



Managing the Leadership Maze

Five months ago you agreed to help provide refreshments for the meeting and suddenly you are on the ballot as vice president. Sound familiar? Whether you purposefully sought a board position or just wanted to help in some way and found yourself deeply involved, you may now be wandering through what seems like a maze of organizational leadership responsibilities. The Southern Early Childhood Association can help.

For five years now you have been the center director and are successful in providing the guidance your staff needs. However, you know there is always more to learn and are looking for additional paths to professional development. The Southern Early Childhood Association can help.

Whether you have been puzzling over leadership questions for five days, five years, or even five decades, the duties and responsibilities of being a leader may continue to provide the joys and challenges of finding your way through a maze. The Southern Early Childhood Association can help.



In order to support your leadership efforts, the Southern Early Childhood Association's **Leadership Commission** is presenting information aimed at enhancing your knowledge, skills, and attitudes about and toward leadership. This first *Leadership Information Sheet* offers ideas for dealing with worry, keys for helping staff develop additional skills, strategies on addressing confrontation, and questions to ask to be sure business is done ethically.

GO AHEAD, WORRY

Directors worry---it goes with the job responsibility. Having people tell you not to worry of haranguing yourself to stop makes stress even worse. In fact, one way to deal with worry, suggests psychologist Robert Leahy, is to stop trying to quit worrying; instead learn to do it effectively.

Understand worry. Worrying is a way to deal with uncertainty, a primary factor of contemporary life and work. Certainly, obsessing can lead to anxiety and depression, but intelligent worry is also tied to strengths shared by many leaders, such as being focused and concerned, motivating yourself to persevere, and dealing with stressful feelings. Capitalize on these strengths. *(Cont'd on next page.)*

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Leadership Commission

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Go Ahead, Worry Cont'd.

Link worry and action. The key is deciding when to follow up on a worry and when to let it ride. Is the danger real, with causes and effects you can discern? In particular, can you do something about the problem? If you say "No", give it a low priority among your concerns. Don't bother to tell yourself to "stop worrying"; instead use your worries to plan and act on what you can influence.

Make uncertainty boring. Instead of denying uncertainties, make them commonplace through a process called "thought flooding". For example, if you are worried that you will not do well in a certain task, say to yourself, "It is always possible I might not succeed" each time you feel yourself starting to worry. Leahy predicts that at first this technique will make you more anxious, but eventually you'll be saying to yourself, "So I don't know---what else is new?"

Get comfortable with discomfort. Many of us worry about situations that make us feel awkward, embarrassed, or rejected. Teach yourself to live with awkwardness by purposely making yourself uncomfortable and proving that it isn't really so catastrophic. To confront shyness, talk to the people you don't know so well. To neutralize your fear of public speaking, practice on small-scale presentations. Start by talking to one person for a few minutes simply to pass on information or share opinions. Then build on the size of your conversations.

Schedule your worries. Pick a daily time to worry, and write down what upsets you. Gradually you'll see that you worry about the same things over and over, but that you also go right on succeeding in other parts of your life. Worry isn't stopping you from doing what you need to and want to do. It has a place in your life, but it is not your life.

- Adapted from June, 2005 *Psychology Today*

Open Paths to Growth for Staff

"Take action in two key areas."

The more you can do to help your staff develop additional skills and enjoy their jobs, the more you yourself can benefit. Take action in two key areas in particular:

1. **Involve yourself in your staff's training.** More than once a year, ask your staff, "What learning or training would help you do your job more easily and effectively? The "more easily" question is not just lip service. "Ease" is a matter of time as well as effort, and the less effort a job takes, the more time there is to do it well. Your role is to make learning available, follow up to check progress, and ensure that the staff has a chance to practice the new skills in their jobs.
2. **Ask for information and opinion.** Directors are often advised to ask their staff for their opinions. However, opinion carries the connotation of recommendation, judgment, and commitment, and talking to the director in these terms can make teachers and staff nervous. Realistically, some staff, do not feel like they know enough about the field or the situation of the details of the director's responsibilities to hazard an opinion and so decline or dodge doing so. Instead of asking for an opinion, try something like, "I have to make a decision about X on a topic you have worked with me in the past. What should I take into consideration as I make my decision?" Here you are giving the staff a chance to contribute to the decision, but not offloading the whole job. You are imposing less stress, and you may get more feedback.

-Adapted from *Your Perfect Right*, by Robert E. Alberti, and Michael L. Emmons (Impact Publishers)

Ready, Set, Confront

If you and your staff are facing some tough times ahead---due to a rocky economy, difficult decisions to be made, or being short staffed---one thing you can count on is confrontation. Arguments and high emotions are natural products of stress, and you need a strategy for working past them. Before everything gets out of control, try the following:

1. **Start with yourself.** All of us have “triggers” — those phrases, tones of voice, gestures, or attitudes of other people that drive us crazy. However by recognizing---and admitting---that you are in fact vulnerable, you’ll have a better chance to keep cool when those triggers are pulled.
2. **Learn the techniques you need.** Depending on how you react to confrontation, you may need a variety of skills. Learning to control your voice and relax your body when angry, or to listen for hidden meaning in loud arguments, will help you to succeed in confrontation without becoming confrontational yourself.
3. **Work together.** For example, agree with your staff to allot each person a set time to make his or her points without interruption. People often react blindly in confrontations, but these preparations can help you see past them.

-Adapted from *Your Perfect Right*, by Robert E. Alberti, and Michael L. Emmons (Impact Publishers)

Give Your Decisions the Ethics Test

“Not just right,

Decisions not only have to be right for doing business, they must be ethically right as well. The only way to make that happen is to think through every decision and be sure you cover the relevant ethical issues. The questions below, based on a checklist created by consultants Doug Wallace and Jon Pekel, can help you to provide that level of scrutiny.

- **Do you have the necessary information?**
Avoid limiting your research and fact-finding by giving into fatigue or to anxiety over costs or impending deadlines, or staff morale?
- **Have you involved the right people?**
Include those that can help you reach a good decision and those that will be affected by it.
- **Have you anticipated the consequences?**
You need to know how those involved in the decision and those who must live with the decision will be affected.
- **Have you been fair?**
If afterward you stood in the shoes of those most affected by the decision, would you feel the decision had been fair?
- **Could your decision stand as a model?**
Your methods and reasoning should be applicable to similar situations.
- **Could you live with public scrutiny?**
You should be comfortable with the way people would likely interpret your actions and judge you if details of your decision were made public.

- Adapted from the *Map for Nonprofits* website.



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***Promoting Quality Care and Education
for Young Children and Their Families***

[[http://
www.southernearlychildhood.or
g/](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/)]

The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is a regional organization committed to promoting quality care and education for young children and their families. SECA is committed to providing leadership and support to individuals and groups by:

- * Enhancing the quality of young children's lives through early childhood care and education. Supporting families in their roles of caring for their children.*
- * Fostering the professional growth and status of individuals working with young children and their families.*
- * Increasing public understanding and support for policies and programs which ensure developmentally based services to young children and their families.*
- * Focusing on Southern issues concerning children and families.*

Ideas for Increasing Attendance at Meetings

Put the name of anyone who brings a guest into a hat for a door-prize drawing.

Pay the SECA membership renewal fee for the member at today's meeting who brings the most guests.

Publicize your meetings with free radio spots, on public television, and in newspapers posting community upcoming events. List your event on the city's calendar of events and web page.

Provide a free children's book for each meeting attendee to take home. Advertise this within the meeting announcement.

Personally invite folks from your group's underrepresented communities to come with you to a meeting.

Provide child care at meetings.

Co-conduct meetings with other community groups—Head Start, Council for Exceptional Children, Phi Delta Kappa, etc.

Hold each meeting in a different location around the community.

Set up a "terrific-speakers" swap with a neighboring affiliate group.

Be sure to make the content relevant. Try to make sessions interactive and interesting. Provide take-home value for attendees.

Be sure participants have some fun.

Have a website or page on someone else's site where folks learn to check about your upcoming events.

Help attendees develop ownership of the meeting.

Use a "telephone tree" method of members-calling-members to remind folks about the meeting and to coordinate carpooling.



Softer, more comfortable environments would help!