek support and information from other teachers and parents.

On-line learning opportunities for training, continuing education, and professional development are also rapidly expanding. For busy administrators they can provide a convenient alternative to traditional course delivery systems. The best on-line courses respond to the needs, interests, and learning styles of child care professionals, and that makes it easier for busy administrators like you to participate in continuing education and professional development opportunities.

Effective on-line courses create a community of learners in which you can exchange information, share ideas and resources, and develop a network of professional contacts and colleagues. This is particularly important for child care professionals who highly value the time together that face-to-face training programs and courses offer.

If the possibility of taking an on-line course intrigues you, see the table above for a partial list of colleges and universities offering courses for child care professionals. Begin by visiting the web sites of these programs, then search the Internet for more on-line resources for training, continuing education, and professional development in your area. (See table 3)

Perhaps you've been curious about what you've heard, read, and seen in the media about the Internet. Maybe you've already *surf*ed the web. Or, possibly the whole idea scares you to death. However you feel about it, the Internet is here to stay, and the more informed and experienced you are, the better you

TABLE 1 – Common Computer Uses in Child Care Administration

Application	Software	Tasks
Word Processing	Microsoft Works Microsoft Word Word Perfect Lotus WordPro	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy manuals, handbooks, job descriptions, evaluations • Reports, tables, forms, records • Surveys and evaluations • Grant proposals and fundraising materials • Newsletters, brochures, flyers, letterhead, and business cards • Correspondence and memos
Database	Microsoft Works Microsoft Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and family records (enrollment, emergency, health) • Licensing/accreditation records • Mailing lists and labels • Inventory records • Conference registrations, name tags
Spreadsheet	Microsoft Excel Lotus 123	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget • Cash flow projections • Cost-of-care analysis • Depreciation schedule • Expense records • Fee schedules • Invoices and purchase orders
Accounting	QuickBooks Bookkeeping One-Write Plus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income statement • General ledger • Accounts receivable • Balance sheet • Payroll • Checkbook • Expenses/revenue by class
Child Care Management	See listing for management software companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and staff scheduling • Enrollment information and FTEs • Child/parent/family records • Account information • Sign in/Sign out/Time clock • Billing • Training records • Vacation, sick time
Desktop Publishing Graphics Scanner Digital Camera Web Cam	Microsoft Publisher PrintMaster Gold Print Shop CreateACard Gold 3 Corel Draw with Click Art Adobe PhotoDeluxe Microsoft Picture It Scanning Software	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters, brochures, flyers, letterhead, and business cards • Posters, banners, and signs • Brochures, flyers, and other marketing materials • Greeting cards • Certificates • Text and graphic scanning • Photo albums, photos for parents, photos for documentation • E-mail photos or video of children to parents
Presentation Graphics	Microsoft PowerPoint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent meetings/trainings • Staff orientation, meetings, and in-service training • Conference presentations • Fundraising and grant proposal presentations
Internet E-mail Web Searches Purchasing Networking Marketing	AOL msn Earthlink Outlook Express Microsoft Front Page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E-mail messages to parents • Online courses/training • Internet searches, resources, research • Networking and advocacy • Purchasing, travel arrangements • Entertainment • Program web site

will be able to take advantage of this incredible information resource to improve your program. Just one note of caution — using the Internet is both challenging and fun, so it's easy to sit down for a few minutes and then wonder where the afternoon went. So, take a little extra time, and give yourself permission to play and explore — the best ways to learn!

“Anything I've ever done that was ultimately worthwhile . . . initially scared me to death.”

— Betty Bender

What Are You Waiting For?

“If at first you succeed — try to hide your astonishment.”

— Los Angeles Times Syndicate

The appropriate and effective use of technology as a tool for management, information exchange, and professional development will enhance program quality and improve responsiveness to parents, *if* administrators have access to the technology, training, and technical assistance they need. Specific technology solutions are needed for this group of adult learners. New strategies are needed to assure equal access to technol-

ogy, information, and resources available on the Internet and through distance learning.

As you become a more *informed* participant and user of these technologies, I encourage you to reflect on what works well and what could be improved to make these tools more effective for teaching and learning by early childhood professionals. And, think about what is missing — what would make the computer, the Internet, and distance learning more effective for you now, and in the future?

Have fun. It's time to boldly go where few early childhood professionals have gone before . . .

References

Donohue, C. (2000). *Microsoft Office 2000 for Child Care Administrators: A Technology Training Manual*. Wheeling, IL: National-Louis University, Center for Early Childhood Leadership.

Donohue, C. (2000). *Lotus SmartSuite: A Training Manual for Child Care Administrators*. Boston, MA: Work Family Directions and Wheeling, IL: National-Louis University, Center for Early Childhood Leadership.

Kalinowsky, M. (2000, July / August). Child Care Administrative Software. *Child Care Information Exchange*, pp. 81-88.

Laskaris, N. E. (1997, November / December) Eight Ways to Use the Internet Now! *Early Childhood News*.

Research Notes (2000, Summer). *The Role of Technology in Early Childhood Administration*. Wheeling, IL: The Center for Early Childhood Leadership, National Louis University.

Rothenberg, D. (1995, May). The Internet and Early Childhood Educators: Some Frequently Asked Questions. Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearing House on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, ERIC Digest EDO-PS-95-5.

Resources

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership
www.nl.edu/cecl

ECRP Early Childhood Research & Practice, an Internet journal on the development, care, and education of young children
ecrp.uiuc.edu/v1n2/index.html

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
ericee.org

NAEYC Technology Caucus
www.techandyoungchildren.org

National Child Care Information Center
nccic.org

TABLE 2 – Surfing for Quality: Web Site Favorites for Child Care Administrators

Child Advocacy	Child Care Law Center Child Welfare League of America Children's Defense Fund Prevent Child Abuse America	www.childcarelaw.org www.cwla.org www.childrensdefense.org www.preventchildabuse.org/
Organizations	Center for the Child Care Workforce Council for Professional Recognition NAEYC National Black Child Development Institute National Network for Child Care	www.ccw.org www.cdacouncil.org www.naeyc.org www.nbcdi.org www.nccc.org
Government	Administration for Children and Families Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Home Page CACFP, Child and Adult Care Food Program Child Care Bureau Head Start Bureau U.S. Department of Health and Human Services	www.acf.dhhs.gov usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/care www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ccb/ www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/hsb/ www.dhhs.gov
Health & Safety	ABC's of Safe and Healthy Child Care AAP, American Academy of Pediatrics Consumer Product Safety Commission The National Program for Playground Safety	www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/abc/contents.htm www.aap.org cpsc.gov www.uni.edu/playground/
Parenting	Babycenter Child Care Aware National Parent Information Network Pampers Parenting Institute Parent Soup Parents.com	www.babycenter.com/ www.childcareaware.org/index.htm npin.org/ www.pampers.com/index.html www.parentsoup.com parents.com/

TABLE 3
On-line Opportunities for Training, Continuing Education, and Professional Development

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee The Credential Program for Child Care Administrators	www.uwm.edu/Dept/CPCCD/	On-line courses for the six-course Wisconsin Professional Credential for Child Care Administrators. Pathways for degree completion and graduate study in the School of Education.
Concordia University Certificate of Proficiency in School-Age Care	www.cshs.csp.edu/sac.htm	On-line School-Age Care Certificate consists of three courses including Professional School-Age Care, Discipline and Self-Discipline, and Conflict Resolution, and Community Building.
National-Louis University The Center for Early Childhood Leadership	www.nl.edu/cecl	On-line courses in the Child Care Administration Master's Degree program, Directors Technology Training courses and manuals, annual surveys of technology use.
NOVA Southeastern University Distance Education Degree Programs	www.nova.edu	On-line courses and degree programs, including child care administration, that combine the use of technology with intensive meetings on campus including a week-long summer institute.
Pacific Oaks College On-line	www.pacificoaks.edu	On-line courses and degree programs based on its active-learning approach that support dialogue, interaction, and collaborative learning among faculty and students.
University of Cincinnati Early Childhood Learning Community	www.ucollege.uc.edu/eclc	An AA degree via satellite TV and the Internet in partnership with the National Head Start Association and the Heads Up! Network.
University of Wyoming On-line Early Childhood Program Director's Certificate	ecampus.uwyo.edu/	On-line Director's Certificate and a Professional Child Development BA Degree are available to early childhood professionals in the state of Wyoming and students at the University.

► Buyer's Guide to Management Software

This directory is a partial listing of companies providing management software. Companies were included free of charge. Inclusion does not imply endorsement by *Child Care Information Exchange*. Request free information about these companies by circling the number for each company on the Product Inquiry Card (between pages 64 and 65).

Thomas McMurrain
ChildPlus Software
750 Hammond Drive, Building
10, #300
Atlanta, GA 30328
(404) 252-6674
www.childplus.com

Gale C. Cohen-Frank
CMSC, Ltd. — Maggey
4641 North First Avenue, #1
Tucson, AZ 85718
(800) 462-4439
www.maggey.com

Amantha Barbee
**Choice Tracking — Center
Management Software**
226 Westinghouse Boulevard,
#309
Charlotte, NC 28273
(877) 867-5077
www.choicetracking.com

John W. Olson
**Comprehensive Information
Systems**
PO Box 161606
Mobile, AL 33616
(334) 661-5997
www.compinfosys.com

Ruthie Hewitt,
Controltec Marketing
**Controltec, Inc/
KinderProducts**
330 South Main Street
Fallbrook, CA 92028
(760) 723-2104
www.controltec.com
www.kinderproducts.com

Michael Mozina
Emerging Technologies
PO Box 1539
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067
(800) 729-4445
www.etwebsite.com

Ken Katz
KidsCare
540 Pennsylvania Avenue,
#200
Fort Washington, PA 19034
(800) 836-3575
www.softerware.com/kidscare

Janet Mazza
**Kressa Software
Corporation**
3724 Hunter's Isle Drive
Orlando, FL 32837
(800) 894-7442
www.schoolleader.com

Michael Spevacek
**Millennium Computer
Resources, LLC**
5376 Temple Court
Madison, WI 53705
(608) 233-7841
www.AccuTrak2000.com

Teri Cajigas
On-Q Software
13764 SW 11th Street
Miami, FL 33184
www.on-qsoftware.com
Nibha Bhargava
Orgamation Technologies
319 Littleton Road, #204
Westford, MA 07886
(978) 692-2966
www.orgamation.com

Steven Lange
Personalized Software
PO Box 359
Phoenix, OR 97535
(800) 553-2312
www.ccmturbo.com

Paul Ziegler
Private Advantage Software
716 College Avenue, #B
Santa Rosa, CA 95404
(800) 238-7015
www.privateadv.com

**Procare Software/
Professional Solution**
3629 Aviation Way
Medford, OR 97504
(800) 338-3884
www.procaresoft.com

Robert Oister
**R.P.M. Software's Data-Care
For Windows**
405 Boyle Street
Dunmore, PA 18512-2039
(570) 342-3677
www.rpmwebworx.com/
rpmsoft

Teina Rowell
**Redleaf Press/Calendar-
Keeper Software**
450 N. Syndicate, #5
St. Paul, MN 55104
(800) 423-8309
www.redleafpress.org

Michael Eisenberg
Soft-Care
11432 Twinging Lane
Potomac, MD 20854
(877) 424-3388
www.soft-care.com

Douglas Schoenberg
SofterWare
540 Pennsylvania Avenue,
#200
Fort Washington, PA 19034
(800) 220-4111
www.softerware.com/ezcare2