

9 + 1 = Fun!

“Good management begins with good people”

by Dennis Vicars



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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.

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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!