

# Maturing As a Manager: Bringing Leadership and Management Together

by Susan Hay

Very few people in early years would dispute that the success of a child care centre is almost entirely down to the strength of the centre manager. At its most successful, management expands to leadership, where leaders are able to influence the behaviour of others for the purpose of achieving a goal. Leaders develop a special set of rather baffling qualities that enable them to persuade others to do what the leader wants because they want to do it. Leaders can balance concern for the task, for quality and efficiency, with equal concern for the people they work with and the relationships they form. Adding leadership to management is maturing as a manager.



The focus of Susan's career has been the development of employer-sponsored work life and child care solutions in the UK. Having started a research and consultancy practice, and built a network of nurseries in London in partnership with blue-chip employers, Susan successfully merged her own business with Bright Horizons Family Solutions. Susan has been centrally involved in influencing public policy and practice in child care, having acted as an advisor to successive Government, academic and campaigning working parties on the economics of child care provision, and the quality of services. Susan's increasing interest in family wellbeing, and the importance of embracing the UK Government's policy of Every Child Matters across health, as well as education, its impact on the life chances of children and centrality to reducing child poverty, has taken her into a new phase of working life largely in the voluntary and state sectors, holding a number of Trustee and Governorship roles, notably, as a Director of Bright Horizons Foundation for Children in Europe, and founding the charity, Adam's Hats. She maintains links with the work life sector as a freelance consultant.

In my book, *Essential Nursery Management (2008)*, I refer to Gillian Rodd's (1994) list of the characteristics that bring leadership and management together:

- *Curiosity*: Interest in learning
- *Candour*: Open to public scrutiny
- *Courtesy*: Respect and dignity for others
- *Courage*: Willingness to take risks
- *Compassion*: Creating trust and empathy.

Given the competitive climate that centres are in, almost 20 years on, now we should add a sixth "C":

- *Commerciality*: Thinking and acting commercially.

In the push and shove of day-to-day child care centre life, it is easy to put aside the essential purpose we all share: improving outcomes for children and families. But this purpose is at the core of recent thinking on management and leadership in early years' settings, as captured in the UK's *National Standards for Leadership of Children's Centres (2007)*. The standards are grouped into six key areas that are both interdependent and of equal importance:

- Leading learning and development.
- Working towards stronger families, stronger communities.
- Being accountable and reasonable.
- Shaping the present and creating the future.
- Managing the organisation.
- Building and strengthening teams.

You can see that the qualities of a *maturing manager* are quite baffling, quite aspirational, quite attitudinal, quite behavioural — and difficult to pin down to a framework for recruitment and retention.

## Integrating Leading with Managing to Achieve Results

Managers who wish to lead should address one key question: "What are the strategic challenges that my organisation is facing and what do I need to do to mobilise others to take on those challenges as their own?" Organisations that recognise they must develop managers who can lead effectively need to make a long-term commitment in resources, not try a 'quick fix' for specific problems — in this sector, most often to quickly refill a vacancy that has suddenly arisen. Leadership development is a way of working and building an organisation. It must be owned and championed inside

the organisation or programme. If you care about your organisation and its future, commit yourself and your organisation to developing leaders at all levels. It is the path to real sustainability, improved organisational performance, and better services.

The framework below offers a guide to the organisational outcomes that managers will achieve when they lead and manage well. Within each leading and managing function, they need to apply a dynamic range of practices at different times to handle change and stabilise their organisations. Larger groups of child care centres and larger centres may split the role, with supervisory staff taking on some of the leadership functions. However, for smaller centres and organisations, both leadership and management are more likely to fall to one individual. Interestingly, those who manage smaller centres often have broader lead-

ership experience because there is no one else to refer to, no system handed down. They are effectively a 'managing director' of a small organisation, rather than somewhere in a reporting line. This is by no means always the case!

Leading aligns the internal organisation with external conditions, and personal interests with the organisation's mission, whereas managing aligns the internal parts of the organisation:

- A leader *scans* trends in the external and internal environments, to continuously update the organisation's knowledge.
- A manager *plans* for defined results by assigning resources and making an operational plan.
- A leader *focuses* on the organisation's mission, strategy, and priorities which

are clearly understood and used to direct work throughout the organisation.

- A manager *organises* the functional structures, systems, and processes for efficient operations. Staff are organised and aware of job responsibilities and expectations.
- A leader *aligns and mobilises* work groups and systems throughout the organisation to support the organisation's strategy and to ensure resources are sufficient to carry out tasks.
- A manager *implements* activities to make sure they are carried out in an efficient and effective way.
- A leader *inspires* staff to commit to the organisation's mission and to continue learning and innovating.

## Learning to Lead

Throughout history, people have developed leadership abilities when they have:

- Faced difficult challenges and mobilised themselves and others to address them.
- Received feedback about their performance from the environment and from other people about their results, or lack of results.
- Received support from others, either mentors or partners, that enabled them to continue to grow and develop.

People learn to lead effectively by a variety of informal and formal means throughout life — through family, friends, school, and professional training and experiences. When you choose to lead others in taking up the challenges that organisations face, you begin a continuous process of personal development. In this process, you:

- Face your leadership challenges.
- Become aware of the values that influence your actions.
- Reflect on your leadership practices.
- Improve your leadership abilities.

## Leading to Learn

When we combine the need to develop leadership ability with the need for learning, we create the idea of the 'learning leader.' This is an appropriate title for the individual responsible for securing success for the centre. The service is managed in a way that matches a changing profile of children, parents, staff team. Also explored are new thoughts on how children develop, new legislation, and the service performance expectations of their employer.

The first step in this maturational journey is to learn from what is going on now. How can the learning system within the centre be refined and improved to ensure that essential information flows freely to the people who need it? The system should comprise a combination of written policies and procedures, and routine review and evaluation of practice. Too many tragedies stem from a situation where the right information was held within the organisation, but did not travel to the person or team that needed it.

- A manager *monitors and evaluates* to share information about performance and results, and applies the lessons learned to future activities.

## Managers as a Source of Competitive Advantage

Niall Fitzgerald, past Chairman of Unilever, said, "You can have all the facts and figures, all the supporting evidence, all the endorsements you want, but if — at the end of the day — you don't command trust, you won't get anywhere." In other words, trust matters. The cases of Enron and Farepak have demonstrated this fact vividly. And in uncertain times, trust becomes the essential glue in a relationship. The choice of child care for a new parent is one of those areas of uncertainty, making trust essential. By living the core values of

the organisation every day, the manager can continuously convince parents and other stakeholders that he or she deserves their trust. That feeling you get when you cross the centre threshold invariably comes down to trust: the welcome at the door, the candour with which she speaks, the transparency of the information provided, her professional attitude, the calm atmosphere he exudes, her reputation as told by friends, how he retains staff, how well she handles conflicts, the respect for and empathy he shows to the parent's situation, and how children approach her.

One of the challenges of being part of a group of centres is to get across the personal service you believe the centre offers to its families. Equally, for a single site centre, what can distinguish you from the crowd? The personal impact, influence, and vision shown by the manager are your unique selling points.

## References

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