

The truth about bad attitudes

by Gigi Schweikert

The real deal

Many people enter the early childhood field because they enjoy working with children. We'll all agree that we love the children, and that may be where our complete agreement ends. Until we spend time in the classroom, many of us don't realize that the picture we painted in our heads of us working independently with a group of cute, well-behaved kids isn't the real scenario. Yes, the kids are cute! But unlike an elementary school teacher who usually teaches by herself in a self-contained classroom, early childhood professionals interact as much with the other adults in the classroom and the program as they do with the children. So what does all that mean? To be successful in early childhood education, we have to love and work well with the children and the adults, even if the adults aren't as cute.



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Centers. Teaching parents and staff to help every child succeed is Gigi's life passion. Her practical ideas and realistic perspective on child care will have you laughing and learning. Contact Gigi at gigi@gigischweikert.com for speaking engagements.

Do you have a good attitude at work?

Do you have a good attitude at work or do you tend to grumble, complain, and make unfavorable comments? A person with a good attitude:

- knows and expects that things won't always go as planned.
- accepts the situation as it is, but works to improve it.
- is generally happy, despite the circumstances.
- helps without being asked.
- doesn't look for someone to blame when things go wrong.
- doesn't always have to be right.
- works hard and enjoys it.

Save the comments

Check out the statements above about having a good attitude. Do they describe you or do you have a negative comment about your job and the situations that happen each day? Yes, there are times when we need to professionally articulate our concerns, but a person with a good attitude expresses her emotions without being negative. She expresses her opinion with the goal of improving things, not just pointing them out. In fact, most people with pos-

itive attitudes fix things without the need to even draw attention to the issue or take credit. A person with a good attitude saves the comments. Sure, they feel frustrated, angry, and unappreciated at times, but a person with a good attitude moves past those feelings and keeps the goal of caring for and educating young children in mind. Do you really have a good attitude?

Bad attitude don'ts

We've talked about the traits of someone who has a good attitude; now let's look at some of the characteristics of someone who has a bad attitude. The funny thing — or the not so funny thing about someone with a bad attitude — is that his behavior can be like a cold: other people can catch it. Hang out long enough with someone who has a bad attitude, who always complains, and you'll easily start to pick up some of his traits.

The bad attitude checklist

1. I want others to hear my opinion about almost everything.
2. I don't listen to some people.
3. Sometimes I am thinking about what I am going to say next instead of listening to others.

4. Sometimes I raise my voice or speak more curtly if they don't hear me or agree with me.
5. I monopolize the conversations and don't let others talk.
6. I have to have the last word.
7. No one ever sees my point of view.
8. I like when people tell me I am right.
9. Sometimes I have to talk to adults like they are children so they will understand.
10. I am smarter than everyone else.
11. I'm never wrong.
12. If I were wrong, I would never admit it.
13. People say I am hard to get along with, but they are the ones who are hard to get along with.
14. I believe there is always a crisis happening at work.
15. For as long as I have worked here, there has always been a problem.
16. Sometimes I have to make a scene for others to get my point.
17. I take things personally; you would, too.
18. No one ever does things the right way, like I would do them.
19. I am always the one doing all the work.
20. No one ever pays me any attention.

Alright, time for the truth. Most of us are sure to exhibit one or two of the bad attitude behaviors at least some of the time. Hey, we're human. Are you guilty of any of the behaviors above?

Give your attention to others

It's easier to have a good attitude when we take the attention off of ourselves and focus on the needs of others. No more complaining or 'poor me' attitudes allowed. We all took a position in early childhood education to help young children, but contrary to what most of us think, it's not the responsibility of our employer or our supervisor or anyone else to make us happy, that's our job. Our employer doesn't owe us, we

owe them. Ouch! Now, please don't misunderstand me. You should never be treated with disrespect or work in an environment that is physically or emotionally unsafe for the children or for you, but we tend to focus on our own needs rather than the needs of others. Keep your focus on the kids and you're likely to have a better attitude.

Learn to be more positive

If someone asked us to come up with a list of things we don't like in our work environment, we wouldn't have any problem listing a number of things. It's easy to complain, we all do it sometimes. But what if we didn't complain, or at least tried not to? Being positive does not mean overlooking issues in your program that need addressing. It's important to point out problems in a professional way and solve them as a team. We could say things like, "I don't like the food," or "The paper towels aren't very soft." "The pay is low," and "Some parents don't appreciate us." All those statements may be true, but do they really matter? If they matter, work to change them.

Let's talk about a sticky subject, salary. We know — and everyone else knows — that our salaries, in most cases, should be higher. I have often heard early childhood professionals say, "I don't get paid enough to do all this." Sometimes people are just venting, but at other times, they are using their salary as an excuse for not working as hard as they could or for not doing their job as well as they should. I'm going to make a tough comment: We all knew our salary when we took the job and we agreed to it. Should we work as a field to improve salaries? You bet. Should we slack off or use our wages as an excuse for not getting the job done? Never.

Being positive all week long

We can all admit that working with kids is tiring and as the end of the week rolls

around, we're ready for a break. A *Thank-Goodness-it's-Friday* mentality is understandable, but communicating your thoughts to others can be misunderstood. Imagine being waited on at a restaurant and the server says, "Oh, thank goodness you're my last table." That comment doesn't exactly make you feel like you can leisurely enjoy your meal, talk with your friends, and have fun. That comment says, "Hurry up and eat. I want to get out of here." Are we guilty of doing the same thing around parents and children? Think of some of these seemingly innocuous statements uttered in front of parents or children.

- "I can't wait until my shift is over."
- "Is it time to leave?"
- "When is this child's mother going to come?"
- "Your dad forgot your gloves."
- "I'm so tired."
- "I need a break."

Those comments may not seem so bad, but think about them. When we make a comment about a child's parent in front of the child, how does that make the child feel? Saying, "Your dad forgot your gloves," may make the child feel that we do not like his parent, that we are angry with his parent or even, "If my daddy loved me as much as the other daddies love their children, he would have brought my gloves." Children can't control the actions of their parents.

How about a simple statement such as "I need a break." We may very well need and deserve a break, but saying that in front of parents may make them question our enthusiasm about the job, our attentiveness, or the credibility of the administration to provide us with a break. Did we mean all that? Most likely not, but negative statements are often misunderstood by others, blown out of proportion, and make people question our professionalism. What do we do? Save the comments.

Are things really that bad?

There are some programs that have a great need for many resources: facility, staff, equipment, and in some places, even food and clothing for the children. Is that the case in your center or have you lost sight of the abundance of resources that you have to use on a daily basis? Do you have a fish tank in your center? Do the children participate in water play? Compared to many parts of the world, there is probably more water in our fish tanks than most kids have to drink on a regular basis. Am I tugging at your heartstrings? I really want to. Your center, like all early childhood programs, may need some improvements or even a lot of improvements, but let's focus on the positive first. Drop the bad attitude.

Having a good attitude means being flexible

Being flexible means being open to change, and we humans are creatures of routine and habit. Even good change takes some getting used to for most of us. Think about this question. How many of you like to sit in generally the same seat at the movie theater? Do you like to sit in the back? In the middle? Who has their heart set on an aisle seat? We sit in the same place in the movie, park in relatively the same area when we go shopping, and sleep on the same side of the bed almost our entire lives. Are we flexible? Not really. Change and flexibility may cause us to feel uncomfortable and awkward, make greater effort, learn a new skill, and even fail initially.

Why change and flexibility?

So why does a good attitude depend on change and flexibility? A day in early childhood education is full of surprises. There's an undeniable feeling of fluidity and change in our environment.

Children are growing and learning, and if we are working well with them we are responding to their cues, and learning quite a bit ourselves. In addition, we should be figuring out new and better ways to do things. Are you ready to have a good attitude and be flexible? Try sitting in a new section of the movie theater. It's a start.

When to get a new job

Contrary to what most of us think, being happy is not about our circumstances as much as it is how we choose to respond to them. In other words, we can choose to be happy and to have a good attitude, even though things aren't perfect. We are all going to have days when we feel discouraged or unhappy, but if you are consistently unhappy in your job, perhaps early childhood education is not the job for you. You can't be the best person you can be if you are not where you are supposed to be. Most days you should be excited about going to work and being there. The children depend on you and the choice to have a good attitude is yours.