

The sailor

“Good management begins with good people”

by Dennis Vicars

“No one appreciates the skills of a sailor until they hit the storm.”

I recently read this author’s unknown phrase and was taken aback. This sentence captures the very essence of quality management and leadership. In many ways it’s similar to a well played sporting event where the players are the main focus while the officials skillfully allow the game to progress at its own natural pace, only intervening when a situation dictates guidance or decision making. Few people leave a stadium thinking about what a great job the plate umpire did in calling balls and strikes. However, the well played game was due in large part to the preparation, field conditions, and skilled decision making that went into allowing that competition to flow. Conversely, poor officiating, like poor sailing, creates the opposite conclusion: chaos, disruption, negativity, and potential loss.



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Payment Program (PACEAPP). In his career, Dennis 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 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).

Great leaders, not unlike great sailors or umpires, often seem to be invisible to the busy daily operations of the enterprise they guide. These are the leaders that create improvements every day, which often go unnoticed as if the organization was somehow put together by magic. All too often, those things which were created and continue to evolve in making a great center/school are taken for granted:

- The original ‘vision’ — creating the business plan
- Educational philosophy manifested in pedagogy and program offering
- Banking, financing, and credit line contract
- Building acquisition and on-going improvements
- Legal, supplier networks, and vendor contracts
- Contract and licenses with city, state, and federal entities
- Marketing and outreach materials created and distributed
- Policies and procedures formulated
- Employee and parent handbooks developed
- Hiring and training of quality staff
- Lines of accountability created and enforced
- Efficient infrastructure continually addressed
- Obsession with improvements in communication to staff and parents
- Attention to detail in all areas affecting children

- Constant improvements and evaluation of curriculum and staff development
- Cultural adherence in every aspect of daily activity
- On-going attention to financial and budgetary success
- A total commitment to improvement in all areas that affect children, staff, and parents

The list is endless, but all are specific to assuring the smooth and successful daily operation of a quality environment for children. All this attention done daily and over time seems to lull people into complacency.

And then . . . the big storm hits. Market share is challenged, the economy tanks, contracts are lost or reduced, and panic abounds. The good leader and the good works which were quietly produced over the preceding months and years become the steadying force that guides the ship through rough seas. Bailing out the ship when the waves hit is crisis management. Building the ship and training the crew beforehand is called great leadership. Only then does the sailor get his or her due and the quiet, often times unnoticed satisfaction of knowing — job well done!

P.S. The above list represents a sailor’s checklist prior to setting sail. If any on the list are not accomplished, better to remain in dry dock pending attention to deferred maintenance.