

s.c.o.p.e.

“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).

My grandfather once told me that when you have more priorities than the fingers on one hand, you really don't have any priorities. I have always attempted to adhere to my grandfather's sage advice, especially when it comes to goals within the operation of a quality early care and educational environment.

If you look at the true quality priorities that we all strive for in creating a great place for young children, it can be spelled out in the acronym S.C.O.P.E. (Safe, Clean, Organized, Professional, and Educational). These five priorities (which, by the way, are the same priorities in order of importance that are repeated on parent surveys and focus groups) can be the central theme which all staff can rally around and keep as their central focus. Whenever one of my directors seemed oversaturated with conflicting priorities and demands, I only had to say one word: "SCOPE." That one word allows everyone to refocus on what's really important. If SCOPE becomes the central focus of your operation, your strategic plan, training, recruiting, time management, and daily activities will automatically fall in line. No one should ever have to ask, "What are my priorities today?"

Safe is not always so obvious. A safe environment extends beyond the basic safety of the classroom environment we create for children. Staff, parents, vendors, and guests need to also be considered in this equation. We often get so involved in our daily activities that we accept that the door sticks and we have to put our shoulders into pushing for it to open. Doors should not stick, nor should slick oil spots be present in the parking lot or uneven bark in the playground fall zones, and so on. Safe extends to all matters of security, health, sanitation, and assurance that things work the way they were intended.

Clean in an early care and education environment means *really* clean. Clean, not unlike safe, is an area that receives more excuses than are warranted. How often have you heard, "Well the janitors are getting better." Better is not good enough. If I am paying the money, then I define what is clean. Clean to a parent begins in the parking lot and extends to the floors inside the front door of the center and to the smell that greets them when they enter the building. No parent will fault you for a "messy but fun classroom activity." They will, however, fault you for not cleaning as you go and teaching young children the responsibility of helping in the endeavor.

Organized is not only a parent expectation for the center, classroom, or office, but also a good learning environment for children. Organization helps everyone perform better, especially children. There is great security for children in knowing that blocks are in the block area and that house-keeping is in a designated area of the classroom. Open cubicles are fine, but inserted baskets help to hide and protect items. Shelves that are neat at the beginning and end of the day are inviting and an early life lesson for children on putting items back where they belong when an activity is over. An organized facility, including the director's office, tells a parent that good things happen here for my child because people take pride in ownership.

Professional says everything about what a parent can expect from you and your program. Your teachers' education, experience, demeanor, speech, attitude, behavior under stress, and appearance are all part of a professional image. Professionalism communicates your center's core values. Who you hire and how you train is on display and is considered an indication of your professionalism. This same professionalism extends beyond a posted lesson plan which exhibits age-appropriate activities. It is also evident in how parents are treated as partners and whether communication is open, positive, and focused on the best interests of the children. Correct spelling and grammar in written communication is also important.

Educational means that there is an organized plan in place where teacher-child interactions and positive child outcomes are pursued in a systematic manner based upon the best research available. In other words, there is a plan in place that includes how the curriculum is being used and monitored and how teachers are trained accordingly. Lesson plans and accountability are expectations. Activities might be loud and seemingly chaotic to the casual observer, but to the trained professional, it is an activity with positive child outcomes as the end goal. Trained observation is critical to ensuring that the desired educational goals are being accomplished. Accountability to the child and parent are obvious.

SCOPE spells out priorities and can be the beacon of light by which everyone is guided. SCOPE offers the entire operation the ability to be on the same page as to what's important and where all efforts should be directed. A leader's responsibility is to create the vision and offer the path for success. SCOPE offers a clear path for all to follow.

The next Management Maxim will offer some management ideas on how to make SCOPE work for your operation.