



The Leadership Letter

Reactive or Creative? What Type of Leader Are You?

Regardless of whether you are leading an early childhood program or your state or local early childhood professional association, the issue of whether your organization is reactive or creative has great implications for your future.

Within the business community, significant research is being conducted about organizational structures and the change from reactive to creative organizations. If the organization is changing in this way, it usually means that businesses have identified competitors who are more flexible, innovative and agile and they are seeing their "market share" decline.

The culture within a program or organization usually reflects the characteristics of the person/persons chosen to lead.

The **reactive leader**:

- ⇒ Spends a great deal of time trying to please. He/she is usually conservative, doesn't change easily and wants to "belong." This leader will be very resistant to initiating change.
- ⇒ May be very protective of the status quo and reflect a type of arrogance in regard to any suggestion of change. "We've always done it this way."
- ⇒ Can be controlling and ambitious and have all the answers. Constructive criticism is generally not

welcomed.

The **creative leader**:

- ⇒ Is relational in his/her dealings with others. He fosters team play, collaborates effectively, and mentors and supports the development of others.
- ⇒ Does not need the reinforcement of praise. He/she can let others get the credit for a job well done and presents a balanced approach to any task, problem or opportunity.

The same criteria applies to programs or organizations. If you're stuck with "the way it's always been," you're very likely to experience significant difficulties in a rapidly changing world.

We've gone from notebooks to computers to smart phones to iPads, all in a short span of time. Parental expectations in early childhood programs have changed and how we interact with those parents is different. Members of early childhood professional organizations are changing and what members expect of their membership is evolving.

The new leader needs a changed mindset. Creative thinking and innovation will lead to an organization that's agile, innovative, and creative. *Source: Leadership Quarterly, Flexibility, Agility & Innovation, Part 3, www.theleadershipcircle.com, Retrieved 4/1/14.*

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Leader or Manager: What's the Difference?

"Managers make and execute plans and decisions, organize the work of others and guide effort toward predicted results."

Leaders are required to do this as well but must also demonstrate capabilities in:

- 1) **Reflection:** Make sure that his/her limitations don't impact the organization, take responsibility for their mistakes, are realistic about the challenges to be faced.
- 2) **Society:** Act ethically, respect others, act with fairness and

benefit others.

- 3) **Diversity:** Respect cultural differences, encourage diversity of participation, collaborate with people who are different from themselves.
- 4) **Ingenuity:** Adapt quickly to change and help others to do so, develop a shared vision of the future, create an environment in which innovation can thrive.
- 5) **People:** Connect with others on a personal level, inspire effort, and communicate effectively.

The director or president who can do both ensures the success of the program or organization. These persons move as needed among the managerial and leadership responsibilities and provide an environment for growth and success.

Take a moment to assess how you manage or lead. Is there room for improvement? If you changed, could you be a more effective manager/leader?

Source: Leader vs. Manager, What's the Distinction?, Craig Perrin, www.achievetheglobal.com, Retrieved 4/1/14.

Adaptability: The Hallmark of a Good Leader

Change—It's not an easy thing to do or contemplate. Life is usually much easier "as is" and things can go along very nicely without modification, at least until your business is going downhill or membership in your state affiliate is beginning to bottom out.

We've all been there and making those changes is one of the hardest things that most people and organizations will do. The trick is to embrace change as an opportunity to grow and learn.

According to the Center for Creative Leadership, "*reactions to change often mimic the stages of the grieving process. First comes denial, which is considered the greatest obstacle to organizational or individual change. Next comes resistance. Then comes a time of exploration, questioning and reflection*

—if the individual doesn't get stuck in the resistance stage. Here the person will experience a shift from holding on to the past to looking forward to the future. Finally, commitment emerges, with new ways of thinking and behaving that are consistent with the changing environment."

The Center identified three types of flexibility that allow a person to become adaptable.

- A. **Cognitive Flexibility:** The ability to use different thinking strategies and mental frameworks.
- B. **Emotional Flexibility:** The ability to vary your approach to dealing with your own emotions and those of others.
- C. **Dispositional Flexibility:** The ability to remain optimistic and at the same time realistic.

Adaptable leaders reflect these characteristics and use them on a daily basis to manage and lead.

- ◆ Where in the four stages of the "change process" are you?
- ◆ Is your organization flexible and adaptable enough to embrace changes and build on them?
- ◆ Are you and your staff (or board) stuck in the first stage, burying your head in the sand?

Don't be afraid to try new thingsmistakes can be learning and growth experiences. Nothing stays the same, nor should it. Embrace these opportunities and see what progress you'll make!

Source: Adaptability: Keys for Success, Allan J Calarco, Center for Creative Leadership, www.ccl.org, Retrieved 4/1/14 .

The Changing World of Employee Benefits

Employee benefits and early childhood programs haven't always gone together. The pressures of balancing the cost of care for parents against the cost of labor for the program have often meant that:

- I. Wages have been low.
- II. Benefit packages have been non-existent or provided to only administrative/management staff.
- III. Significant turnover rates among staff have made provision of benefits difficult.

Unfortunately, this scenario hasn't changed significantly, but there are some new benefit opportunities (and some old ones) that we'd like to share that may be feasible for you now.

Health Insurance

With the passage of the Affordable Care Act and the establishment of insurance exchanges, health insurance is an option that you can offer employees. If your state has opted for the Medicaid expansion, many of your employees may qualify under that expansion at no or very little cost.

The insurance exchange offers premium subsidies depending upon family income if they are not eligible for Medicaid. Your employees may be eligible for these subsidies but must enroll through an insurance exchange. The deadline for enrollment was March 31, 2014 for this year; however, enrollment will open in November for the 2015 insurance year.

Rates for small businesses (and child care qualifies as a small busi-

ness) have changed significantly, particularly if you have employees who are older women.

As an employer, you can help guide your staff to an insurance option for them or offer an employer sponsored program.

Preventive Health & Wellness

One of the "new" things on the landscape, this program can have a significant effect on employee sick days, health care costs and staff performance. You can:

- ◇ Provide information on such things as smoking cessation programs, access to diet and nutritional counseling, access to exercise facilities, etc. It can be as simple as gathering information and placing it in the staff lounge or office.
- ◇ Provide an exercise space with some equipment (such as a treadmill) that's easily accessible to staff or work out a partnership with a local hospital for nutritional counseling, particularly if you have staff with diabetes. Many of these programs are provided through state and federal funding and are free to participants.
- ◇ Tie some type of incentive or reward to participation. You may see more people participate!

The South is experiencing an epidemic of obesity and we're trying to teach young children to adopt healthy lifestyles. **Why not ask the adults who teach them to do the same?** It doesn't have to cost a lot of money, just effort and education.

Cafeteria Plans

Many employers have developed cafeteria plans that allow employees to defer taxes on some expenses, such as dependent care (child & adult) and medical. These plans will require administrative support from your program to payroll deduct these funds.

Employee Discounts

If employees have children who are attending your program, discounts are often offered to help offset the cost of that care. You may also be able to negotiate employee discounts with other vendors such as fitness centers.

Retirement

The employer can design a retirement plan that will allow employees to save, usually tax free, for retirement. If a plan is offered, it usually defines the length of employee service before it goes into effect and states a "defined contribution" on the part of the employer. Employees can opt to make voluntary contributions in addition to the employer contribution.

Workplace Flexibility

Although we know that this is difficult in early childhood programs (staff-child ratios), you may be able to design flex scheduling that helps employees cope with family situations. Being responsive to individual needs is seen as a "benefit" and will help you retain those loyal employees.

Providing benefits within the limited budgets of most early childhood programs can be difficult but not impossible. Are there options that will work for you?



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More Resources



*The Center for Creative Leadership has a variety of resources that you may find of interest. We would recommend a research report, **What Makes a Leader Effective**, that can be downloaded at www.ccl.org. It is a look at what the younger generations view as leadership characteristics.*



The McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership at [National Louis University](http://NationalLouisUniversity) is a nationally recognized resource for building the leadership capacity of the early childhood workforce through professional development, evaluation, research, and public awareness.

I'll Become a Leader, Not Just a Manager!

2015 is just around the corner. It's time to think about what the new year will bring and how you can improve and enhance your skills as both a leader and manager. **Why don't we take this time to reflect and decide how we'll change the way we lead?**

Some Resolutions to Make

- ◆ **Rather than look for stability, I'll embrace change**, not just for the sake of change, but to improve and enhance my professional life.
- ◆ **Leading people will replace managing work.** I'll learn to listen and respond to colleagues and encourage collaboration.
- ◆ **I'll no longer have subordinates, I'll have followers.** That's a sign that I've moved

from being a manager to a leader.

- ◆ **My vision will be long-term rather than focused on the short-term.** I'll think outside of the box and apply principles of good leadership.
- ◆ **I will be proactive rather than reactive.** I'll try to anticipate rather than waiting for something to happen.
- ◆ **My leadership style will become transformational rather than transactional.** Change will be embraced, not denied.
- ◆ **I'll begin to take risks rather than trying to minimize them.** I understand that I may make mistakes along the way, learning as I go.

- ◆ **If conflict occurs, I'll use it to strengthen the dialogue.** I will no longer try to avoid it but will ensure that the resolution process remains ethical, controlled, and productive.
- ◆ **My direction will be down new roads**, not only the existing ones. New skills, new ideas, and innovation will be my mantra.
- ◆ **I will give credit rather than take credit** and allow others to be successful. My ego and pride will take a backseat to my obligations to others.

Remember, change doesn't happen overnight!

Source: Leadership vs. Management, www.changingminds.org, Retrieved 4/1/14