



Staff Retention in Child and Family Services

The Role of Leaders

Workbook 1

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(inside of front cover page)

Dedication

This workbook series is dedicated to child and family service supervisors everywhere who work tirelessly with their staff to make the world a better place for children and families at risk.

Acknowledgements

First, we gratefully acknowledge the authors, Judith McKenzie, John McKenzie and Rosemary Jackson, for their incredible commitment in developing this unique and useful workbook series. This inspired team brought years of child and family service experience and a sense of urgency to the work that comes from “knowing” that children and their families need a stable workforce to help them realize their potential and that effective child and family service supervisors hold the key to staff retention.

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Introduction to Workbook Series

Purpose of this Series

The purpose of this training and series of workbooks is to increase child and family service agencies' effectiveness in developing and retaining their staff by applying information from research and best retention practices to their work.

The foundation for this material is the important mission of child and family service to provide safety, permanence and well being for children, within a context of family-centered practice. Underpinning this foundation is a heightened sensitivity to the potential impact of significant emotional events on child and family service professionals which can lead to excessive stress, burnout and, possibly, secondary trauma. Case materials, tools and skills integrated throughout this workbook series intend to honor and support leaders and supervisors as they cope with the value dilemmas and emotional content found in the "real world" of child and family services.

The ultimate goal of this curriculum is to improve retention practices and outcomes for child and family service agencies. With such an end in mind everybody wins: the staff, the agency, the families and children, and especially the supervisor, whose life is vastly improved by having a stable, loyal workforce.

This curriculum has been designed with a series of workbooks. A workbook is provided for each of the following subjects in the core curriculum series.

Workbook 1 – The Role of Leaders in Staff Retention: provides information, tools and methods for leaders to use to support supervisors in creating and sustaining a positive culture for staff retention.

Workbook 2 – The Practice of Retention-Focused Supervision: provides research information and supervisory competencies for retaining effective staff, including self-assessment and planning tools. It includes methods and tools for setting objectives, structuring the supervisory process and managing stress in the workplace.

Workbook 3 – Working with Differences: provides understanding, methods and tools for tailoring supervision to the diverse characteristics, learning and behavioral styles and professional development needs of staff.

Workbook 4 – Communications Skills: provides specific information, tools and activities to adapt communication skills to the supervisory relationship.

Workbook 5 – The First Six Months: provides a structure, methods and tools for orienting, supporting and training new staff during their first six months on the job, with particular attention to helping staff cope with and manage the stressors of the job.

Workbook 6 – Recruiting and Selecting the Right Staff in Child and Family Service: provides information on promising practices and tools for recruiting and selecting front line staff; includes profiles of desirable qualities needed in front-line supervisors and staff and methods for developing effective collaborations with universities.



Child Welfare is not rocket science. It's harder than rocket science.

- David Liederman, former CWLA CEO

The Underlying Principles of this Training Curriculum

The *Staff Retention in Child and Family Service* workbook series is based on a review of research literature in child and family service, human services and business. The research focused on the many studies that have to do with staff turnover and retention. Additionally, resilient workers and supervisors who stayed with their current agencies for at least two years were interviewed and surveyed in public and private agencies throughout Michigan to determine what underpins their commitment to the field. There was a strong consensus about what was learned about workplace retention across business, human service work and child and family service, but there were also some significant differences. Understanding the differences between child and family service and business is critical to retaining and developing staff in human service. Those differences are fundamental to the approach that is expressed in this training program and are summarized as follows:

Child and family service is challenging and life-changing work

Child and family service staff, many of whom are young and inexperienced, often make “god-like” decisions every day that have profound effects on the lives and destinies of children and their families. They see and experience the most tragic human conditions, extreme poverty, child neglect and abuse, inter-generational violence and substance abuse. Yet, they have to find a way to assure safety of children while working toward permanence and well being for both children and their families. Child and family service staff do this in a system that is under-funded, under-staffed, and sometimes chaotic and hardened to the plight of the people who are served by it and those who work in it.

This curriculum does not minimize the difficulties of the work (the reality of low pay, high workloads, and high turnover) but it doesn't belabor these issues either. It recognizes that these issues need to be addressed, especially when an agency is not competitive with other similar agencies offering the same service. This curriculum stresses that child and family service retention rates can be improved by understanding and building upon those resilient factors that attract people to and keep them in the profession.

Child and family service is mission and values centered

Those who enter the profession of child and family service are not motivated by profit. They are mission-driven. They are usually motivated by “doing good and making a difference” for others, particularly children who have been victimized. They come to accept that child and family service work is mainly about working with and through parents.

This curriculum offers an understanding of the mission and value-centered nature of this work as a context for all of the materials developed. To undervalue the significance of idealism and a need to help others in the motivation of staff would be wrong. The concept of mission is what energizes child

and family service people and needs to be reinforced at every step of the retention process. Attention to feelings, showing appreciation and strengthening resiliency are essential for prevention of burnout and achieving good outcomes for children and families.

The supervisor in child and family service is the most influential person in staff retention

The research shows that having a good relationship with the front line “boss” or supervisor is one of the most important factors in retention. This is even more essential in child and family service due to the stressful nature of the work. Managing one’s own feelings and learning effective relationship skills to help others manage their feelings and assumptions are a big part of the work that has to be done. The inadequacies of the system, along with the multiple demands and challenging relationships, can cause stress, burnout and result in “secondary trauma” for child and family service staff. An effective supervisor will facilitate professional development of his/her staff by consistently modeling effective relationship and strengths-oriented behaviors that help staff grow through their most difficult and/or emotionally charged times and events. An effective supervisor will pay attention to the personal and professional growth needs of their staff and offer recognition, encouragement and support. To do this well, supervisors have to be aware of their own vulnerabilities, while building on their personal style and strengths.

What a new staff person experiences within the first year is crucial to retention

An experienced supervisor recognizes that over half of turnover occurs in a staff person’s first year on the job. What a staff person first experiences, especially with their supervisor, will determine whether he/she will stay with the agency and ultimately build a career in child and family service.

Respect for a person’s strengths, uniqueness, and rights are the primary elements in the success of all staff retention efforts







How a staff person is treated by the agency and, in particular, by his/her supervisor will become a mirror for how clients will be treated by staff. Honoring and building on staff strengths, including the individual’s capacity to cope with stress, learn and change, is key to successful retention in child and family service. Preserving the dignity of the individual is not only important in staff retention. It is a principle that is essential to achieving positive outcomes with families. A fundamental belief in the resiliency of people provides a reservoir of hope in child and family service.

This training curriculum takes the view that all participants: agency leaders, supervisors and staff, are partners in improving retention of staff in child and family service. The agency’s culture for retention will be continuously improved only to the extent that people share and learn from one another. Training materials, language and case examples are designed to be strengths-based and respectful of public and private agencies, supervisors, staff and families.

How to Use this Workbook

This training curriculum uses a workbook format for the following reasons:

- Participants who attend a training session have the information and tools at their fingertips to use as reference long after they attend the training
- Individuals can benefit from the program by using the workbooks as self-study tools, if they cannot attend a group training
- Learning activities appear throughout each workbook to encourage agencies and staff to use the materials in small groups during formal staff training or more informal sessions
- Participants attending the training can share the materials and coach others through the program
- Agencies can use the units within workbooks to review and build specific competencies e.g., when a supervisor is new to the position, following a performance review and/or when a need specific to the agency has been identified

Icon	Description
	<p>Activity – this icon represents an activity that can be used by an individual for self-reflection and/or for small group discussions.</p>
	<p>Small Group Activity – this icon represents an activity that is best done in small groups where individuals can share insights and learn from each other.</p>
	<p>Quotes – this icon is to represent words of wisdom that are meant to be inspirational or to bring home an important point to the user.</p>
	<p>Case Study – this icon represents a case study where content from the workbook is applied to typical supervisor/staff situations and interactions.</p>
	<p>Important Points to remember – this icon represents a summary of the key points contained in the workbook unit.</p>
	<p>Tools – this icon represents a tool that can be adapted and used in the workplace to further enhance the supervisor’s repertoire. All tools are provided in the appendix of each workbook for duplication and use in quantity.</p>

Debriefing Small Group Activities

When discussion questions and/or other activities are used in a small group, it is helpful for someone to act as a facilitator and recorder of notes to engage the group in responding to at least two additional questions:

- What lessons did we learn from this experience?
- What implications does this have for what we will continue to do, start or stop doing in the future?

Sequence of Workbooks

All the workbooks were designed to stand-alone and can be used in any sequence based on the organization's and/or an individual's needs and priorities.

Each workbook has numbered units. For example Unit 3 in Workbook 3 will be numbered Unit 3.3. Units extracted from a Workbook can be used in management and supervisory staff meetings, brief "Lunch and Learn" sessions, or in supervisor support groups. Using this material in the workplace is highly recommended because the sharing of ideas and synergy among like-minded people can aid and support individual growth and/or agency-wide culture change.

Participants can feel free to duplicate and share all activities and tools contained in these workbooks. Please acknowledge the source of the information when reproducing the materials.

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1.0 The Role of Leaders in Staff Retention

Learning Objectives for Workbook 1

- Promote understanding and application of a leadership model and skills for improving staff retention
- Understand what leaders must do to build a culture for staff retention
- Understand concepts and utilize tools for building the capacity of the agency's senior management team and supervisors to retain and support staff
- Learn about the policies and procedures that will drive staff retention now and in the future
- Provide tools and strategies for leaders to enhance staff involvement and retention

This workbook has been developed for child and family service leaders including: CEO's, Directors, Administrators, Program Managers and Supervisors. Some agencies use the terms leadership or leaders broadly to include everyone in the agency. For purposes of this workbook, when the term "leaders" is used, it means Senior Management (however that is defined within a particular agency).

In today's world, it is especially important to achieve outcomes for those served by child and family service agencies. But it is equally important to recruit, select and retain the right staff to do child and family service work. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to be successful without a committed, stable and qualified workforce.

This workbook provides the leader with methods and tools as well as the mindset to accomplish the agency's mission and goals through focusing efforts on sound staff retention practices. The material is based on extensive literature research on the topics of leadership, staff retention and turnover in child and family service, as well as experience of the authors and reviewers in leading child and family service agencies and programs and training child and family service staff. Sources are listed in the reference section of this workbook.

1.1 Challenges Facing Leaders in Retaining Staff

The Leadership Challenge

Today’s child and family service organization is overstressed with many challenges including ever tightening budgets; the need to speed-up services while taking on larger caseloads; increasing demands to meet outcomes; and the need to fund and mobilize the effective use of technology for planning, documenting and communicating. These and other challenges have to be met in the face of turnover rates ranging from 30% to 40% a year and sometimes higher in direct service positions.¹ Leadership’s challenge is to meet the needs of multiple programs and constituencies, while keeping the organization solvent and productive. These challenges and organizational requirements are illustrated in Figure 1.1 below.

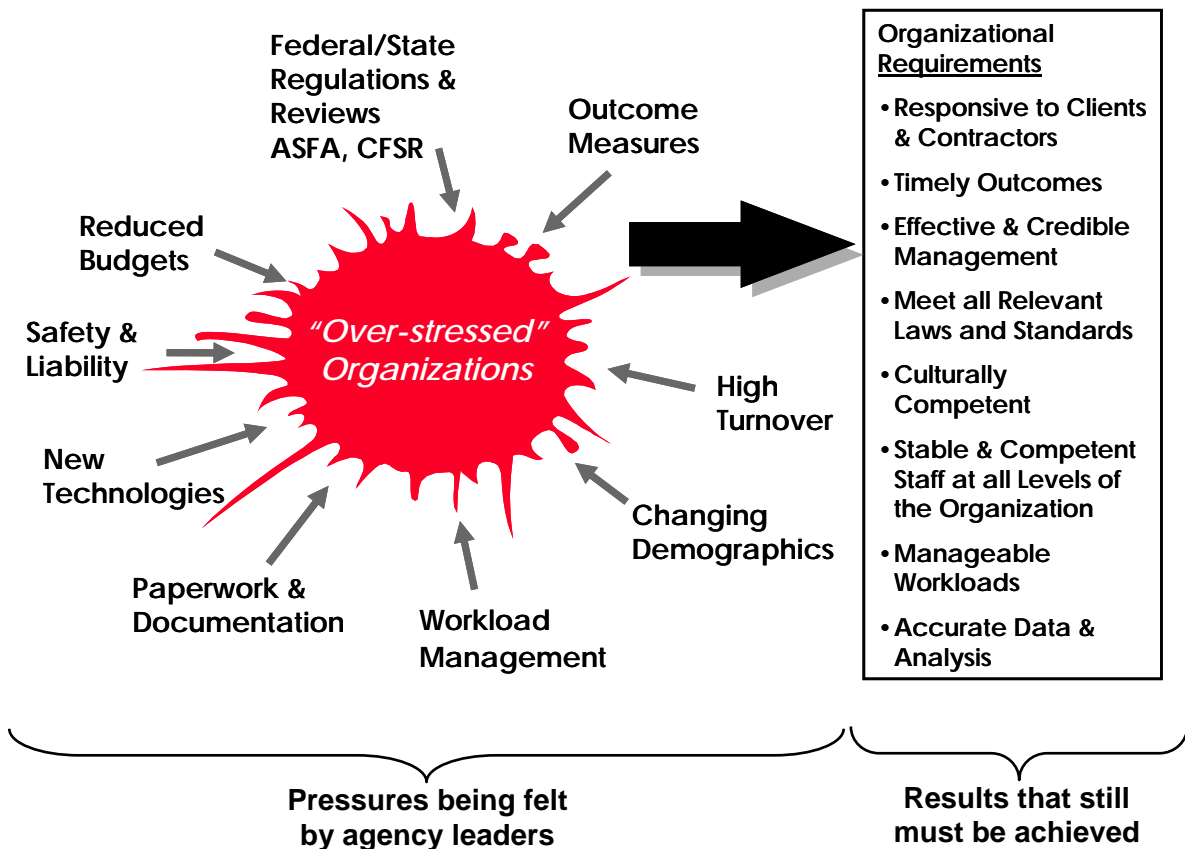


Figure 1.1 The Leadership Challenge – Retention in a Continuously Changing Environment

¹ Many leaders report that turnover in protective service, foster care and adoption is even higher. They believe that the emotional toll of placement services is greater because of the nature of the work, which involves having responsibility for critical decisions in the lives of children and families without corresponding control.

Turnover is especially significant in organizations where the productive capacity is invested in human capital – in the skills, abilities, knowledge and relationships carried by individual staff. Turnover adds high financial and training costs to agencies, while simultaneously producing significant loss and stress for the staff left behind to “pick up the pieces.” This in turn can have devastating consequences for the children and families the agency is mandated to serve.

States and agencies estimate that it costs from \$25,000 to \$50,000 to replace a child and family services staff person. These costs vary depending on what training and salary costs are included in the estimate. In the appendix of this workbook is a tool for calculating costs of turnover for any position, see *Tool: Blue Money and Green Money - Calculating the Costs of Turnover*².

Factors in Child and Family Service Staff Retention

Many studies of turnover in child and family service cite low pay and high workloads as the determining factors in staff turnover. Unfortunately, these conditions are all too often real, but are not the complete story. Forward thinking public and private agencies are making progress in retaining staff by paying attention to other significant motivational factors in the workplace.

For this project, interviews were conducted with ‘resilient’ supervisors and social workers to determine why they stay in their positions. Interview findings were then compared with information from other national research studies regarding retention in child and family service, other human service professions and the business sector.

Research indicates that people stay in child and family service for reasons that are common to most jobs, but also for reasons that are distinctive for human caring professionals. The distinguishing and most consistent retention themes found from child and family service staff interviews and literature are those that have to do with personal characteristics; professional organizational culture such as support for handling stress; and effective supervisory relationships.

Primary reasons child and family service staff stay in the field and with their organizations include:

Personal characteristics:

- Sense of personal mission – human caring
- Making a difference in the lives of the children and families being served
- Strong feeling of effectiveness in doing the work
- “Goodness of fit” with child and family service work and the agency’s mission
- Relevant education and length of time in the field
- Feeling of belonging and personal pride in the agency and its mission

² Source of Blue Money Green Money may be found at <http://careers.mcmaster.ca/employers/calculator.cfm>

Supervisory Relationships:

- Support from and a good relationship with an effective supervisor
- A supervisor who focuses on professional learning, career and personal development
- Recognition and encouragement from the supervisor and agency

Professional Organizational Culture:

- Opportunities to learn and develop personally and professionally
- Safe work environment – physically and emotionally
- Concern for employee’s families and personal needs
- Agency investment in staff development
- Support for handling stress, burnout and secondary trauma
- Supportive and satisfying relationships with peers
- Respect from management
- Flexibility in work hours

See *Workbook 2 The Practice of Retention-Based Supervision*, for more information on motivational factors, particularly a description of the Herzberg Model in unit 2.2.

Even though leaders are concerned about staff turnover, in the “Over-stressed Organization,” it is very difficult for them to make staff retention a high priority. Although not all staff should be retained and not all problems in retention of staff can be fixed, those that can be fixed are usually systemic. It is helpful for leaders to focus on staff retention as a holistic organizational development process and one of its most important leadership challenges and, therefore, one of its greatest opportunities. Successful staff retention efforts will evolve from a basic commitment of management and staff to accomplish the organization’s mission and goals as effectively as possible.

The activity that follows provides an opportunity for an agency to identify its overall turnover and, in particular, pinpoint departments or functional areas where turnover is of greatest concern.

Activity: Method to Calculate Turnover



Instructions -

1. Select a one year time period
2. Calculate turnover in your agency and/or unit using the method described below
3. Answer the questions that follow the chart

Point in Time Method of Calculating Staff Turnover

	Number of employees that left during this time period	÷	Total number of employees at the beginning of this period ³	×	100	=	Turnover % for this time period
Total agency		÷		×	100	=	%
Foster care caseworkers		÷		×	100	=	%
Adoption caseworkers		÷		×	100	=	%
Other staff		÷		×	100	=	%
Other staff		÷		×	100	=	%

See example in appendix in this workbook

³ An alternate way of calculating turnover is to use the average number of employees during the period. Whichever way is used, just be sure to be consistent in the calculation when comparing results year to year.

Activity: Challenges in Retaining Staff



Instructions: Consider the following questions

1. What are your greatest challenges in retaining staff?

2. How does staff turnover impact you personally?

3. How does staff turnover impact your agency?

Important points to remember



- Turnover rates in child welfare can be as high as 30% to 40%. Agencies report that when zeroing in on turnover in protective services and placement services, rates can be even higher.
- Turnover adds high financial costs, demoralizes the staff who are left behind and prevents agencies from providing timely and effective services for children and families.
- It is helpful to concentrate on why workers stay, so that agencies can do more of what works in retaining staff.
- Staff retention requires an understanding of the unique pressures of child and family services.
- Retention themes found from child and family service staff interviews and the literature include a personal sense of caring and mission; effective supervisory and peer relationships; and a professional/caring organizational culture.
- Staff retention in child and family services is best viewed as an organizational development issue and a continuous improvement process.

1.2 Leadership Model for Staff Retention

Steven Covey's (Covey, 2004) definition of leadership provides a good platform for developing a holistic or systemic approach to staff retention.



Definition:

Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.

- Stephen Covey

The following model builds on Covey's definition of leadership and an extensive review of retention and leadership literature. It illustrates six domains of leadership which, when addressed and aligned, can result in a caring and productive organization.

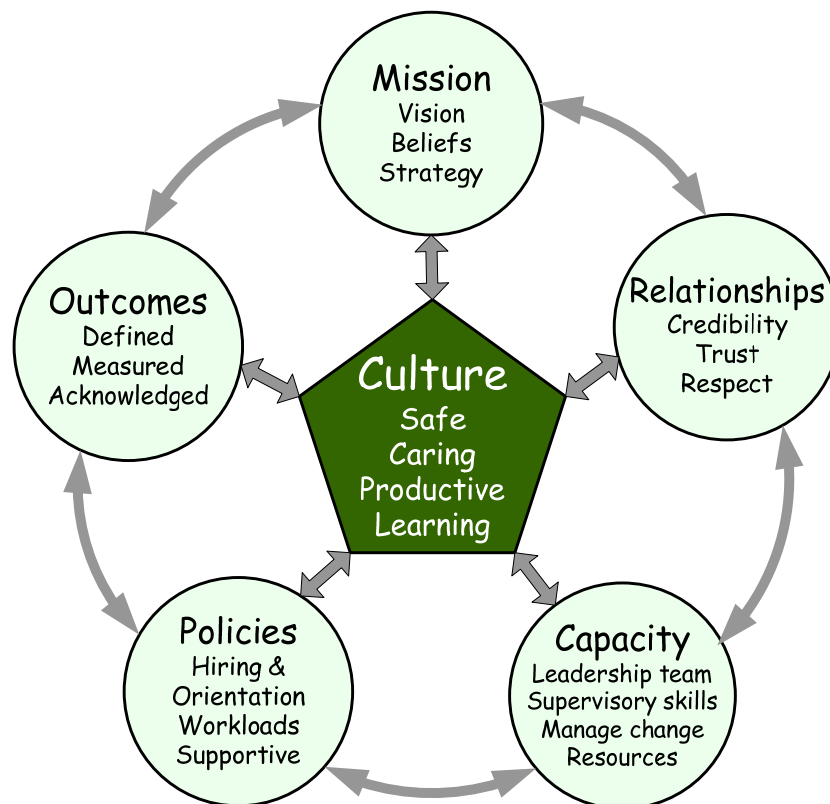


Figure 1.2 Model of Leadership Domains for Staff Retention

Description of Leadership Domains

Culture: An organization's culture is the sum total of its success in aligning its mission, relationships, capacity, policies, and outcomes. It is a "gestalt" concept, where the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. An organization that is successful in staff retention will be a diverse, safe, productive and caring learning environment. Staff retention is a high priority and embedded in the agency's culture. In this culture people will be heartened and encouraged to do their best. There will be a focus on personal, family, professional and organizational development.

Mission: The agency's purpose, belief and strategy are aligned so that the agency "practices what it preaches." People who work in child and family service are usually mission-driven and motivated by helping others. Involvement of all stakeholders in understanding, developing and implementing the organization's mission, beliefs and strategy is a key factor in reinforcing commitment.

Relationships: People are valued as the most important asset that the child and family service organization possesses. Leaders are role models who seek to build effective relationships within their agencies and communities to support the agency's mission. This involves a commitment to develop the personal attributes, knowledge and skills necessary to lead others to meet their goals.

Capacity Building: How the leader secures and uses resources effectively and prudently is a critical success factor in the overall health of the agency. Effective leaders put emphasis on building strong senior management teams that echo the agency's values about its staff and clients served. These teams focus on achieving goals and outcomes and hold themselves to high standards. They work to support and build the front-line supervisory capability of the agency because they understand that supervisors are critical to staff retention and quality services.

Policies: An organization's policies and procedures need to make sense to people and be consistent with its goals and objectives. This means having a consistent process for selecting the right people for the right positions; supporting safety and flexibility in the workplace; having reasonable workloads and weeding out policies and practices that waste time, disenfranchise children and families and diminish the effectiveness of the organization's staff. Leaders will provide ways for staff to have meaningful input into the development of policy and work practices.

Outcomes: In child and family service, staff are very committed to making a difference for children and families. An agency that adheres to professional standards, gets good results and acknowledges staff efforts is more likely to retain staff than one that is not effective or respected for its work. People want to be a part of a successful agency that appreciates them.

No organization is perfect, but it is possible to make consistent progress in becoming an organization that is intentionally retention and outcomes focused. This occurs when leaders have the commitment and framework for anchoring their retention efforts.

Agency leaders are encouraged to complete the agency leadership inventory tool that follows in this workbook to reflect on your agency's standing in each of these competency areas. Units 1.4 through 1.10 that follow the inventory, provide detailed information, suggested methods and tools to enhance performance in each of the six competency areas.

Activity: Agency Leadership Inventory for Staff Retention



Instructions:

Complete the *Tool: Agency Leadership Inventory* and answer the questions that follow

Tool: Agency Leadership Inventory



Score each line as you believe, if asked, staff would say

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5= Strongly agree.

Agency Culture	Score
1. Staff retention is considered everybody's business at our agency and we are all expected to play a role in retaining staff	
2. Our agency is a great place to work for professional development, interpersonal support and gaining a sense of meaningful accomplishment	
3. Our agency promotes continuous dialogue and improvements to support staff retention and satisfaction	
Score Agency Culture	

Mission, Vision & Direction	
4. Our agency's mission is well understood by everyone and comes alive in all of our communications and the work that we do	
5. Our agency has a current and meaningful strategic plan, which is consistently being communicated to staff and other stakeholders	
6. Our agency adheres to a set of guiding beliefs or principles that are reflected in the agency's priorities and also in management and case decisions	
Score Mission, Vision & Direction	

Relationships	
7. Our leaders have credibility in the agency and the community and represent our agency effectively	
8. Our leaders truly care about the staff and their families by treating them with respect and showing appreciation for their work and personal commitment	
9. Our leaders display behaviors that are consistent with the organization's values, beliefs and principles	
Score Relationships	

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5= Strongly agree.

Capacity-Building	Score
10. Our leaders work as a team in setting priorities, promoting communication and modeling collaboration throughout the agency	
11. Our agency places a high priority on and invests in developing and supporting first line supervisors	
12. Our agency provides ample opportunities for training and professional development	
13. Our leaders are effective in communicating and managing change	
14. Our leaders are effective in garnering and advocating for resources necessary to meet our goals and agency mission	
Score Capacity-Building	

Policies and Practices	
15. Our agency provides salaries and benefits that are competitive with other child and family service agencies in our geographical area.	
16. Our agency has an effective, consistent and repeatable process for recruiting, selecting and putting the right people in the right jobs	
17. Our agency has an effective and repeatable process for orienting and providing extra support for staff in their first year on the job	
18. Our agency is effective in assuring that workloads are equitably distributed and fair	
19. Our agency is a safe place to work both emotionally and physically	
20. Our agency's employment policies support flexibility and professionalism	
Score Policies and Practices	

Outcomes and Accountability	
21. Our agency has strong financial systems and exercises effective management over the use of financial and human resources	
22. Our agency makes sure that everyone knows what is expected of them in terms of quality of service and outcomes expected	

23. Our agency is current and competitive in its use of technology; and uses data and technology effectively to make decisions and measure results	
24. Our agency uses effective strategies for acknowledging accomplishments of individuals and workgroups	
25. Our agency celebrates small and large victories and successes	
Score Outcomes and Accountability	

Summarize your scores.

1. Circle the number in each of the six categories on the chart shown below that comes closest to your actual score for each category.

	Agency Culture	Mission, Vision & Direction	Relationships	Capacity-Building	Policies and Practices	Outcomes & Accountability
Strongly Agree	15	15	15	25	30	25
	13	13	13	22	27	22
Agree	12	12	12	20	24	20
	10	10	10	17	21	17
Neither agree nor disagree	9	9	9	15	18	15
	7	7	7	12	15	12
Disagree	6	6	6	10	12	10
	4	4	4	7	9	7
Strongly Disagree	3	3	3	5	6	5

2. Now draw a line through each of the six circles connecting them on the chart. How do your scores compare? Are they in balance or are some higher and some lower?
3. Look over your inventory scores and decide if there are any items that you would like to change.
4. Circle those that you think are most important and want/need to change. Refer to those sections of the workbook. What will you do in the short-term to gain greater competency in your priority areas?

Important points to remember



- There are six key domains or competency areas to help leaders build a successful retention-focused organization. These are: Agency Culture; Mission, Vision & Direction; Relationships; Capacity-Building; Policies and Practices; Outcomes & Accountability.
- People who work in child and family service are usually mission-driven and motivated by helping others. They need to see that they are making a difference for children and families to stay in the agency.
- In retention-focused agencies, people are valued as the most important asset that the child and family service organization possesses.
- Retention focused leaders are role models who seek to build effective relationships within their agencies and communities to support the agency's mission.
- Effective leaders put emphasis on building strong senior management teams. They work to support and build the front-line supervisory capability of the agency because they understand that supervisors are critical to staff retention and quality services.
- An agency's policies and procedures need to make sense to people and be consistent with its goals and values.
- An agency that adheres to professional standards, gets good results and acknowledges staff efforts is more likely to retain staff than one that is not effective or respected for its work. People want to be a part of a successful agency that appreciates them.

1.3 Culture for Staff Retention



In a retention-minded agency, leaders understand that keeping good staff is an essential key to the success of the organization in meeting its mission. Therefore, retention is made and kept a high priority issue and an essential part of the agency's culture. Such emphasis can make an agency a great place to work and a magnet that attracts others to seek employment there.

There is significant evidence from research that agency culture – the attitudes that employees collectively hold about their work environment – affects retention, quality of services, consumer satisfaction, outcomes and the risk of child maltreatment by staff. (Bednar, 2003) This unit covers the following agency leadership responsibilities:

Agency Culture
Staff retention is considered everybody's business at our agency and we are all expected to play a role in retaining staff
Our agency is a great place to work for professional development, interpersonal support and gaining a sense of meaningful accomplishments
Our agency promotes continuous dialogue and improvements to support staff retention and satisfaction

The Power of Unspoken Cultural Norms

Just as any agency of any size has a formal organizational structure, it also has an informal, often unspoken culture. Its members share certain values, attitudes and behavioral norms. Culture is extremely complex and many of its rules are informal or implicit and, perhaps, not even within the consciousness of its members.

Culture can be a part of the woodwork of an agency. It can influence how individual members think, believe and behave. It can convey not only rules but enforce compliance with unspoken imperatives such as: "If you don't conform, you won't fit in, you won't be liked and you won't succeed." Much of culture is unconscious, therefore, it is helpful for leaders to understand the informal culture and seek to consistently act in ways that send messages to reinforce positive messages, particularly related to how staff are valued and the high priority placed on maintaining a professional, committed workforce.

The activity that follows illustrates the powerful impact of the informal cultural norms of an agency on staff attitudes and behaviors.

Activity: *The Unspoken Cultural Norms in your Agency*



Instructions: Fill in the chart of *Unspoken Cultural Norms* that follows

1. First identify and write in an “unspoken” cultural norm for your agency (such as the example given in the chart that follows). Norms can be either positive or negative.
2. In the left hand column list those things that give evidence of the norm.
3. In the right hand column, list those things that can be done to reinforce or change it.

Unspoken Cultural Norms

Example of an unspoken cultural norm:

If you don't have previous child welfare experience, your other qualifications are not valid.

Evidence of norm:

New staff consistently complain that their education and previous experience are discounted by peers in team meetings. Seasoned staff acknowledge this bias.

What could be done to extinguish / reinforce:

Engage existing staff in developing and using a process to fully welcome and include new staff, including valuing differences and interdisciplinary planning.

Unspoken cultural norm:

Evidence of norm:

What could be done to extinguish / reinforce:

Unspoken cultural norm:

Evidence of norm:

What could be done to extinguish / reinforce:

Unspoken cultural norm:

Evidence of norm:

What could be done to extinguish / reinforce:

Building a Culture for Retention is Everybody's Business

The greater the extent to which leaders, supervisors and staff make retention everybody's business, the more success the agency can have in meeting its mission. This requires mutual respect and understanding for each other's responsibilities and a compelling interest in being open-minded and creative in building a culture that values people.

There are three groups to consider in looking at retention practices within an agency. The mandates and responsibilities are different between individual staff, agency senior management and front line supervisors. Thus, priorities and what motivates each group will be different. Mutual sensitivity and respect for these differences and ongoing dialogue between management and staff can help to minimize the impact of conflicting agendas and expand areas of common ground.

Areas of common ground can be found most vividly when the agency's mission, values and concern for the well being of children and families and that of its staff are at the heart of the work of everyone in the agency.

Some examples of the different responsibilities and priorities are as follows:

Senior Management: CEO and senior managers will be concerned about budgets and funding, meeting state and federal regulations, protecting the agency from lawsuits, capturing trends and staying competitive.

Front-line Supervisors: Front-line supervisors will be concerned about getting their unit/departmental work done, meeting program and client goals and objectives, positive staff morale, covering workloads.

Staff: Staff will be concerned about getting their specific day-to-day work done, fair pay, reasonable workloads, peer and supervisory support, respect from management and having adequate resources to achieve results for children and families.

Despite these differing perspectives and priorities, everyone in the agency has a role to play in enhancing the quality of the work experience and, thus, has a role in enhancing a culture of staff retention. Everyone has a common interest in the agency's mission, culture and outcomes. Figure 1.3 that follows depicts the responsibilities, concerns and perspectives of individual staff, supervisors and leaders. This illustrates what is unique and where there is overlap.

Individual Staff

Senior Management

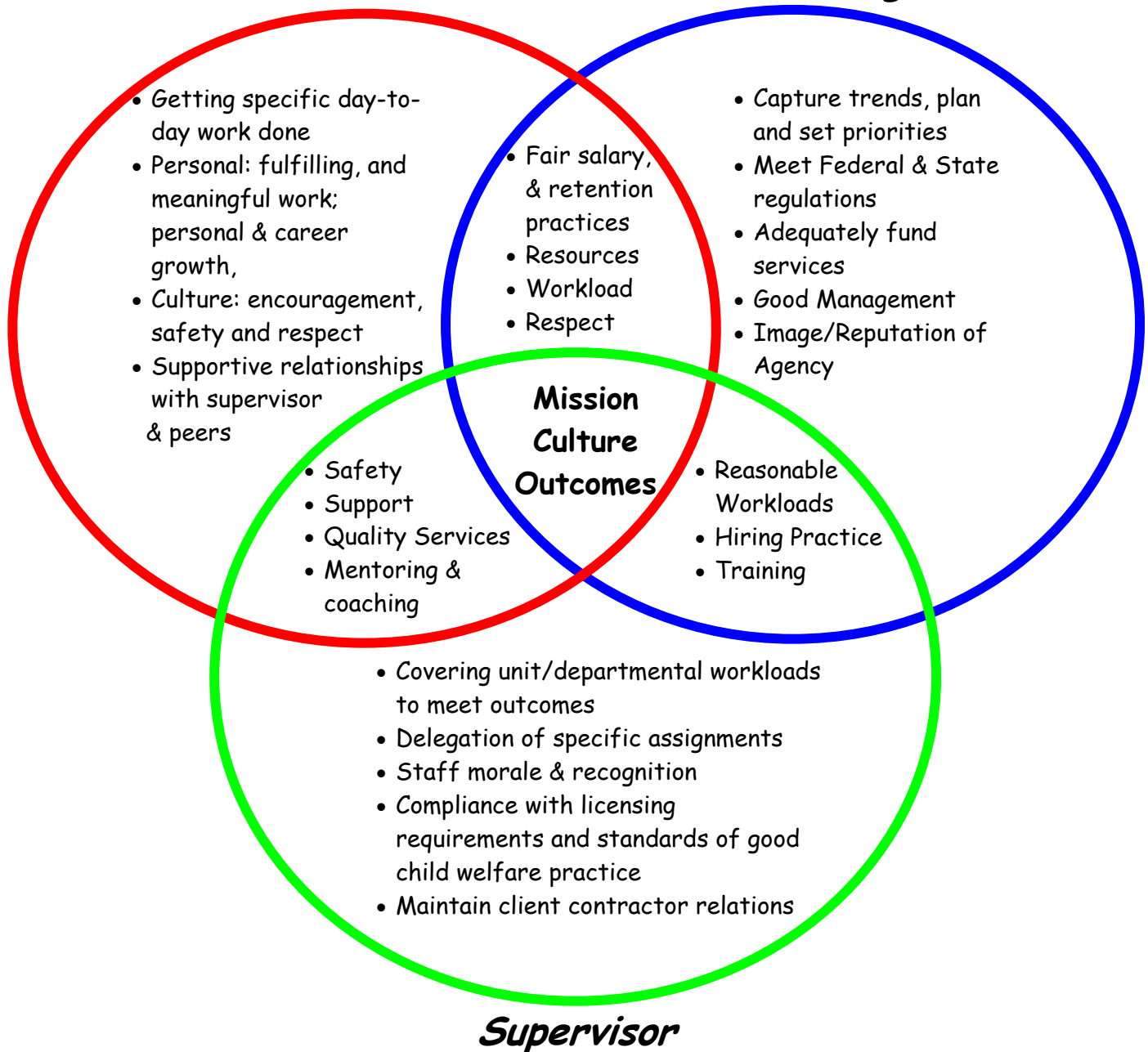


Figure 1.3 Responsibilities and Priorities by Role

Staff Recruitment and Retention Committee

One way an agency can keep a retention focus is to develop a standing, cross-functional, cross agency committee to continuously explore and recommend ways to effectively recruit and retain employees. Some of the questions that could be considered by staff include:

- How can we help recruit effective staff?
- How can we improve the agency's effectiveness in retaining staff and improving the culture of the organization?
- What policies and procedures act as barriers to staff retention and how can we change them to be more helpful?
- How can we help make new staff feel welcomed and appreciated?
- What can we do to encourage cross-cultural understanding and support?
- How can we show appreciation for one another?
- How can we mark and celebrate our accomplishments?
- How can we support an atmosphere of continuous learning and professional development?
- What can we do to encourage having fun in the workplace?
- How can we reinforce creating a physically and emotionally safe work environment?

When this type of representative entity is endorsed by leaders and is empowered to influence agency practices, it can go a long way to improving the culture by making retention everybody's business.

Research shows that professionals and knowledge workers (i.e., free agent professionals) may exhibit greater loyalty to their colleagues and their profession than to their employing organization. This type of loyalty is associated with greater relational ties (in terms of numbers and strength) and may serve as the backbone of effective performance.⁴

An added benefit of establishing a staff retention committee is that the agency promotes continuous dialogue, a sense of responsibility and networking among staff related to this subject. In addition to its ongoing agenda, such a group can pinpoint particular programs of the agency or work units to support when specific turnover or a pattern of turnover occurs.

In interviews with resilient caseworkers, peers are identified as very important to retention. When there is high turnover, the costs are not just from losing the individual, but from weakening the total social network. Once these bonds start to weaken due to turnover, it is not unusual to see several staff leave an agency within a short period of time. Agencies that actively promote collaboration, peer networking and relationships among staff are building a culture that reinforces the social ties and networks that bind loyalty of employees.

⁴ Editor. (2002.) Notes from the Management Literature. Administration in Social Work, Vol.. 262 (2) 2002 by the Haworth Press, Inc.

Important points to remember



- Successful agencies keep the issue of staff retention a high priority and embedded in the agency's culture. Staff retention is considered everybody's business.
- Agencies that value staff retention are considered a great place to work, which can act as a magnet that attracts others to seek employment there.
- It is helpful for leaders to understand the informal culture and seek to consistently act in ways that reinforce positive messages, particularly related to the high priority placed on maintaining a professional, committed workforce.
- One way an agency can keep a retention focus is to develop a standing, cross-functional, cross agency committee to continuously explore and recommend ways to effectively recruit and retain employees.
- Agencies that actively promote collaboration, peer networking and relationships are building a culture that reinforces employee loyalty.

1.4 Mission and Direction



As the old adage goes, “Managers do things right, leaders do the right things.” This is especially true when it comes to retaining staff in a world of shrinking public dollars. In this context, part of a leader’s role with respect to “doing the right things” includes putting emphasis on:

1. Setting the right vision, direction and expectations for the agency and management team and delegating accordingly
2. Assuring that the agency is consistent in practicing what it preaches

This unit emphasizes the role of leaders in setting the agency’s direction and keeping the agency on the right path. Unit 1.4 covers the following leadership responsibilities:

Aligning Mission, Vision & Beliefs:
Our agency’s mission is well understood by everyone and comes alive in all of our communications and the work that we do
Our agency has a current and meaningful strategic plan, which is consistently being communicated to staff and other stakeholders
Our agency adheres to a set of guiding beliefs or principles that are reflected in the agency’s priorities and also in management and case decisions

A Consultant’s Story

Several years ago a child welfare consultant did some work with a residential agency that served children under twelve. She studied their mission statement and beliefs, which focused on the importance of family and Christian principles. When she arrived at reception, the first thing she noticed was a sign that said: “Families are not allowed in the children’s living units.” She asked herself how an agency could expect families to be actively engaged with their children if agency policies and practices inhibit it. She knew then that her work was cut out for her.

Agencies that are successful in attracting and holding on to talented people are able to generate a communal sense of purpose and meaning through having:

- A compelling purpose and mission
- A current vision and strategic plan that is alive throughout the organization and communicates a desired future
- A set of guiding principles or core values that have intrinsic value to the members of the agency and are aligned with the work that is being done
- Practices that are consistent with the agency’s mission, beliefs and goals

Alignment, a Key Role of Leadership

A critical function of leadership is to assure alignment and integrity between the agency’s mission and strategic plan and its organizational and unit priorities. It is also important to align agency values and beliefs with policies, practices and management behavior. Aligning values and beliefs with policy and behavior is sometimes referred to as “symbolic leadership.” Stated simply, this means leaders and agencies are called to practice what they preach. The concept of alignment is illustrated in figure 1.4.

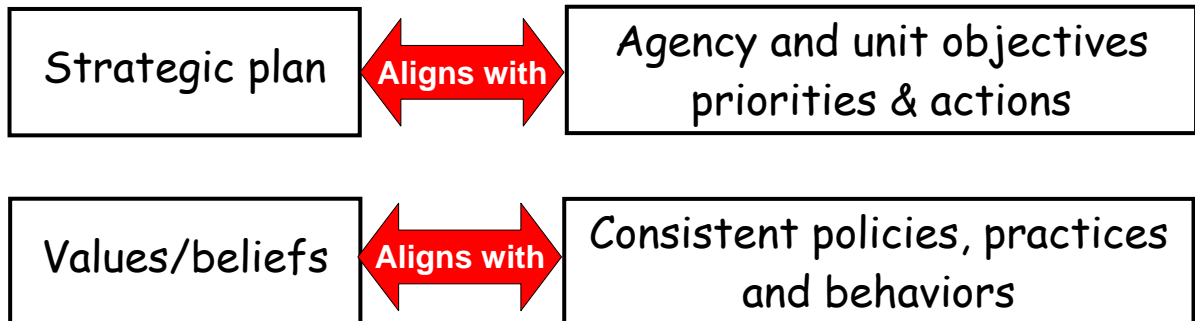


Figure 1.4 Alignment

Why deal with alignment in a workbook on staff retention? Simply put, child and family service staff are mission-driven. They know when what they see and what management asks them to do are out of sync with their sense of what is professional and right.

Importance of Having a Current Strategic Plan ⁵

Leaders who have difficulty completing the preceding activity may also have difficulty communicating their agency's vision to staff. If the agency does not have a current strategic plan, leaders may want to consider whether or not this is the right time to develop one. A strategic plan may be needed when:

- The board, leadership team and/or staff need to come to agreement about how to address pressure for change, internally or externally
- The agency wants to launch a major effort to develop additional resources and/or launch a fund development initiative
- There is a lack of support for and/or declining interest in what you are doing, e.g., decreased donations, decreased referrals, decreased enrollment, etc.
- There is an anticipated change in status or governmental support
- There is a desire to become more involved in the community
- There is a new opportunity that may create a need for reallocation of resources
- The agency is chronically unable to fulfill its mission or meet its outcomes
- A funder or major stakeholder has asked for a strategic plan and there isn't a current one (For example, every state is required by the federal government to submit a comprehensive IV-B Plan every five years.)

Strategic plans are different than operations plans, primarily because strategic plans are more long term in scope and take into consideration future trends and needs that may result in new program directions and bold actions affecting resource allocations.

Getting Staff Buy-In to the Agency's Plan ⁶

Strategic planning is an important discipline as well as an opportunity. When it is undertaken, it is important to use the process as a basis for achieving commitment from staff and other important stakeholders regarding the agency's vision of the future. Some guidelines for ensuring staff buy-in and commitment are:

Involve staff in creating the plan: Generally, the leadership team will be involved in creating the vision and overarching goals for the agency's plan. Staff can then help develop program goals, strategies, outcomes and results affecting their program area.

Consider staff retention goals and strategies in the plan: Having a clear goal of retaining talented staff will enable the agency to keep this subject on the table at all times and measure improvements over time. Staff will also be able to contribute to the development of strategies that will work and will see this as part of their jobs.

⁵ Adapted from Margaret May's article, *Strategic Planning for Organizational Success*, available at http://www.lord.ca/publications/articles/strategic_planning.html

⁶ Adapted from Leigh Branham, *Keeping the People Who Keep You in Business*, pages 59-60

Demonstrate a personal commitment to the plan: Once the plan is approved and being worked on, it's essential for leaders to "stay the course." When something has to be changed, then dialogue and honesty are critical to maintaining credibility and commitment to the vision and plan.

Create ongoing alignment between the agency's plan and each operating unit's goals and objectives: It is important that there is consistency throughout the organization in meeting the plan's goals and objectives. All program managers and supervisors must remain true to the overall vision and plan or others will lose heart.



Being a visionary company requires 1% vision and 99% alignment.

- James Collins

Core Beliefs and Principles in Child and Family Service

A statement of beliefs or principles is very important and will provide a framework for how agencies provide services, allocate resources and engage the family or individual client and significant others in decision-making and service delivery. In developing statements of principles, at least four areas can be addressed:

- How families, individuals, children and youth are treated and engaged;
- How staff are treated and valued as professionals;
- How the agency collaborates interdepartmentally; and
- How the agency collaborates with the community, on behalf of children and families.

Having a well-understood, unifying statement of core beliefs and principles can go a long way to underpinning an agency's practice model and training, facilitating interdepartmental communication, reinforcing expectations and achieving the right outcomes for children and families. An agency oriented in this way can always ask itself: "Are we really practicing what we preach?"

As a first step, some states and agencies are bringing staff and stakeholder groups together to establish common principles and belief statements. Family centered practice values are being used by child and family service agencies as a basis for developing the agency's beliefs. These beliefs are particularly relevant to achieving outcomes in a timely manner. Some agencies are more oriented to mental health services and may adopt a "client-centered" statement of principles, consistent with serving the mental health needs of clients.

Without realizing it, agency leaders can undermine their agency philosophy or beliefs by promoting double messages. These can come in the form of giving more attention or accolades to one program over another; promoting different philosophies in different programs. For example, this could be seen by excluding parents from decisions related to their children; treating foster parents differently than adoptive parents; having higher caseloads for more difficult services; adhering to rigid policies and procedures that restrict creativity; insufficient or non-existent training in how to work effectively with families; and lack of allocation of funds to promote "out of the box" solutions.



Aligning Beliefs with Policies and Practices

It is one thing to have a statement of beliefs or principles. But to be truly effective, it is especially important that an agency's principles be aligned with its policy and practices. The role of leaders is to assure that this alignment occurs and is monitored regularly by program managers and supervisors. The activity provided here is a tool to practice aligning agency principles with practices/policies and resources.

Activity: Aligning Beliefs with Policy and Processes



Instructions:

1. Choose one or more of your agency's beliefs about services to families or staff retention
2. Using the chart, answer the following questions:

What policies reinforce each principle or belief statement?

What practices or processes are in place to reinforce each principle or belief statement?

3. In your discussion, did you identify any policies or practices that run counter to the belief?

A sample called *Worksheet for Aligning Beliefs with Policy and Practices* has been completed and provided in the appendix for leaders to consider alignment of principles with policy and practices in work with families.

Worksheet for Aligning Beliefs with Policy and Practices

In this column, list agency's beliefs in the area you selected	In this column, cite the policy supporting the belief	In this column, list the formal and informal practices supporting this belief

Important points to remember



- Agencies that are successful in attracting and holding on to talented people have a compelling purpose and mission and are able to generate a communal sense of purpose and meaning.
- A critical function of leadership is to assure alignment and integrity between the agency's mission and strategic plan and its organizational and unit priorities. Another function is to assure alignment between the agency's values and beliefs and policies and behavior.
- Successful agencies have a current vision and strategic plan that is alive throughout the organization and communicates a desired future.
- Strategic plans are different than operations plans, primarily because strategic plans are more long term in scope and take into consideration future trends and needs.
- Successful agencies abide by a set of guiding principles or core values that have intrinsic value to the members of the agency.
- When an agency has a unifying statement of core beliefs and principles, this can go a long way to underpin its practice model for achieving outcomes for children and families.

1.5 Relationships and Leaders



Leaders are role models and set the tone for the whole agency. Nobody is perfect, however, and leadership is a continuous improvement process that takes place over a lifetime. It involves a commitment to develop the personal attributes, knowledge and skills necessary to lead others to meet their goals.

People want to work for leaders who they can respect and trust. Staff may come to work and put in their hours but their hearts will not be in it if their passion for doing good for others is not reflected in their leaders. Their attitude will sour and productivity will spiral downward. A leader's values and behaviors need to be in alignment with the organization's values. Furthermore, leaders need to be people of integrity who practice what they preach.

Following is a list of qualities that address the role modeling responsibilities of successful leaders.

Relationships
Our leaders have credibility in the agency and the community and represent our agency effectively
Our leaders display behaviors that are consistent with the organization's values, beliefs and principles
Our leaders truly care about the staff and their families by treating them with respect and showing appreciation for their work and personal commitment

Leaders are People of Integrity

Stephen Covey, in his book *The 8th Habit: from Effectiveness to Greatness*, defines being a role model as “finding (your) own voice and then choosing the attitude of taking the initiative to expand your influence in every opportunity around you.” But how can leaders gain credibility and build confidence so staff will truly respond to and follow the direction they set? Covey says it has to do with...

- Building strong relationships through trusting
- Building trust by being trustworthy

So what are the most important things to keep in mind when looking to shape an organization and be an effective leader? When asked what it takes to be an effective leader, a recent survey of 54,000 people in for-profit and not-for-profit organizations across the country responded that “integrity” was the most important characteristic followed by being a “good communicator” and being “people focused.” (Covey, 2004)

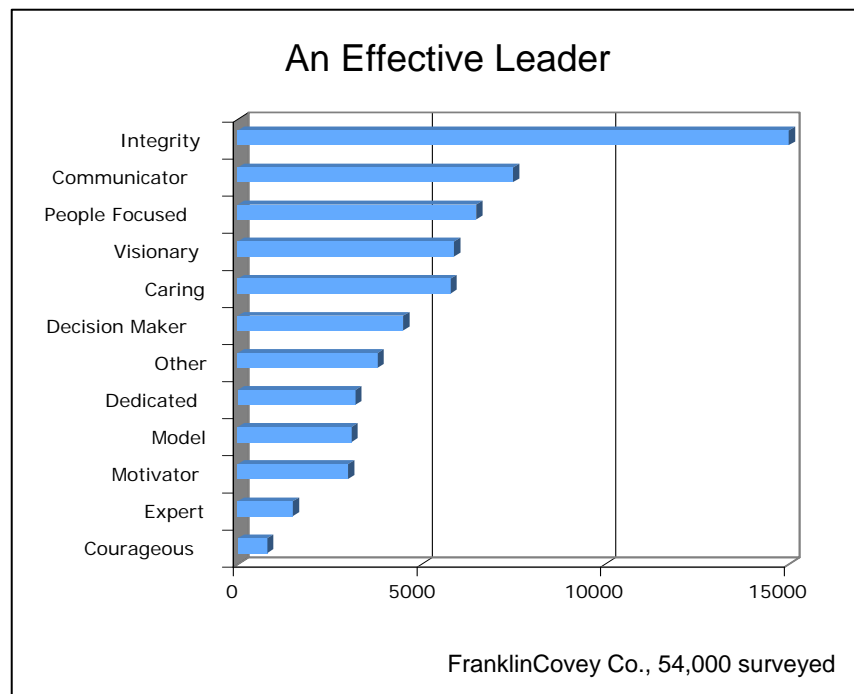


Figure 1.5 Being an Effective Leader

It takes more than talent and stamina to succeed. Being trustworthy, communicating a consistent message that is aligned with the organization's mission and purpose, and treating others with respect will set the tone for the rest of the agency. Leaders build trust and respect by:

- Doing what they say they will do
- Being respectable and discreet in both their professional and personal lives
- Being sincerely interested in and open to the people in their organization and the clients they serve
- Not over paying themselves or surrounding themselves with expensive perks when the rest of the organization is having to squeeze to a tight budget
- Taking responsibility for leadership tasks and empowering staff to do what they are good at doing
- Having faith in staff and believing that they want to do the best job they possibly can
- Finding necessary resources and breaking down barriers so work can get done



Values are like fingerprints. Nobody's are the same, but you leave 'em all over everything you do.

- Elvis Presley

The Importance of Self-Mastery and Relationship Skills

Self-mastery and fostering effective relationships are twin pillars for integrity, conscientiousness and trustworthiness. The path to becoming an effective leader is both a character-building process and a relationship-building process. This requires that leaders develop emotional intelligence and the ability to work with differences.

Emotional intelligence, what many refer to as “EQ,” is defined by Adele Lynn as “the ability to manage ourselves and our relationships with others so that we can live our intentions.”⁷ EQ involves developing both internal and external capabilities. Adele Lynn and Karl Albrecht (Albrecht, 2004), in their separate publications, identify several components of emotional and social intelligence. The characteristics are categorized below as self-mastery capabilities and relationship capabilities.

Self-mastery (internal) capabilities:

- Self awareness and self control – The ability to fully understand oneself and to use that information to manage emotions productively; self discipline and postponement of gratification
- Authenticity – The ability to bring a sense of purpose to one’s life and behave in accordance with one’s beliefs, so as to be seen as honest with one’s self and credible by others
- Presence – Known as “bearing,” the external projection of one’s self that others perceive; confidence, self-respect, self-worth, and humility

Relationship/social (external) capabilities:

- Social expertness – The ability to build genuine relationships and bonds and to express caring, concern and conflict in healthy ways
- Situational radar – The ability to “read” situations, understand the social context that influences behavior and choose behavioral strategies that are most likely to be successful with people
- Empathy - The ability to put one’s self in another’s shoes; the ability to understand the emotions of others and create a sense of connectedness with them
- Clarity – The ability to express one’s self clearly, use language effectively, explain concepts and persuade others with ideas
- Personal influence – The ability to positively lead and inspire others to follow

⁷ Adele Lynn, *The EQ Difference*, page 7

Leaders Treat Their Staff with Respect and Dignity

The child and family service professional is continually interacting with people in difficult and confusing circumstances. The children, parents, resource parents, people in the community, the legal system all operate on their own. Consequently, conflicting agendas may occur. The way the child and family service worker's supervisor and leaders treat them sets the tone for how they will treat their clients. The culture of the organization will reflect the personal characteristics of the person(s) on top. What that culture will be is up to its leaders.

Being an effective leader and role model involves both self-mastery and relationship capabilities. It is difficult to be "on" all the time, particularly, when the organization and/or the leader is under a lot of stress.

Nonetheless, all effective leaders learn to handle their internal world of feeling and emotion including anger, anxiety and depression. Managing one's emotions is a matter of controlling one's impulses and this is an essential leadership and life skill. It is very important for the leader to be aware of those internal feelings that drive, worry, and often get in the way of his/her personal effectiveness. The leader who says: "This is who I am, take me or leave me," has already shot him/herself in the foot. While the arrogant, tuned-out leader protects him/herself with blind spots, effective leaders know their strengths, areas needing improvement and their limits. (Goleman, 1998) Leaders who are self aware can be more open to change, less threatened by the input of others, and have confidence in their decisions.

Some of the things effective leaders learn from experience are (Lynn, 2005):

- The behaviors of others can trigger and/or "highjack" their feelings
- Feelings can influence one's actions and performance
- People, especially when under stress, will display many difficult and sometimes destructive behaviors
- Performance can be enhanced through positive and supportive responses

Key attributes of the successful leader include the ability to control her/his emotions and respond effectively to others when they are under pressure. It is truly in the heated moment that leaders set the example for how staff will be treated and respected in the agency. Every leader finds it difficult to work with certain behaviors or attitudes in their work with others. Workbooks 3 and 4, *Working with Differences* and *Communication Skills*, include activities to strengthen the leader's ability to understand his/her own style and vulnerabilities, work with different personalities under stress and enhance his/her ability to develop and maintain effective relationships.

Showing Appreciation

Being genuinely appreciative and showing it is one of the most important things a leader can model for his/her staff.

Showing appreciation does not come easy for everyone. Some personalities are more adept at this, and for others it may require extra effort. It is easy for leaders to forget how their positions come with a certain amount of power and how some people need positive feedback more than others. Giving recognition requires a little creativity on the part of leadership, but it is an undertaking worth the effort. Words are important and so are actions. Showing appreciation through acknowledgement and individualized, appreciative gestures is most effective. In this context, it is important to acknowledge the uniqueness of the person as well as the specific work that he/she performs.

Make a practice of catching staff doing something well and acknowledging this. Work hard at remembering staff names and stories about their personal families and the family cases they are carrying. Other ways to show appreciation include:

- Being accessible – even at home
- Listening everywhere and listen well
- Learning your staff's personal stories – who they are and what is important to them
- Stepping outside your cultural experience to participate in theirs
- Staying in face-to-face contact with staff, in the lunchroom and walking around to engage them, working along side them in meeting tight timelines or performing critical and sometimes menial tasks, e.g., cleaning up before or after a work function or meeting
- Attending unit and departmental meetings at consistent intervals

Leaders can set an inclusive and collaborative tone for how people value one another's work in the agency. The most obvious way to affirm staff is to tell them you appreciate the very specific things that they as individuals and/or work groups do. Acknowledgement can be both task related as well as how they relate and care for one another. This must be done in ways that are meaningful to the staff involved. Giving recognition and showing appreciation are skills that leaders can learn to do well and model for others. For more in depth information about showing appreciation, please see Workbook 4 of this series, *Communication Skills*. For leaders who want to recognize and encourage employees, *Encouraging the Heart* by James Kouzes and Barry Posner is a must read. It is referenced in the appendix of this workbook.

Important points to remember



- Personal integrity is the most important characteristic a leader can have, followed by being a “good communicator” and being “people focused.”
- The path to becoming an effective leader is both a character-building process and a relationship-building process. This requires that leaders develop emotional intelligence (EQ) and the ability to work with differences.
- EQ involves developing both internal and external capabilities. Successful leaders have the ability to control their emotions and know how to respond to others when they are under pressure.
- Leaders can set an inclusive and collaborative tone for how people value one another’s work in the agency.
- The most obvious way to affirm staff is to tell them you appreciate the very specific things they do as individuals and/or work groups. This must be done in ways that are meaningful to the staff involved.
- Giving recognition and showing appreciation are skills that leaders can learn to do well and model for others.
- Workbooks 3 and 4, *Working with Differences* and *Communication Skills*, include activities to strengthen the leader’s ability to:
 - Understand his/her own style and vulnerabilities
 - Work with different personalities under stress and
 - Enhance his/her ability to develop and maintain effective relationships.

1.6 Capacity Building: The Leadership Team



Building a strong and effective leadership team is the most important responsibility a leader can have. This includes the following agency leadership responsibilities:

Capacity-Building
Our leaders work as a team in setting priorities, promoting communication and modeling collaboration throughout the agency
Our agency places a high priority on and invests in developing and supporting first line supervisors
Our agency provides ample opportunities for training and professional development
Our leaders are effective in anticipating and communicating change
Our leaders are effective in garnering and/or advocating for resources necessary to meet our goals and agency mission

Working with Diverse Teams

There are several factors that are universal to people that make it challenging for an agency to build a strong, cohesive leadership team.

Leaders will find themselves working with individuals who⁸:

- Come from a variety of backgrounds (race, culture, ethnicity, gender, personality, age, religion, politics etc.) and have their own way of looking at the world which is influenced by their specific background
- Have conscious and unconscious stereotypes and prejudices regarding people who they perceive as different from them
- Come from both good and bad relationships with past authority figures that they unconsciously attempt to recreate on the job
- Have different styles of learning, behaving, and leading that have resulted from their past experiences and have served them well in most circumstances
- When under stress can experience distrust, defensiveness, inflexibility and insecurity, which can result in overt or covert conflict

Understanding and mastering one's own diversity and personality and then learning to adapt responses to the uniqueness of others is very challenging. But it is foundational to becoming an effective leader and leadership team member.

⁸ HUD Youthbuild Management Institute, *Cultural Bridges: Defusing the Diversity Powder Keg*, July 2001

Workbook 3 in this series, *Working with Differences*, explores the complexity of diversity including cultural, racial, learning and behavioral style differences. It provides assessment tools, case studies and learning activities designed to assist leaders and supervisors in understanding differences and adapting their responses to build strong interpersonal relationships and working teams. This workbook can be very helpful in building a leadership team.

Building Trust

Trust is the foundation of teamwork. On a team, trust is all about vulnerability, which is difficult for most people. Many things can get in the way of building trust. For example, making assumptions about others without attempting to clarify what is really going on; developing cliques among certain members to the exclusion of others; being afraid to ask for help when needed or concealing a mistake or weakness. Trust can develop in teams when leaders:

- Take time out to know one another; respect and understand individual differences, strengths and challenges
- Care about one another enough to encourage personal and professional growth

Workbook 3 in this series, *Working with Differences*, provides a number of tools and activities to challenge assumptions and learn about one another's learning and behavioral styles. A simple activity, *Building Understanding*, is presented here and could be used as a warm-up for a leadership meeting or retreat.

Activity: *Building Understanding*



Instructions:

If your team is small, do this together. Each group member answers the following questions:

1. Where did you grow up? How many children were in your family? Where do you stand in the birth order?

2. What challenged you as a child or teen?

2. How did those challenges influence the way you are today?

Creating a Collaborative Leadership Team

Many agencies, even small ones, have a culture of walls and a lack of collaboration between departments, units within departments, and even between individuals within units. It is the agency's leadership team that provides the example of how staff can work collaboratively and cooperatively across departmental and program units. In doing so, leaders can maximize synergy in problem-solving and create a caring and participatory culture for all. Leaders can enhance collaboration by:

- Building and modeling mutual support and collaboration with their own peers on the leadership team
- Developing mechanisms for interdepartmental and inter-unit communication
- Co-locating teams that need to work together to accomplish goals
- Developing opportunities for teaming projects and cases between units and departments
- Supporting and participating in celebrating the achievements of one another's work units
- Rewarding and affirming staff who practice collaboration and teamwork within and between work units
- Encouraging staff to participate in collaborative projects within and external to the agency
- Encouraging work units to meet together to share information, promising practices and support one another
- Job shadowing within and between functions and work units to encourage understanding and support of one another's jobs
- Cross-training between and among units

Activity: Forces For and Against Collaboration



Instructions:

1. Using the chart provided, identify forces in your agency that support and those that do not support inter-departmental and inter-unit collaboration. Focus on structure, processes and/or policies and not personalities
2. Select one of the factors that does not support collaboration
3. Identify actions you can take personally or as a group to minimize the effect of this factor.

Forces that *do* support collaboration

Forces that *do not* support collaboration

Forces that <i>do</i> support collaboration	Forces that <i>do not</i> support collaboration

Managing Conflict

Nothing poisons a work environment as quickly as “festering,” or unresolved conflict in the agency. This is often referred to as “agency politics.” This occurs in many situations such as: when individual supervisors and/or managers have subtle warfare going on with each other; when there are racial and cultural issues; and/or when poor performance, poor attendance or unethical conduct are obvious, but not addressed by management. It is important that leaders not duck their responsibility, but instead face and engage the conflicting parties or leadership team in appropriate discussions and resolution. Intervention may be needed from leaders in conflict situations where the following characteristics exist:⁹

- The situation is important and the conflict stands in the way of a crucial decision
- The situation is not a simple disagreement and is causing a business problem
- The people in conflict are highly dependent on one another to get a job done
- There are a lot of people who have an interest in resolving the conflict and/or morale is affected by the outcome
- The persons in direct conflict represent a group of “constituents” or subgroups within the agency, e.g. foster care versus adoption interests, or different cultural sub-groups

Conflict is inevitable whenever there are groups of people working together and, especially, in high stress situations. Child and family service leaders need conflict management skills and tools to be effective in maintaining a creative and productive agency culture. There are many courses and materials available on mediation and conflict resolution, which can be helpful.

Conflict is often crucial to making the best possible decisions as a leadership group. Artificial harmony can be just as destructive to team process, as too much or destructive conflict as illustrated in figure 1.6.

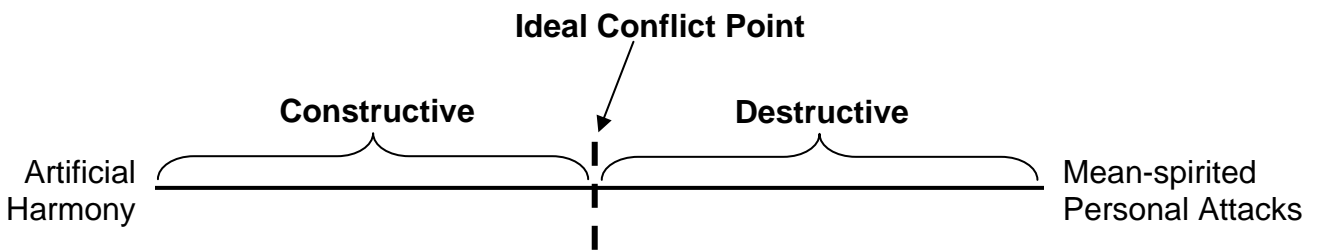


Figure 1.6 Conflict Continuum chart

When an agency’s culture does not allow for acknowledging and resolving conflicts, respect for leaders will be undermined and mediocrity can be the result. Some things to keep in mind when dealing with conflict as a team are:

- Establish conflict norms and make them clear among team members

⁹ Adapted from Dana, Daniel. *Conflict Resolution*. Madison, WI; McGraw-Hill. 2001.

- Focus conflict on ideas and concepts – not on personalities
- Gear conflict discussions to producing the best possible solutions; think win/win
- Put critical and difficult topics on the table to discuss
- Show appreciation for different styles in dealing with conflict

Ultimately, in surfacing and resolving conflict in leadership teams, it is not necessary that everyone agree. The important thing is that every member feels that he/she has been heard and can still respect and support the team's decisions.

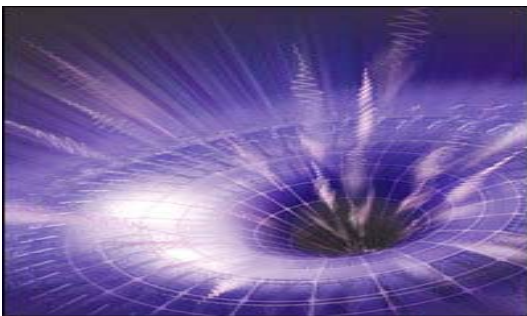
Communication within the Agency

Creating a participatory culture where good, open and honest communication takes place benefits everybody. It requires that leaders respect their staff through reaching out, listening, respecting and learning from them. Leaders demonstrate that they appreciate diverse points of view by actively asking for feedback on matters of importance to staff and the agency. They especially solicit input into matters that directly affect people's jobs. Clarifying how staff input will be used in advance helps to encourage honesty and openness and also acknowledges how difficult some decisions are to make in child and family service.

Many agencies identify communication between the agency leadership and staff and between different departments as an area where serious problems exist. Poor communication can lead to misunderstandings, rumors, resentment and poor morale. There is no such thing as having too much effective communication. When a communication vacuum exists, staff will fill in the gaps with their own, often inaccurate, interpretations. Their interpretations are often much worse than the reality.

Organizational black holes

A black hole is a collapsed star. Scientists tell us that they are objects in space where all matter has been crushed into a single point. They create such a huge gravitational pull that anything that gets near one, gets sucked in and never comes out again. Nothing can escape the clutches of the black hole, not even light.



Organizations can have black holes too. They occur within the hierarchy of an organization. Communication can be sucked in coming from either management or from staff. Black holes are so powerful that nothing can escape, not even logic.

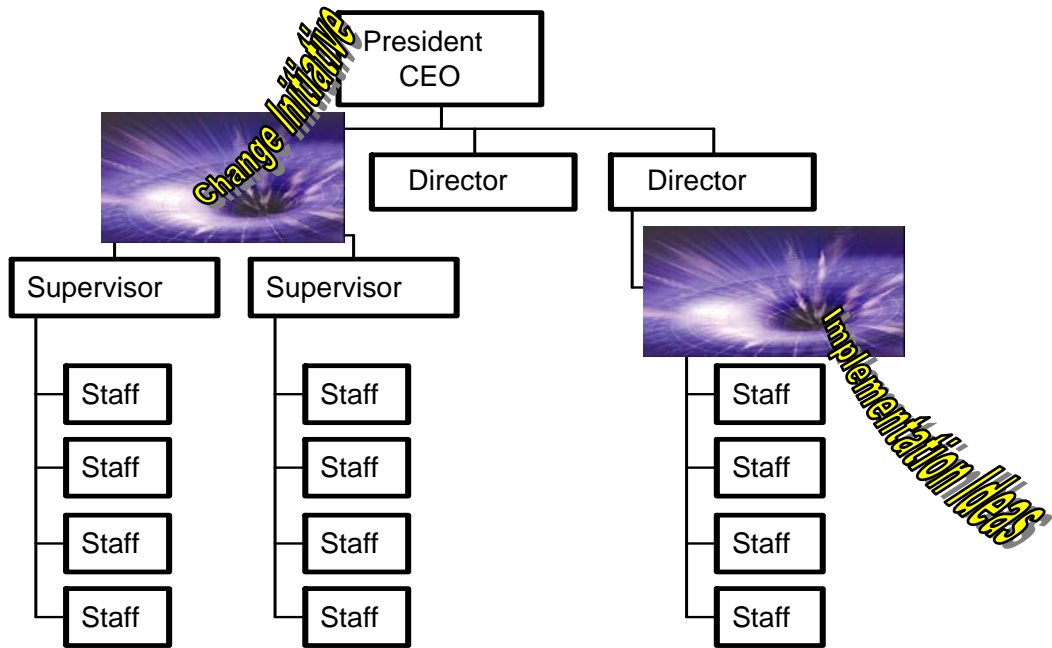


Figure 1.7 Organizational Black Holes

For example, the agency’s executive wants to communicate a “change initiative.” He/she tells his/her staff about the idea and instructs them to plan and implement it. However one of the leadership team has a different priority and/or doesn’t think as highly about the “change initiative” and forgets about it. The “change initiative” just got sucked into an organizational black hole. The “change initiative” never gets communicated down through the organization. A similar thing can happen from the bottom up where implementation ideas coming from front line staff in the organization get sucked into an organizational black hole on the way up.

Following are some strategies for reducing the power and impact of these black holes:

- Actively seek out resistance to the change initiative among the leadership team; it is much easier to address overt resistance than hidden resentment
- Create a commitment infrastructure where the culture of the organization will not allow middle managers to sabotage change initiatives coming from either above or below them in the hierarchy
- Make sure the change initiative gets communicated in a way that has good rationale and reasoning behind it in a way that is meaningful to all those affected by it
- Follow through on the change initiative to monitor how it is progressing through the organization
- Listen and demonstrate the value of feedback

Communicating change initiatives

In agency communication, it is wise to understand that what is said and what is heard may be different, because people tend to receive messages from their own perspective. In other words, from the perspective of “what’s in it for me?” (WIIFM)

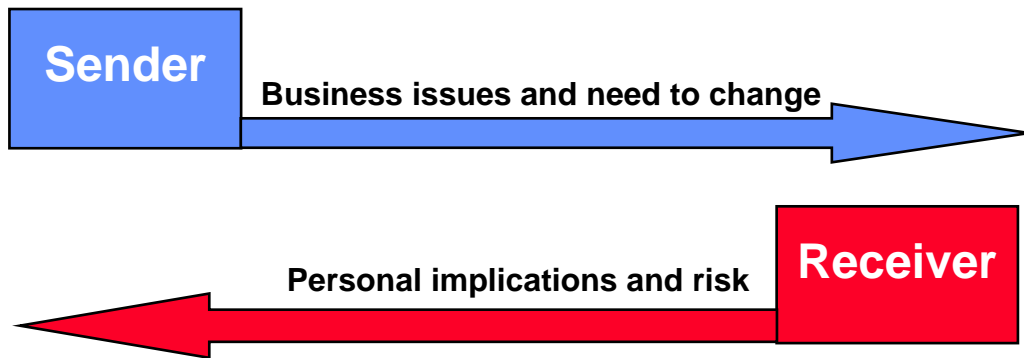


Figure 1.8 Communication – Senders and Receivers

The key point is that there must be rapport and trust between senders and the receivers. This is why the black hole phenomena can be so critical to agency communication. If the immediate boss does not communicate the change, then his /her staff are left to flounder, gossip and worry about the personal impact of the change. Most assuredly they will hear about it from others in the organization.

It is important for leaders to plan their communication strategies to make sure that the right person is sending the right message and the message is being passed on to staff consistently throughout the organization. In communicating change initiatives, there are preferred senders for different messages such as:

Leaders share messages about:

- Competitive issues or changes in the marketplace including customer issues
- Financial issues or trends
- What might happen if a change is not made (the risks of not making the change)
- A vision of the organization after the change takes place
- Scope of the change (including process scope, organization scope, tools/technology scope and systems scope)
- Objectives of the change including a definition of success (desired outcomes)
- Alignment of the change strategy with the business strategy
- How big of a change is needed (how big is the gap between where we are and where we are going)
- Who is most impacted and who is least impacted by the change

- The basics of what is changing, how it will change and when it will change, including what will not change

Front Line Supervisors share messages about:

- The expectation that change will happen and is not a choice
- The impact of the change on the day-to-day activities of each employee
- WIIFM “What’s in it for me” from the employee’s perspective
- Implications of the change on job security
- Specific behaviors and activities expected from employees
- Procedures for getting help and assistance during the change
- Ways to provide feedback

Both senior managers and supervisors share messages about:

- The overall timeframe for the change
- When will new information be available
- How will information be shared about the project
- Major milestones and deliverables
- Key decision points and milestones
- Early success stories

Following is a tool, *How to Engage Staff in Effective Communication*, that summarizes “best practices” in employee communication found in diverse industries and organizations.

Tool: How to Engage Staff in Effective Communication



Successful Leaders:

1. Act as communications champions

- The role of leadership is to communicate their visions and direction throughout the organization in clear and relevant terms.
- The CEO must be philosophically committed to the notion that communication with employees is essential to the achievement of agency goals.
- The leadership team must display a willingness to address challenging questions, listen carefully to staff and respond quickly to sensitive topics.
- Every manager and supervisor serves as a communications manager because people want to hear the news from their boss and not from peers or the grapevine.
- Match actions with words: the actions of management must match the values of the organization and the messages being communicated.

2. Commit to two-way communication

- The leadership encourages a variety of means for dialogue including: informal one-on-one discussions; formal regularly planned departmental meetings; reports from special committees organized around a task or problem to be solved; newsletters, etc.
- Leaders are above board with their own ideas, but also seek contrary thoughts and opinions, so that ideas and better solutions can be found.
- In seeking staff input on important and complex decisions, effective leaders seek to clarify in advance how decisions will be made and who is most appropriate to be making the decisions. For example is the leader asking for ‘consultation’, so he/she can make the best possible decision? Or does the leader want a consensus from a particular workgroup on a decision?

3. Deal with bad news

- The leadership team isn’t afraid to give or hear bad news. The organization’s culture needs to promote an attitude of honest dialogue where “don’t shoot the messenger” of bad news is a common theme.
- Studies have found that when bad news is candidly reported, an environment is created in which good news is more believable.

4. Know and appreciate where staff and clients are coming from

- Communication is phrased in a way that is meaningful and relevant to these different perspectives
- Each part of the organization understands who their customers and clients are and has an appreciation for their unique needs and perspectives.

5. Develop and deploy consistent communications strategies

- The leadership team seeks to communicate not only WHAT is happening within the organization but WHY it is happening.
- Information is communicated in a timely way.
- Leaders don’t dictate the way people should feel about good or bad news. It has been found to be more effective to communicate the who, what, why and where of the news and let staff draw their own conclusions.
- After every leadership meeting, ask the question: “What do we need to communicate to our staff?” This will help clarify the message and give a consistent method for disseminating it.

Important points to remember



- Understanding and mastering one's own diversity and then learning to adapt responses to the uniqueness of others is foundational to becoming an effective leader and leadership team member.
- Trust is the foundation of teamwork. On a team, trust is all about vulnerability, which is difficult for most people.
- It is the agency's leadership team that provides the example of how staff can work collaboratively and cooperatively across departmental and program units.
- Learning to surface and manage conflict is often crucial to making the best possible decisions as a leadership group.
- Artificial harmony can be just as destructive to team process as too much or destructive conflict.
- In dealing with conflict within the organization, the important thing is that everybody feels that they have been heard and can still respect and support the team's decisions.
- There must be rapport and trust between "senders" and "receivers" for effective communication to occur. People tend to send and receive communication from the perspective of "what's in it for me."
- The CEO/Executive and leadership team are the preferred senders related to business issues and opportunities.
- The immediate supervisor is generally the sender that the staff person wants to hear messages from related to personal impact.

1.7 Capacity Building: Anticipating Change and Developing Resources



Constant change is a fact of life in leading child and family service agencies in today's environment. In these times of significant cuts in public funding in this area, the top leader's responsibility is to make sure there are sufficient resources to carry out the agency's mission and services. This means that senior managers must be adept at anticipating and managing change and be continuously involved in developing sources of support for the agency.

Unfortunately, under the threat of budget cuts, many child and family service agencies resort to hiring freezes, wage freezes and other broad sweeping strategies that undermine the morale of the workforce, encourage poor outcomes and create a lack of trust in management. This can result in attrition, rather than retention, of talented people. Today's leader will need to be proactive in anticipating funding changes and acting in advance, so that budget cuts do not place the agency's essential services in jeopardy.



No margin, no mission. We may be social entrepreneurs - using every dollar of income to improve the health of our members and our communities - but we need to employ sound business principles to do social good.

- Dee Hock

For leaders who are new at anticipating resource needs and fund development, this is a very daunting challenge. Following are ten strategies that leaders can use to improve their capacity for managing change and insuring the agency's future:

- 1. Always have a current strategic plan in the pocket:** A current strategic plan and/or a compelling strategy, that is true to the agency's mission, is a tool that leaders use to obtain support of the legislature, contractors, foundations and other major stakeholders and donors on an ongoing basis. It is also a tool to engage the public, the non-profit board, and others in supporting the agency and helping to develop new revenue sources. It is more important than ever to have a plan, but it needs to be a plan that is real, exciting and robust to win friends and garner support.
- 2. Have a well thought out fund development plan and work it continuously:** Along with the strategic plan, it is necessary to have a fund development plan that addresses the agency's current funding needs and forecasts longer range funding requirements and potential sources of revenues. Regardless of whether the agency has a development staff person, leaders of today have to get directly involved with fundraising, meeting with major supporters/donors, and cultivating board members and advisors to be partnering with them to raise visibility and support for the agency and its work.

3. **Be proactive and visionary:** Leaders today have to live a couple of years into the future. They will have several “what if” scenarios/contingency plans. They will be looking for other sources of funding, such as other public agencies, grants, major donations at least one to two years before they actually need them. They will anticipate and make budget cuts in advance to preserve agency resources, particularly staff positions.
4. **Integrate the agency’s services:** It is the leader’s responsibility to assure that limited resources are managed effectively to reach outcomes. There are too many silos and specialization in large and small agencies that fragment client services, hamper interagency communication and increase costs. Integration of services gives agencies greater flexibility to manage outcomes and provide continuity of care (Lawrence, 1999).
5. **Engage staff and be open to new ideas:** Involvement of staff is especially important in redesigning services and cutting waste. They are the experts on the day-to-day work that has to be done. Being open to input and new ideas is an important key to success. Encourage creativity, innovative thinking, and pilot new ideas one project or case at a time.
6. **Have a rigorous public relations, educational and advocacy strategy:** Public and private agencies together need to be stimulating public concern and making a compelling case to the community for the importance of child and family services. People in funding and policy-making positions need to hear about the success stories and the good work that is being done. Provide positive stories to publishers and local TV stations on a regular basis so they can be aware of the good that happens for children and families.

In working with legislators, there is a need for ongoing education and public relations. It’s important to build relationships and a trustworthy reputation with key policy makers. Developing these relationships is an ethical responsibility of leaders. Many leaders shy away from doing this, but it is essential for the well being of underserved children and families, because they have no voice of their own. A leader in a public or private agency can learn to work with legislators within legal limits.

7. **Utilize board and advisors effectively:** Leaders need the support of their policy makers or board members. Most advisors and board members hate surprises so keep them apprised of what’s going on. Know the members who are dependable and their individual areas of strength. Know the talents of the board members and advisors and use these talents wisely and strategically. Certain individuals have vast business experience and can support and/or coach a leader through a major change or challenge. Some members will want to be kept in the loop, helping to consider the challenges and options leaders have put before them. Many advisors are best at meeting with legislators or other policy-makers. Others are best at fund raising and fund-development.
8. **Develop new strategic alliances and/or improve existing alliances:** Many public agencies are looking to the private non-profit agencies to provide needed services such as foster care, adoption and family preservation services, through use of performance

contracting. As a public agency leader, it is important to enlist the private sector in planning major system changes to the fullest extent possible and to develop positive strategic partnerships to carry out the work on an ongoing basis.

As a private agency leader, it is equally important to understand the implications of contracting in a tight budget, high accountability environment. There is no place for competition and antagonism between the private and public sectors in today's world. Public and private agency leaders need to set a different and more positive tone for their respective staffs and partner together with other agencies to meet the needs and achieve successful outcomes for children and families.

9. Lead with optimism and hopefulness: In today's uncertain times, people need leaders who have a positive, can-do approach to life and passion for their work. These leaders express genuine belief in the capacity of people to make a difference. They supply the means to achieve by facing reality proactively, encouraging their people and expressing optimism for the future. (Kouzes and Posner, 1993) Successful leaders work along side their staff and are especially visible during times of crisis. They are quick to express gratitude when others are putting forth their best efforts.

10. Continue to build credibility and trust: Mission-driven organizations and their leaders possess a public trust that is essential to their success. By involving staff and other stakeholders in the process of thriving in difficult times, this trust can be reinforced. By being trustworthy in collaborations and meeting contractual requirements, trust can flourish.

How leaders choose to master the challenges today will determine to what extent they and their agencies will be successful in the future. It is tempting to try to order these strategies along some timeline or priority. The truth is that today's leader must be doing all of these things simultaneously. It takes a strong heart and unwavering passion for the work. Most of all it takes a dedicated and loyal leadership team and staff to meet the leadership challenges of the 21st Century.

It is not uncommon for leaders to feel that they have not been adequately prepared for the various expectations related to resource development. Most have comfort zones and areas with which they are not so comfortable.

Use the activity that follows to explore areas of personal strength and areas for improvement in resource and fund development.

Activity: Comfort Zones in Resource Development



Instructions: Take a moment to answer the following questions:

1. What of the ten areas of resource development are you most confident about and do well?
2. How did you learn to be confident in these zones?
3. What area of resource development are you least confident with and don't do so well?
4. What specific action can you take immediately to challenge and increase your confidence in this uncomfortable zone?

Important points to remember



- Ability to anticipate and manage change are critical leadership skills.
- A current strategic plan and/or a compelling strategy, that is true to the agency's mission, is a tool that leaders use to obtain support of the legislature, contractors, foundations and other major stakeholders and donors.
- Today's leader will need to be proactive in anticipating funding needs and acting in advance, so that budget cuts do not place the agency's essential services in jeopardy.
- Integration of services and use of cross-functional teams can give agencies greater flexibility to manage outcomes and provide continuity of care.
- Involvement of staff who are expert in the day to day work is especially important in redesigning services and cutting waste.
- Public and private agencies together need to be stimulating public concern and making a compelling case to the community for the importance of child and family services.
- Know the individual talents of the board members and advisors and use these talents wisely and strategically.
- Public and private agency leaders need to set a different and more positive tone for their respective staffs and partner together with other agencies to meet the needs and achieve successful outcomes for children and families.
- In today's uncertain times, people need leaders who lead with optimism and have a positive, can-do approach to life and passion for their work.
- Mission-driven organizations and their leaders possess a public trust that is essential to their success. By being trustworthy in work with staff and partnerships with others, trust can flourish and agencies can thrive.

1.8 Capacity Building: Developing a Professional Organization



Promoting professionalism within the agency requires leaders to be proactive. There are three fundamental strategies that are necessary. These are:

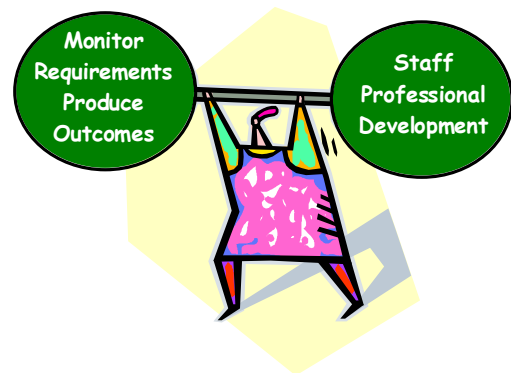
- First, leaders model the example of being life-long learners themselves
- They put particular emphasis on supporting the professional development of front line supervisors
- They value and support formal and informal professional development for all staff

Professional Development of Supervisors

Most research documents that staff retention is in the hands of the front line supervisor or “boss” (Kaye, B, Jordan-Evans, S, 2002). For example, the 2003 Federal General Accounting Office study attributes turnover to low pay in the field, high workloads, lack of supervisory support and insufficient training. However, officials and staff in all four of the states studied, indicated that supervisory support either motivated workers to stay despite job stress; or, lack of supervisory support was a critical factor in their decision to leave.

One of the most important thing leaders can do to develop the agency’s capacity as an effective and professional organization, is to have an effective system for developing supervisors. To be effective in retaining staff, supervisors must perform a dual role— monitoring and producing outcomes while facilitating the professional development of staff. This is a difficult role under the best of circumstances.

This workbook series “raises the bar” on expectations for supervisors, especially in those areas that have to do with coaching, mentoring, and building the professional competencies of their staff.



An agency that uses this training will need to be prepared for some backlash, because the supervisor’s job is becoming increasingly more complex as there are increasing demands for accountability and larger workloads to monitor. Staff turnover further compromises the ability of supervisors to do the job they were hired to do.

The supervisor’s style and relationship with his/her staff is of *standout importance* in attracting and retaining key talent (Corporate Leadership Council, 1998). It is, therefore, incumbent upon the agency to invest in the development of its supervisors in order to develop the capacity of its workforce.

Unfortunately, in most child and family service agencies, supervisors are least likely to be provided role specific training when they are promoted to their positions and they have less access to ongoing training than most staff. That is why this workbook series: *Staff Retention*

in *Child and Family Services*, available through Michigan State University School of Social Work, has been specifically designed to enhance competencies needed by supervisors to support the professional development of their staff and improve staff retention.



Activity: *Making your Agency's Supervisory Training Checklist*

Instructions:

Include members of your leadership team and agency supervisors in this small group activity

1. Review the Supervisory Competencies Inventory Tool in the Appendix of this workbook.
2. Using the Supervisory Competencies Inventory Tool as a reference, develop a checklist of competencies you believe need to be addressed in your agency's training program for supervisors.
3. As a leadership group, develop a plan for supporting front-line supervisors, as they participate in this training and on a day-to-day basis.

Note: The introduction in "The Role of Leaders" Workbook delineates which workbook in the series addresses each broad topic and the unit where a specific competency can be found.

Building a Multi-Cultural Workforce

Having a diverse workforce at all levels of the organization is perhaps more important in child and family service than in any other business. This is because the children and families served are also from diverse backgrounds. Culturally relevant decision-making is essential to achieving appropriate child and family service outcomes.

Moving an organizational culture from one that is primarily American white, middle-class mainstream in its outlook to one that is truly transformed into a multi-cultural mindset is a huge leadership challenge, but a necessary undertaking in today's world. Becoming a multi-cultural organization is a developmental process. It takes time and unwavering commitment from leaders. Some strategies that the leader can employ include:

- Develop a culture of zero tolerance for discrimination, racial jokes and comments and other forms of racism in the workplace
- Actively recruit and commit to developing and retaining a diverse and culturally competent work force in relative proportion to the population served, at all levels of the organization
- Provide ongoing staff training and support systems to assure cultural awareness and competence at all levels of the organization
- Make cultural relevance and competency a part of the agency's strategic plan
- Develop a diverse board, advisory groups, and work committees
- Engage multi-cultural communities in meaningful decision-making and collaborative efforts
- Assure that the office and workspaces honor cultural preservation and celebration; and are accessible in the communities served
- Assure that language translation services are provided, particularly in assisting and advocating for families who do not speak English well
- Assure that program policies and procedures are developed in the cultural context of the populations served, i.e., value systems, family definitions and traditions, gender and age, etc.
- Engage multi-cultural staff and community in continuous assessment and improvement of agency's performance, particularly relating to achieving culturally relevant outcomes for children served

In the short run, commitment to diversity can make the leader's job more complex. With the greater pool of experience and knowledge, comes more challenge and alternatives. More reaching out is required. More personal growth, compassion and understanding are demanded. There will be a need for honest efforts to recognize that sometimes, competing values and interests are legitimate and important. Today's multicultural work environment requires that differences be recognized and honored. Leaders will often have to reinforce this issue, by insisting on changes in policies and procedures and attitudes of some of their staff. Staff who declare that they "treat all people the same" can be blind to the need for change. Other staff

may resist because they have had earlier bad experiences or felt misunderstood or rejected when reaching out to peers or communities that are different from their own.

A fundamental step is to acknowledge the differences that affect child and family service decisions. These may include real life experiences of institutionalized racism, different modes of communication, different values about families and diverse personality styles within a culture. Being in an agency where staff are able to be authentic can enhance participation in the workplace. Cultural differences need to be faced by everyone in the workplace with courage and honesty. When all staff can feel safe to ask about and examine their assumptions about cultural differences, then real progress can be made in building a multi-cultural community.

In the long run, building a multi-cultural agency is a very rich experience. It is also of great benefit to the emotional health and sense of satisfaction for leaders, staff, board members and the families and children served.

Ideas for Staff Development

Leaders must develop the capacity of staff within the agency to act upon their shared values. Having a good staff development program assumes that an agency has developed its beliefs and values and has a practice model, which stems from these principles.

Developing staff capacity requires that leaders provide a climate conducive to learning. They will be on the lookout for opportunities to challenge their staff to improve themselves and promote professionalism among their staff by:

- Providing ongoing staff development programs within the agency that include building advanced competencies, including cultural competency, in areas of assigned work
- Developing ongoing partnerships between universities and the agency to provide a lab for staff and students to continue to learn
- Creating a process to exchange promising practices with other agencies and states
- Encouraging attendance at important child and family service conferences and gatherings by providing expense reimbursement and/or administrative leave
- Developing a pool of funds for ongoing education of staff
- Sponsoring “lunch and learn” groups where employees come together on a regular basis to share information about various professional topics over an extended lunchtime
- Developing and encouraging the use of a sharing library within the organization
- Offering staff the opportunity to learn about and use technology, including access to the internet for professional articles, education opportunities and research
- Encouraging attendance at local community colleges and university graduate education programs
- Promoting job shadowing where staff “spend a day in the life of” other staff to become familiar with new methods and processes

- Including learning and professional growth objectives in employee performance reviews
- Peer to peer networking

Developing a Learning Culture

This curriculum supports the concept of developing a “learning organization” in the child and family service field. This emphasis is derived from the understanding that child and family service staff are professionals and gain their professional pride and motivation from a personal mission to make a difference for people. In order to support this, there is a need for a culture that supports continuous learning and reflection. To further develop a learning organization, leaders will need to establish a culture of reflection and dialogue. The agency will need to build an atmosphere where it is safe to celebrate and distill lessons learned and to make continuous system and program improvements. In addition, an agency can encourage a spirit of experimentation and innovation to try new ways of helping children and families. Areas of focus and inquiry for continuous learning can include:

- Methods of improving processes and services for children and families
- Ways of improving responsiveness to clients
- Ways of improving communication between department and programs in the agency
- Ways of engaging the community in partnerships on behalf of children
- Ways to become more family centered in the agency’s approach
- Ways of building stronger partnerships between birth, foster and adoptive parents
- Ways of becoming an effective multi-cultural organization.

The areas for learning and improving effectiveness are endless. What is most important is that the agency’s leaders encourage, promote and facilitate team and individual learning experiences as an integral, valued and distinguishing feature of its culture.

Important points to remember



- In order to develop the agency's capacity as an effective and professional organization, the most important thing leaders can do is to invest in developing supervisors.
- Most research documents that staff retention is in the hands of the front line supervisor or "boss" (Kaye, B, Jordan-Evans, S, 2002).
- The supervisor's style and relationship with his/her staff is of *standout importance* in attracting and retaining key talent and developing the capacity of the agency's workforce.
- Having a diverse workforce at all levels of the organization is more important in child and family service than in any other business, because culturally relevant decision-making is essential to achieving appropriate child and family service outcomes.
- Having a good staff development program assumes that an agency has developed its beliefs and values and has a practice model, which stems from these principles and guides the content of training.
- Focusing on providing effective orientation to new employees and providing structured supervision and training in the first six months are vital retention practices.
- Child and family service professionals gain pride and motivation from a personal mission to make a difference for people. In order to support them, there is a need for a culture that supports continuous learning and reflection.

1.9 Policies and Practices

Policies
Hiring &
Orientation
Workloads
Supportive

Leaders are ultimately responsible for the philosophy, policy and procedures that aid or inhibit retention of employees. Progressive public and private child and family service agencies are retaining staff by paying attention to significant motivational factors in the workplace, particularly those that are most important to their staff.

In this unit, the following retention focused leadership responsibilities are explored:

Policies and Practices
Our agency provides salaries and benefits that are competitive with other child and family service agencies in our geographical area
Our agency has an effective, consistent and repeatable process for recruiting, selecting and putting the right people in the right jobs
Our agency has an effective and repeatable process for orienting and providing extra support for staff in their first year on the job
Our agency is effective in assuring that workloads are equitably distributed and fair
Our agency is a safe place to work both emotionally and physically
Our agency's employment policies support flexibility and professionalism

The Emerging Workforce

Workforce studies are identifying a new breed of American worker—confident, self-reliant and distinguished by a set of workplace values and expectations that vary significantly from what managers have encountered in the past. This growing group called “emergent workers” comprise about 1/3 of the workforce and is expected to include the majority of all employees in the near future. The emerging worker’s values and attitudes cut across age, race and gender lines. A major workforce study conducted by Spherion in 2005 identified a serious disconnect between what employers and workers see as retention drivers.¹⁰ The emergent worker identifies financial compensation, benefits, growth and earning potential and time and flexibility as their top priorities; whereas, the employer identifies management climate, supervisor relationship, culture, work environment and benefits as top retention factors. This information has important significance for the policies and procedures that can be developed by agencies related to staff retention. This section emphasizes the policy and practice issues that are important to emergent workers, with additional focus on issues identified by resilient child and family service staff and managers as pertinent to them.

¹⁰ Information regarding this study and the “emergent worker” can be found on the Spherion website at www.spherion.com.

Salaries, Benefits and Non-Monetary Rewards

Many studies of turnover in child and family service cite low pay as the most important determinant factor in staff turnover. Unfortunately, low pay is too often a real factor in turnover, particularly in private agencies. So the first rule of thumb is that pay rates, health and medical insurance and time-off policies need to meet basic employee needs/expectations and be competitive with other child and family service agencies in the geographic area. Most leaders are aware of their competitive market by reviewing national and state salary studies on a regular basis and making adjustments when necessary. It is also important for leaders to continuously advocate for better pay in child and family services. There are many other “helping professions” with comparable degree requirements and less responsibility that pay much better.

Low pay can be a disincentive, but there comes a point where increasing pay doesn't necessarily become an incentive. There is little evidence in research that simply paying people more is the most critical factor in retaining employees. Studies of resilient staff, those who are committed long term to the profession of child and family service, report that they are motivated more by intrinsic factors such as “making a difference for kids” and feeling a sense of pride in their work, their peers and their agency.

Nonetheless, in a traditionally underpaid profession, fairness, equity and soft benefits assume a relatively high value. Private child and family service agencies in many states have trouble staying competitive with the public sector and, therefore, must look for ways to contain their fixed costs, while compensating staff in more flexible ways. Some examples include:

Lump sum bonuses: Some agencies use lump sum bonuses to compensate a valued person at the top of her/his range for continuing outstanding performance. This keeps fixed costs under control. In lean years, agencies may use a pool of dollars with the same set amount of pay raise for everyone, including upper level managers. Creative use of lump sum bonuses can go a long way to improve morale.

Deferred signing bonuses: Many younger staff are accustomed to seeing signing bonuses among their peers. Paying the signing bonus at the one or two year anniversary can give an employee something to look forward to.

Position levels: Allowing a level change and raise at the one year mark or after attending specific training and/or provisional period can be an additional retention incentive.

Providing opportunities for internal promotions and lateral moves: Having the opportunity for promotion and/or lateral moves to enhance professional skills is very important to staff and can be a significant factor in reducing burnout and promoting retention.

Other tangible rewards: If agencies can't give money give something else, such as a special day off, a shortened workday, gift certificates, etc.

Recruiting and Selecting the Right Staff for the Team

Having the right people in the right positions is one of the most critical success factors for any agency or organization. Stephen Covey was asked: "What is the most crucial activity of any management or leadership team?" He answered: "recruiting, selecting and positioning people." (Covey, 2004) Jim Collins, in his book, *Good to Great*, also makes the point that great companies seek first to "have the right people in the right seats on the right bus." (Collins, 2001) Agency leaders may not be directly involved in recruiting and selecting staff for most front-line positions, but it is their responsibility to assure that effective processes are in place and performed consistently. It is especially important that leaders are directly involved in selecting program managers and supervisors for their management team, as these staff have the most influence on retention in the organization.

Workbook #6 in this series, *Recruiting and Selecting the Right Staff in Child and Family Service*, provides position profiles of effective supervisors and child and family service workers and details information about how to develop an effective recruitment and selection process that is relevant to child and family service practice.

Emphasizing the Importance of the First Year on the Job

Research indicates that child and family service staff make a decision to stay or leave the field early on, usually within the first two years of employment. An individual's initial experience with supervision plays a significant part in that decision. One study of turnover rates in Michigan reported that 47% of staff who leave foster care in the private sector, do so within the first year of employment. (Michigan Federation for Children and Families, 2000) Given this information, focusing on providing effective orientation to new employees and providing structured supervision and training in the first six months are vital retention practices. Workbook 5 in this series, *The First Six Months*, provides a six stage process for providing supervisory support during the first six months to a year on the job.

Workloads and Caseloads

Large workloads/caseloads and an over-abundance of paperwork are also significant factors in staff turnover in child and family service. Agencies often take the position that not much can be done about this, given the fact that funding is very limited. This can be a self-defeating prophecy when agencies take a passive stance related to workloads and workload management.

There are several steps that agencies can take in reducing the workload burden on front-line staff. These are as follows:

Simplify and consolidate paperwork and case documentation

When was the last time the agency reviewed all of the paperwork and documentation needed for each case, with the intention of consolidating and simplifying requirements? Many social workers leaving child and family service cite paperwork as their downfall. Regular culling of paperwork and using portable technology (laptops and PDAs) to handle necessary requirements can be very cost-effective and especially appealing to younger workers.

Use current technology to support staff in their work

Current technology can enable staff to be more effective and efficient in doing day-to-day work, as well as improve recordkeeping in both business and program functions such as inputting case data to directly produce case reports. It can also be used to enhance communication between and among staff and management through the use of e-mail, pagers, voice and text messaging. Technology can enable staff to work from remote locations and can help staff stay connected when in riskier environments.

Younger staff and new recruits most likely grew up in a world of computers, video games, digital photography, e-mail and, of course, the Internet. For this generation, technology has become an essential and expected part of life. The agency's more seasoned staff may feel differently and may even be a little intimidated or threatened by technology. One of the realities of today's world is that technology is critical to an agency's success and staff retention, and will be even more so in the future.

Maximize learning and support during the first six months on the job

Research tells us that most staff turnover in child and family service occurs in a person's first year on the job. The quality of supervision during this vulnerable period can make a very real difference. Agencies will need to support supervisors during this period by valuing a reasonable pre-service orientation period and gradually assigning cases, as the new staff person's competencies and confidence increase. Workbook #5 in this series provides a structure for the first six months for supervisors to follow with new staff. Some agencies are finding ways to provide pre-service training opportunities prior to assigning staff to a particular geographical area or caseload. Other agencies have used contractual staff to cover vacant caseloads during transition periods and/or less emergency prone cases, such as re-licensing of foster families.

Reduce waste and redundancy in child and family service processes

Find out what are the most critical success factors in reaching outcomes for children and families. Focus on those and seek to reduce waste and redundant actions and processes throughout the organization. When was the last time the agency flowcharted one of its processes? It is amazing at how many steps are redundant and how many avoidable hand-offs occur from one part of the agency to another.

Think about streamlining long processes. For example, if you know that it takes up to a year to process a foster home license, ask why. Challenge staff to eliminate unnecessary delays and streamline processes.

Consider using cross-functional teams to manage the overall burden of caseloads and documenting services

Assign teams to cases, as appropriate. When there is more than one caseworker in a home, consider how contacts can be consolidated to meet visiting requirements. For example, could an agency nurse visit families who have pre-school children to do health, development and safety visits, while social workers work with birth parents toward reunification?

Other ideas for reducing workloads

It is important for leadership to always be considering ways of reducing child and family service workloads and stress, while meeting requirements for quality service.

- If the agency is carrying staff vacancies for too long, reducing capacity to bring on new cases or overburdening experienced workers, leaders might ask why and make the process of hiring more efficient and effective. (See Workbook #5 for more detail related to staff recruitment and selection.)
- Consider how technical and clerical staff can take on paperwork functions so that case managers can be freed to provide more intensive services in critical success areas.
- Certain technical and social work tasks can also be contracted out, such as using social work aides and/or experienced foster and adoptive parents to help with recruitment and retention. Usually the budgetary impact of contracting specific services is small, compared to other alternatives.
- Consider entering into inter-agency agreements which are mutually beneficial.
- Use trained volunteers to do technical functions and transportation as appropriate.

Flexibility

As the labor shortage increases, employers must offer a flexible workplace in order to attract and retain top-quality employees. Parents with children, adult children of aging parents, baby boomers looking to work past the traditional retirement age and individuals simply in need of more time are demanding that employers offer nontraditional schedules, tele-working and other benefits that give them more personal time and a better quality of life. There are many reasons to consider giving child and family service staff more flexibility in managing their workload. They include:

Nature of the job: Flexibility can counterbalance stress and attract employees who want more autonomy. An effective child and family service worker will be meeting with families in their homes at various times of the day and night and sometimes on weekends. Creating schedules with this inevitability in mind can enable the work. Agencies that provide flexible hours and the ability to store up “flex time” are better able to be supportive of their staff and the work that has to be done.

Times are changing: In the past, staff had to be in the office to do paper work, cater to their secretary’s schedules, answer telephones and reach contacts. With cell phones, laptop computers and other high tech mobile devices, staff can work from their cars and their homes more efficiently, especially when crowded office environments are not conducive to completing work on time. Having up-to-date technology available is a factor in holding on to staff and helping them to be more efficient. This is particularly important to younger workers, who are very comfortable with technology and may be critical and unsatisfied when these tools are not available in an agency.

Child and family service is family oriented: Some staff need to coordinate schedules with spouses, child care and other personal requirements. Job sharing and part-time assignments can help staff to integrate family and work requirements. Contractual work is an underutilized resource in child and family service and can be an important resource in many functions, particularly where hard and fast employment rules restrict flexibility.

Mutual trust and support: Flexibility helps staff balance the demands of work with the demands of their personal lives, but it also helps employers. Employees who are given the trust and support to work flexibly tend to be happier, more productive and loyal to their employers.

As competition for good child and family service staff increases, flexible work arrangements with technology support can become an essential employee recruitment and retention tool. (Booth, 2002)

Emotional and Physical Safety in the Workplace

Leaders have a legal and moral obligation to provide an environment where staff are free from emotional harassment, racial or cultural discrimination and protected from physical and emotional harm.

In interviews with caseworkers, the issue of safety comes up time and time again. They are asking that their leaders “have their back” in risky situations. They need to know that when they extend themselves into an emotionally or physically risky situation, their agency is behind them and supportive of them.

In an emotionally healthy setting, leaders and supervisors work to create an atmosphere of collaboration, trust, open communication and honest expression of feelings. As a first step towards this, agency leaders can create a workplace that is physically safe, clean, culturally sensitive and appealing for children, families and staff. This is the easy part. Unfortunately physical space often shows neglect and lack of caring for the people who use it, especially in some large urban child and family service agencies. The agency’s physical space either is welcoming or not and forms a first impression of the emotional wellness and culture of the agency. The impression one has of the agency’s physical setting radiates the agency’s beliefs about staff and the people it serves.

The issues of secondary trauma, burnout and stress are very central to child and family service work. Child and family service workers operate in an environment that meets the criteria established for high levels of workplace trauma, including contact with traumatized clients, high levels of responsibility, public and media scrutiny, high workload, the utilization of empathy, working alone in the community and lack of work experience. (Howe, P., and Milstein, H., 2001) Some agencies have developed peer support and mentoring mechanisms to aid staff in anticipating and living with potentially traumatic events and loss. In some areas, foster and prospective adoptive parents are asking states to consider providing grief and loss support to help them when children must move.

There is increasing evidence that staff and clients need to be supported to express their emotions and feelings related to the work, in order to avoid undue stress and burnout. A study examining occupational stress in child and family service supervisors noted that those who suppressed angry feelings on the job tended to experience increased stress and physical symptoms. In addition, these staff expressed more dissatisfaction with their coworkers. (Bednar, 2003) Working in an environment where it is safe to express emotions about the work can lead to a higher degree of trust and sense of support among colleagues.

Being proactive about risk and safety

Creating a safe environment for staff helps the agency to:

- Make difficult decisions and take appropriate actions in situations of risk
- Utilize accepted standards and processes, as required by agency policies and procedures and by State and Federal laws
- Support staff in situations of physical and emotional risk
- Achieve outcomes

Risk cannot and should not be avoided or nothing will get done. Creating a safe and supportive environment for staff to take necessary risks is linked to an organization's ability to achieve its mission and make necessary changes to keep up with the times. The way an agency manages these necessary risks affects staff morale, productivity and outcomes.

Program managers and supervisors are in a strategic position to manage risk in the organization. They are the lynchpin that holds the organization together and they determine whether an organization can create a safe environment for employees. They can be proactive in putting into place the processes to predict, control and mitigate risk.

Respecting differences in risk tolerance

People differ in their comfort level and readiness for risk. Some people, when presented with a situation, may have a natural propensity for taking risk while others facing the same situation seek to avoid risk. Risk taking theory states that a person's readiness to take risk is based on three factors:

- Individual - Each person's individual propensity toward risk-taking
- Organizational - Perception of the degree to which the organization supports and trains staff and is otherwise prepared for risk taking
- Role - Each person will consider risk differently, based on his/her role and responsibilities within the agency

Difference in individual risk taking styles can be an advantage to the agency by providing checks and balances. Those who are more cautious may check those who would launch off into a potential disaster and vice-a-versa. It's important for the agency to establish psychologically safe environments where differences are both honored and respected and people are encouraged to collaborate on difficult decisions and situations.

Finally, when bad things do happen and/or a high risk situation is about to happen, administration must step up and take appropriate responsibility for making decisions or for not having made the right decisions. When individual staff and/or supervisors are not supported in risky situations or blamed for making a mistake, years of building a positive culture of safety can go down the drain.

Tool: Safety Planning Guidelines



Develop safety policies

The agency will need safety and risk management policies that are:

- Clearly stated and understood by all
- Translated into specific expectations for an individual's roles and responsibilities
- Involves everybody from the Director to Janitor and includes resource parents

Develop a proactive belief statement

The agency beliefs can contain a statement of the agency's desired culture for safety and risk management such as:

- "We strive to minimize conditions of risk for staff, children, and families and we learn from our accomplishments and our mistakes."

Reassess practices and facilities for risk/safety potential regularly

Having a regular review schedule helps to reduce risk and is good risk management practice.

Develop safety procedures

The agency should have written procedures, safety protocols and "what if" scenarios to detect and prevent potentially hazardous conditions.

Train supervisors and managers

Periodic training and group discussions in decision-making and risk management procedures will help the agency prepare to handle situations consistently.

Establish internal and external crisis plans

Bad things happen even in the best agencies; it is wise to prepare for them in advance by having:

- An effective communications plan for emergencies that includes the leadership team, staff and board of directors
- A positive relationship with the media by providing them with regular positive news reports
- A media plan in place to deal with crisis that designates official spokespersons

Establish an effective review process

When situations happen, examine potentially hazardous situations and and/or actual incidents and integrate lessons learned into practice.

Establish and consistently apply a safety protocol

Identify and review potentially unsafe situations in advance of performing work in the field.

Creating Balance in the Workplace

Child and family service is about family support and preservation. So leaders need to reinforce these values in their work with staff. Encouraging staff to find balance between their personal, family and work lives is one way that leaders can help staff live a quality life and increase their loyalty to the agency. Supporting time off and being able to leave guilt free at the end of the day or when going on vacation is valuable to staff. Many resilient child and family service workers talk about how their agency is like a family to them. When things go wrong in their personal or family lives, their leaders and peers stand behind them. When there is cause for celebration in their personal and family lives, their leaders and peers celebrate with them. This is a very unique part of working in a caring child and family service agency.

Enjoying work is about balance and respect for family. It can also be about having fun together. Consider the following thoughts:

- The more high stress the job, the more there is need for fun to keep balance and blow-off steam in positive ways.
- Stress reduction through efforts to have fun can translate into less absenteeism and higher productivity.
- Employees and bosses with a good sense of humor tend to be more flexible and innovative.
- Senior executives must be able to lighten up and have fun in order for it to become part of the culture.
- Fun doesn't always have to be planned. It can be spontaneous.
- What is enjoyable for one person is not always enjoyable for another. It is important to be sensitive and respect individual differences.

Workbook #4, *Communication Skills*, has a unit on communicating encouragement that gives suggestions on how to support and acknowledge staff in the workplace.

Wellness

Many child and family service agencies are exploring ways to help employees take better care of themselves through on-site exercise programs, diet groups, gym memberships, smoking cessation groups and counseling and support group programs. Agencies may be able to partner with other organizations such as health insurance groups to provide some of these benefits. By increasing the awareness of staff and supporting them to value their personal and family's health, this attitude can trickle down. Ultimately, it can lead to putting more emphasis on maintaining high health standards and services for the children and families served.

Activity: *What Do You Do to Encourage Balance and Fun?*



Instructions: Take a moment to answer the following questions:

1. List those things that make working at your agency enjoyable for you.

2. What things can you do in your role to encourage balance and fun for staff?

Important points to remember



- Leaders are ultimately responsible for the management philosophy, policy and procedures that aid or inhibit retention of employees.
- Since low pay is a critical issue in staff retention, it is important for leaders to continuously advocate for better pay in child and family services.
- Agency leaders may not be directly involved in recruiting and selecting staff for most front-line positions, but it is their responsibility to assure that effective processes are in place and performed consistently. It is especially important that leaders are directly involved in selecting program managers and supervisors for their management team.
- There are several steps that agencies can take in reducing the workload burden on front-line staff. These include: using technology, streamlining paperwork and creating cross-functional teams.
- As the labor shortage increases, employers must offer a flexible workplace in order to attract and retain top-quality employees. This includes flexible hours, job sharing, telecommuting and other incentives.
- Leaders have a legal and moral obligation to provide an environment where staff are free from emotional harassment, racial or cultural discrimination and protected from physical and emotional harm.
- Encouraging staff to find balance between their personal, family and work lives is another way that leaders can help them live a quality life and increase their loyalty to the agency.

1.10 Outcomes and Accountability



Leaders need to be ethical and responsible stewards of agency assets. They need to assure that financial and human resources are focused on achieving the organization’s mission and outcomes as effectively as possible, while meeting federal, state and funding requirements. This unit focuses on the many responsibilities that leaders carry for maintaining agency outcomes and accountability.

Outcomes and Accountability
Our agency has strong financial systems and exercises effective management over the use of financial and human resources
Our agency makes sure that everyone knows what is expected of them in terms of quality of service and outcomes
Our agency is current and competitive in its use of technology; and uses data and technology effectively to make decisions and measure results
Our agency uses effective strategies for acknowledging accomplishments of individuals and workgroups
Our agency celebrates small and large victories and successes

Child and Family Service leaders have many constituencies and processes that make up accountability in an agency, as illustrated in figure 1.9 below.

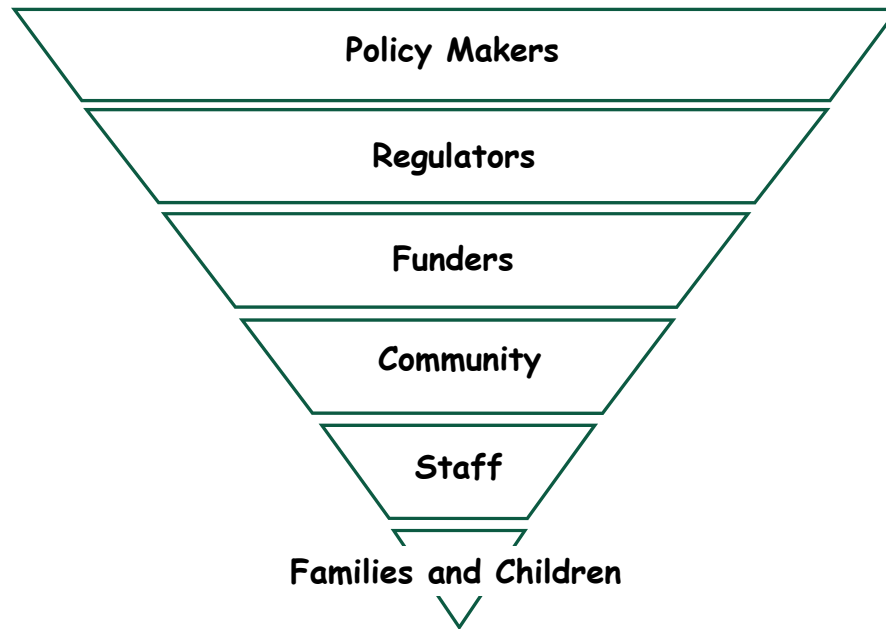


Figure 1.9 Multiple Constituencies for Accountability

Activity: *Flipping the Accountability Pyramid*



Instructions: Answer the following questions as an individual or in a discussion group.

1. Define which constituency your agency is most accountable to and discuss the reasons behind this.
2. How would the agency services change, if you put more emphasis on being accountable to children and families?
3. How would the agency services change, if you put more emphasis on being accountable to your staff?

Laws, Licensing and Standards

At a bare minimum, agency leaders need to be concerned about meeting laws and licensing standards on an ongoing basis. Agencies that put in place systems for continually monitoring licensing and accreditation standards, such as peer review of cases on regular intervals, are more likely to be in compliance when reviews occur. These agencies are also better protected when crises, accidents or other types of licensing complaints occur.

More agencies are finding it necessary to become accredited for funding to enhance their credibility. These processes require quality assurance, utilization and case review processes to be implemented and monitored on a regular basis. Some accreditation bodies and/or contracts with public agencies require client rights processes. Also federal CFSR systemic factors require that states have effective case review processes built into the agency's system for monitoring compliance with multiple legal and outcome-related requirements.

Maintaining compliance with these requirements puts agencies in the position of needing staff dedicated to quality assurance. With respect to staff retention, when these processes are well-managed, they can protect the agency and staff from inappropriate lawsuits, enhance agency credibility and add to the perception that an agency is a professional and effective place to work.

Accountability for Goals and Outcomes

All constituents have a stake in the agency's success but clients stand to lose the most when the agency is not productive. People tend to under-perform when expectations are low, and no one wants to work in a non-productive situation for very long. When there is a culture of productivity and clear expectations for achievement, there is more likely to be success. Accountability is everybody's business and an important concept for leaders to model and reinforce. Setting goals and meeting outcomes are an important part of developing and maintaining high morale and a culture for retention.

Traditionally, child and family service agencies have been more focused on process than outcomes. In recent years, with the advent of the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process, there has been more emphasis on achieving timely outcomes. How an agency administers outcome requirements is critical to success. Agencies that are autocratic and demeaning to staff who do not or cannot reach outcomes because of lack of resources will have difficulty retaining staff. Following are some key points for leaders to consider when seeking better and timelier outcomes for children and families:

- Leaders need to be role models by adhering to high performance standards within the senior management team.
- Leaders need to commit to measurable outcomes related to management and total agency goals and keep these visible through team scorecards or scoreboards.
- Leaders and staff need to be on the same page as to what constitutes quality services versus meeting federal and state outcomes for children and families.

- Leaders need to provide and allocate adequate resources to achieve outcomes.
- Leaders need to work to reduce barriers, redundancy and wasted time in achieving outcomes.
- Leaders need to put processes in place to support, improve and measure individual and team performance in meeting goals and objectives.

The following activity can be used to encourage discussion between leaders and staff about what constitutes quality services and how the pressure to meet timely outcomes might facilitate and/or detract from staff definition of quality services.

Activity: *Quality vs. Outcomes*



Instructions: Answer the following questions as an individual or in a discussion group.

1. Choose a service program and list what attributes would define quality services for this program.
2. What outcome measures are expected for this program? Are these the same as the identified quality attributes or different for this program?
3. Do leaders and staff have the same perspectives on this issue? If perspectives differ, how can different views be reconciled?
4. What can the agency do to insure that both quality and outcome issues are addressed sufficiently in providing services?

Accountability: Data and Technology

Although technology has been commonplace in science, industry and business for many years, many child and family service agencies have lacked sufficient resources and/or the will to make it a priority. Basically, technology has to be seen by today's leaders as providing a series of essential tools to be used, to assure agency accountability in all areas. Technology can:



- Provide information for making critical agency decisions and setting management and program goals and priorities, enabling more informed and faster decision making
- Document services provided, outcomes and critical success factors
- Maintain ongoing compliance with state and federal regulations
- Provide information and data for evaluation, business and program planning
- Provide feedback on system-wide activities and outcomes
- Capture, analyze, and disseminate information

Staff involvement in technology decision-making

It is essential to involve staff in the decision processes for both selection and implementation planning of new systems. One reason their involvement is necessary is because the information generated will require their interpretation to ensure it meets user needs and is able to be applied in constructive ways.

Staff will be able to determine what questions need to be answered by the data reports to assist them in doing their work. Qualitative aspects of children, families, and service providers are difficult to adequately capture in numerical formats. For example, performance scores of some agencies and people may appear unduly high or low in computer-generated reports that summarize activities.

It is essential that people use the rules of “common sense” to interpret and transform data into information that is meaningful. The agency will want to use data reports and numbers as guides to making better decisions. It is also important to avoid reacting spontaneously to the data, making snap or inappropriate decisions.

Properly used data systems and generated reports can provide vital information for answering management or evaluation questions. From how to achieve outcomes faster and more cost effectively to forecasting future service or funding needs, rapid communication and evaluation of information can help an agency determine its priorities and focus its change efforts strategically.

Fiscal Accountability

Leaders need to understand and develop analytical skills regarding the business and financial side of child and family services. Having knowledge and skill in this area is crucial for several reasons. Leaders need to:

- Be able to anticipate and make informed decisions to develop budgets that reflect the agency's strategic plan and priorities
- Monitor and balance expenses with revenues throughout the fiscal year
- Minimize the impact of budget cuts on the agency's core services and mission, utilizing the expertise of the budget office, while remaining in the driver's seat
- Be able to understand patterns and trends to forecast financial viability of the organization into the future and make necessary strategy adjustments
- Control overhead, capital and management costs both short-term and long-term
- Oversee the ethical management of the agency's finances and be ultimately responsible to the governing body for carrying out fiscal responsibilities
- Assure that funding allocations meet the requirements of donors, grantors, contractors, and legal guidelines, while maintaining sufficient flexibility to address priorities
- Understand audits and the financial condition of the agency

Human service agencies are entrusted with financial resources to carry out their missions. Leaders that mishandle public funds or fail to anticipate and seek out sufficient resources to perform their responsibilities are doomed to fail. This is usually seen as the ultimate betrayal of stakeholders and staff.

Honoring Staff and Celebrating Success

Some of the most critical human needs that affect staff commitment and performance are:

- Pride in one's work and employer
- Work that has meaning—staff want to be part of something that is doing good and accomplishing goals
- Clear goals and understanding of one's role in accomplishing these
- A voice in shaping how the work is to be done
- Professional autonomy appropriate to one's experience and education
- Acknowledgement and recognition for individual and team achievements

And, thus, we end with where we started, using Covey's definition of leadership: "Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves." Leaders can make honoring and celebrating staff achievement a high priority function of their jobs. The following story illustrates this very well.

A Consultant's Story

A team of outside consultants had worked in many states, but one experience stands out. They were finishing a grueling day with a top-level state management group. It was after 5 o'clock before they could debrief with the group and plan for the next day's statewide annual review meeting to be held with front-line staff. After their official work was done, the state-level staff began to finalize their plans to personally prepare lunch for over 100 people for the next day's meeting. When the big day came, together we identified and celebrated the group's specific accomplishments for the year. At lunch, the state-level leadership staff served the meal they prepared complete with ice cream sundaes for all.

Important points to remember



- Leaders need to be ethical and responsible stewards of agency assets, ensuring that financial and human resources are focused on achieving the organization's mission and outcomes and that the agency meets federal, state and funding requirements.
- Agencies that put in place systems for continually monitoring licensing and accreditation standards, such as peer review of cases on regular intervals, are more likely to be in compliance when reviews occur.
- Accountability is an important concept for leaders to model and reinforce and it is everybody's business. People don't perform well when expectations are low.
- Technology has to be seen by today's leaders as providing a series of essential tools to be used to assure agency accountability in all areas.
- Properly used data systems and generated reports can provide vital information for answering management or evaluation questions such as how to achieve outcomes faster and more cost effectively and how to forecast future service or funding needs.
- Leaders interested in staff retention make honoring and celebrating staff achievement an important priority.

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Tool: Blue Money and Green Money – Turnover Cost Calculation ¹¹

NOTICE PERIOD <i>Green Money (actual) Costs:</i>	
1. Last paycheck, accrued vacation, separation pay	\$ _____
2. Increased unemployment tax	\$ _____
3. Continued benefits	\$ _____
<i>Blue Money Costs (appropriate salary/hour) x (time spent on each activity):</i>	
1. Administrative costs for processing the separation: process benefits; contact unemployment office, Payroll, IS departments; schedule exit interview; etc.	\$ _____
2. Lower productivity: employee, peers, supervisor, subordinates	\$ _____
3. Exit interview, transition meetings	\$ _____
VACANCY PERIOD <i>Green Money (actual) Costs:</i>	
1. Advertising and recruiter fees	\$ _____
2. Interview expenses (meals, mileage, or other)	\$ _____
3. Printing costs for company marketing materials	\$ _____
4. Criminal checks, reference checks, credit checks, etc.	\$ _____
5. Medical exams and drug tests	\$ _____
6. Temporary/contract employee costs	\$ _____
7. Overtime costs	\$ _____
8. Relocation expenses and salary	\$ _____
<i>Blue Money Costs (appropriate salary/hour) x (time spent on each activity):</i>	
1. Lost productivity: peers, supervisor, subordinates	\$ _____
2. Advertising creation and placement	\$ _____
3. Recruiter selection	\$ _____
4. Administrative costs: ordering forms and copies of annual reports, scheduling and scoring assessments, etc.	\$ _____
5. Resume screening	\$ _____
6. Interviews: first, second, third	\$ _____
HIRING/ORIENTATION PERIOD <i>Green Money (actual) Costs:</i>	
1. Orientation materials (handbook, video, handouts, etc.)	\$ _____
2. Formal training programs (materials, course fees)	\$ _____
3. Informal one-on-one training (materials, if any)	\$ _____
<i>Blue Money Costs (appropriate salary/hour) x (time spent on each activity):</i>	
1. Orientation participants' salaries	\$ _____
2. Lost productivity: peers, supervisor, subordinates	\$ _____
3. Administrative costs: orientation setup, ordering materials, etc.	\$ _____
4. Informal training and one-on-ones	\$ _____
HIDDEN COSTS	
1. Missed deadlines and other Client issues due to turnover	\$ _____
2. Loss of organization knowledge	\$ _____
3. Lower morale due to overwork	\$ _____
4. Learning curve	\$ _____
6. Loss of client relationships	\$ _____
7. Disrupted department operations	\$ _____
8. Chain reaction turnover	\$ _____
TOTAL REPLACEMENT COST	\$ _____

¹¹ Source of Blue Money Green Money is <http://careers.mcmaster.ca/employers/calculator.cfm>

Sample Calculation of an Agency's Turnover Rate



	Number of employees that left during this time period	÷	Total number of employees at the beginning of this period ¹²	×	100	=	Turnover % for this time period
Example <i>total agency XYZ</i>	50	÷	150	×	100	=	33%
Example <i>foster care case workers at agency XYZ</i>	20	÷	45	×	100	=	44%
Example <i>adoption case workers at agency XYZ</i>	2	÷	10	×	100	=	20%
Example <i>protective service case workers at agency XYZ</i>	15	÷	30	×	100	=	50%
Example <i>other Agency XYZ</i>	13	÷	65	×	100	=	20%

¹² An alternate way of calculating turnover is to use the average number of employees during the period. Whichever way is used, just be sure to be consistent in the calculation when comparing results.

Tool: Agency Leadership Inventory



Score each line as you believe, if asked, staff would say

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5= Strongly agree.

Agency Culture	Score
1. Staff retention is considered everybody's business at our agency and we are all expected to play a role in retaining staff	
2. Our agency is a great place to work for professional development, interpersonal support and gaining a sense of meaningful accomplishment	
3. Our agency promotes continuous dialogue and improvements to support staff retention and satisfaction	
Score Agency Culture	

Mission, Vision & Direction	
4. Our agency's mission is well understood by everyone and comes alive in all of our communications and the work that we do	
5. Our agency has a current and meaningful strategic plan, which is consistently being communicated to staff and other stakeholders	
6. Our agency adheres to a set of guiding beliefs or principles that are reflected in the agency's priorities and also in management and case decisions	
Score Mission, Vision & Direction	

Relationships	
7. Our leaders have credibility in the agency and the community and represent our agency effectively	
8. Our leaders truly care about the staff and their families by treating them with respect and showing appreciation for their work and personal commitment	
9. Our leaders display behaviors that are consistent with the organization's values, beliefs and principles	
Score Relationships	

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5= Strongly agree.

Capacity-Building	Score
10. Our leaders work as a team in setting priorities, promoting communication and modeling collaboration throughout the agency	
11. Our agency places a high priority on and invests in developing and supporting first line supervisors	
12. Our agency provides ample opportunities for training and professional development	
13. Our leaders are effective in communicating and managing change	
14. Our leaders are effective in garnering and advocating for resources necessary to meet our goals and agency mission	
Score Capacity-Building	

Policies and Practices	
15. Our agency provides salaries and benefits that are competitive with other child and family service agencies in our geographical area.	
16. Our agency has an effective, consistent and repeatable process for recruiting, selecting and putting the right people in the right jobs	
17. Our agency has an effective and repeatable process for orienting and providing extra support for staff in their first year on the job	
18. Our agency is effective in assuring that workloads are equitably distributed and fair	
19. Our agency is a safe place to work both emotionally and physically	
20. Our agency's employment policies support flexibility and professionalism	
Score Policies and Practices	

Outcomes and Accountability	
21. Our agency has strong financial systems and exercises effective management over the use of financial and human resources	
22. Our agency makes sure that everyone knows what is expected of them in terms of quality of service and outcomes expected	

23. Our agency is current and competitive in its use of technology; and uses data and technology effectively to make decisions and measure results	
24. Our agency uses effective strategies for acknowledging accomplishments of individuals and workgroups	
25. Our agency celebrates small and large victories and successes	
Score Outcomes and Accountability	

Summarize your scores.

1. Circle the number in each of the six categories on the chart shown below that comes closest to your actual score for each category.

	Agency Culture	Mission, Vision & Direction	Relationships	Capacity-Building	Policies and Practices	Outcomes & Accountability
Strongly Agree	15	15	15	25	30	25
	13	13	13	22	27	22
Agree	12	12	12	20	24	20
	10	10	10	17	21	17
Neither agree nor disagree	9	9	9	15	18	15
	7	7	7	12	15	12
Disagree	6	6	6	10	12	10
	4	4	4	7	9	7
Strongly Disagree	3	3	3	5	6	5

2. Now draw a line through each of the six circles connecting them on the chart. How do your scores compare? Are they in balance or are some higher and some lower?
3. Look over your inventory scores and decide if there are any items that you would like to change.
4. Circle those that you think are most important and want/need to change. Refer to those sections of the workbook. What will you do in the short-term to gain greater competency in your priority areas?

Tool: Supervisor's Staff Retention Competencies Inventory



A) Complete the inventory

Read each statement and score yourself on the extent/frequency to which you do each of these behaviors. Use the following rating scale:

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Professional Development: I support the personal and career growth of my staff. If asked my staff would say that I...	Score
1. Take personal responsibility for retaining my staff	
2. Give priority to maintaining a schedule of regular, focused supervisory meetings	
3. Care about their values and help them connect their values with the agency's mission	
4. Work to build partnerships between myself and my staff	
5. Help staff cultivate and use self-awareness in their work with families, children and others	
6. Help staff set objectives for cases and personal development	
7. Encourage appropriate autonomy and decision making, based on an individual's experience and competence	
8. Support accountability and achieving outcomes for children and families by removing barriers and advocating for resources	
9. Help staff take responsibility for their own learning and development	
10. Encourage staff to take part in growth opportunities within the agency and professional education	
11. Model with staff the type of relationship that they need to develop in their work with children and families	
12. Link staff with others who can encourage their growth and job satisfaction	
Total score Professional Development	

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Working with Differences: I respect and build on each individual's strengths and what makes each of them unique. If asked my staff would say that I...	
13. Model respect for differences and diversity	
14. Understand my assumptions about individual staff and work to value his/her unique differences	
15. Treat staff respectfully and preserve their dignity	
16. Understand how my personal learning style impacts my interaction with staff	
17. Understand staff's learning styles and employ techniques that are designed to aid in their learning	
18. Understand how my behavioral style impacts my interaction with staff	
19. Understand my staff's behavioral style and maintain flexibility in working with staff whose styles differ from my own	
20. Understand and manage my emotions and those of staff	
Total score Working with Differences	

Communication Skills: I model the relationship and communication skills that I want my staff to emulate with their clients. If asked my staff would say that I...	
21. Tailor my communication based on who I am, who my staff are and what the situation requires	
22. Listen carefully to what is being communicated and summarize what I hear	
23. Ask questions that draw out additional information	
24. Look for and evaluate nonverbal cues	
25. Identify and work with the feelings behind the words	
26. Keep an open mind and ask open questions	
27. Tell the truth and give thoughtful feedback that focuses on actions and not attitude	
28. Give feedback that works to instruct and assist staff rather than alienate them	
29. Ask clarifying questions to better understand staff emotions, attitudes and behaviors	
30. Challenge staff to rethink their blind spots, assumptions and values	
Total score Communication Skills	

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

Culture and Environment: I understand that supervisors are cultural ambassadors for the agency. If asked staff would say that I...	<i>Score</i>
31. Place a high priority on staff retention and make it part of everyone's responsibility	
32. Maintain physical and emotional safety in the workplace and have safety policies and plans	
33. Develop and engage a multi-cultural workforce at all levels of the agency	
34. Care deeply about staff and their families and encourage balance between work and personal life and having fun in the workplace	
35. Support and encourage staff for their commitment and work on behalf of families and children and celebrate accomplishments	
36. Give staff appropriate autonomy to work in their own creative ways	
37. Promote a culture of continuous learning and development	
Total score Culture and Environment	

Performance and Outcomes: I want my staff to be successful on the job and earn the respect of others. If asked my staff would say that I...	<i>Score</i>
38. Teach and reinforce policies, procedures, and protocols relevant to the job	
39. Model and teach how to effectively manage the workload	
40. Help them make difficult decisions and set priorities	
41. Teach child and family assessment skills	
42. Teach report writing skills	
43. Teach how to access and use community resources	
44. Find ways for staff to do more of what they love to do	
45. Look for innovative and customized ways to reward and recognize talented people	
46. Differentially assign work to the staff who are most passionate about it	
47. Give credit and spotlight to staff	
48. Give continuous feedback on individual staff performance	
49. Conduct affirming and timely performance reviews	
50. Find creative ways to encourage teamwork to manage workloads	
Total score Performance and Outcomes	

B) Summarize your scores

1. Circle the number on the chart shown below that best approximates how you scored in each category.

	Supporting Staff Development	Working with Differences	Communication	Building Positive Culture	Support Performance and Outcomes
Strongly Agree	60	40	50	35	65
	54	36	45	31	58
Agree	48	32	40	28	52
	42	28	35	24	45
Neither agree nor disagree	36	24	30	21	39
	30	20	25	17	32
Disagree	24	16	20	14	26
	18	12	15	10	19
Strongly Disagree	12	8	10	7	13

2. Now draw a line through each of the five circles connecting them on the chart. How do your scores compare? Are they in balance or are some higher and some lower?
3. Look over your assessment scores and decide if there are any line items that you feel are especially significant. Circle those that you think are most important and want/need to work on.

Worksheet for Aligning Beliefs with Policy and Practices

In this column, list your agency's belief in the area you selected	In this column cite the policy supporting the belief	In this column, list the formal and informal practices supporting this belief
<p>Families are empowered to care for their own children</p>	<p>When an out of home placement is required, families are included in planning for their children at every step of the foster care experience.</p>	<p>A meeting is set up between foster parents and birth parents within 3 days of the initial placement to discuss the child's needs and to establish a visiting plan.</p>

Tool: How to Engage Staff in Effective Communication



Following is a summary of “best practices” in employee communications found in diverse industries and organizations.

Successful Leaders:

1. Act as communications champions

- The role of leadership is to communicate their visions and direction throughout the organization in clear and relevant terms.
- The CEO must be philosophically committed to the notion that communication with employees is essential to the achievement of agency goals.
- The leadership team must display a willingness to address challenging questions, listen carefully to staff and respond quickly to sensitive topics.
- Every manager serves as a communications manager because people want to hear the news from their boss and not from peers or the grapevine.
- Match actions with words: the actions of management must match the values of the organization and the messages being communicated.

2. Commit to two-way communication

- The leadership encourages a variety of means for dialogue including: informal one-on-one discussions; formal regularly planned departmental meetings; reports from special committees organized around a task or problem to be solved; newsletters, etc.
- Leaders are above board with their own ideas, but also seek contrary thoughts and opinions, so that ideas and better solutions can be found.
- In seeking staff input on important and complex decisions, effective leaders seek to clarify in advance how decisions will be made and who is most appropriate to be making the decisions. For example is the leader asking for ‘consultation’, so he/she can make the best possible decision? Or does the leader want a consensus from a particular workgroup on a decision?

3. Deal with bad news

3. The leadership team isn’t afraid to give or hear bad news. The organization’s culture needs to promote an attitude of honest dialogue where “don’t shoot the messenger” of bad news is a common theme.
4. Studies have found that when bad news is candidly reported, an environment is created in which good news is more believable.

4. Know and appreciate where staff and clients are coming from

- Communication is phrased in a way that is meaningful and relevant to these different perspectives
- Each part of the organization understands who their customers and clients are and has an appreciation for their unique needs and perspectives.

5. Develop and deploy consistent communications strategies

- The leadership team seeks to communicate not only WHAT is happening within the organization but WHY it is happening.
- Information is communicated in a timely way.
- Leaders don’t dictate the way people should feel about good or bad news. It has been found to be more effective to communicate the who, what, when, where, why and how’s of the news and let staff draw their own conclusions.
- After every leadership meeting, ask the question: “What do we need to communicate to our staff”? This will help clarify the message and give a consistent method for disseminating it.

Tool: Safety Planning Guidelines



Develop safety policies

The agency will need safety and risk management policies that are:

- Clearly stated and understood by all
- Translated into specific expectations for individual's roles and responsibilities
- Involves everybody from the Director to Janitor and includes resource parents

Develop a proactive belief statement

The agency beliefs can contain a statement of the agency's desired culture for safety and risk management such as:

- "We strive to minimize conditions of risk for staff, children, and families and we learn from our accomplishments and our mistakes."

Reassess practices and facilities for risk/safety potential regularly

Having a regular review schedule helps to reduce risk and is good risk management practice.

Develop safety procedures

The agency has written procedures, safety protocols and "what if" scenarios to detect and prevent potentially hazardous conditions

Train supervisors and managers

Periodic training and group discussions in decision-making and risk management procedures will help the agency prepare to handle situations consistently.

Establish internal and external crisis plans

Bad things happen even in the best agencies; it is wise to prepare for them in advance by having

- An effective communications plan for emergencies that includes the leadership team, staff and board of directors.
- A positive relationship is cultivated with the media by providing them with regular positive news reports.
- A media plan is in place to deal with crisis that designates official spokes persons.

Establish an effective review process

When situations happen examine potentially hazardous situations and actual incidents and integrate lessons learned into practice.

Establish and consistently apply a safety protocol

Identify and review potentially unsafe situations in advance of performing work in the field.

About the Authors

John and Judith McKenzie, along with their colleague, Rosemary Jackson, are the principal authors, organizational consultants and trainers for the Michigan State University Workbook Series on *Staff Retention in Child and Family Services*. Their results-oriented work ethic, combined expertise, and successful work histories are ideally suited to assisting child and family service agencies in developing a culture for staff satisfaction and retention.

Judith was the CEO and President of Spaulding for Children for 22 years. Under her leadership, Spaulding grew from a small special needs adoption program to a renowned multi-service agency that has been the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption continuously since 1985. In addition, she has several years experience administering public child and family service programs, including public assistance, protective services, foster care and adoption and child welfare agency licensing. Judith has provided training, keynote addresses, and has written extensively on child and family services, public and non-profit agency management and strategic planning. Judith received her MSW from the University of Michigan.

John has been a “hands on” manager and organizational consultant in business and industry for over 25 years. He has led a number of change initiatives and implemented many new projects throughout his career, winning six executive level awards for his contributions to General Motors, TRW and Unisys. John has experience and proven expertise in strategic planning, change management, teambuilding, project management, and implementation of workforce and quality processes. He has adapted these proven methods and materials from business to provide assistance to state child welfare programs and non-profit agencies. John received his BS in Industrial Engineering from the University of Maryland.

John and Judith have provided consultation and training in strategic planning and change management for over fifteen states’ child welfare programs. In addition, they have written a series of five, *Answering the Call*, publications for AdoptUsKids on recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents, which have been published and distributed to over 60,000 individuals and agencies nationwide.

Rosemary Jackson is an accomplished trainer, consultant, program developer and clinician. Rosemary has developed curriculum for clinicians and parents to address the post placement needs of foster and adoptive families and she currently offers post adoption services to adult adoptees and families who have adopted internationally. She has also developed training materials on a variety of topics including grief and loss; workplace stress and burnout; secondary trauma and others that are germane to staff offering services to children and families. Her years combining service delivery and product development make her uniquely qualified to offer training and consultation services in child and family services.

Project Services

With a flexible design, agency leaders, supervisors and front-line staff will be able to benefit from using the curriculum in many ways. However, it is important for users to understand that the curriculum, at its best, is intended to facilitate cultural change within agencies to support staff retention and job satisfaction and improve agency outcomes. Therefore, states and agencies that make a commitment to obtain professional services to facilitate the implementation of the curriculum will experience better and more lasting results. The various ways the curriculum can be accessed and used are described below.

Self-study - Specific workbooks target the needs and interests of agency leaders, supervisors and front-line workers. Workbooks include learning activities, case studies and tools to enhance individual learning.

Workshops - Trainers and advisors are available to conduct workshops for leaders, program managers and/or supervisors. These workshops are tailored to the specific audience and (when available) will include use of media to present learning principles, engage participants in small group learning activities and demonstrate how the program can be used in the work setting.

Training of facilitators - Project staff will provide facilitator training for individuals or agency teams. Sessions will equip teams to facilitate learning groups in an agency and to use the curriculum in a combination of self-study and small group activities.

Multiple agency user group(s) - Project staff will provide ongoing training and support to a regular group of selected and trained agency facilitator teams, who will form a User's Group. The advantage to this model is that teams will be supported and encouraged to share their promising practices.

Single agency model - An experienced project faculty team will facilitate an agency's development plan over a mutually agreed upon period of time. Services will involve high-level administrative commitment and involvement. Agency assessments will be conducted and an agency-specific plan developed. Internal leadership team(s) will determine and facilitate changes. Staff will be involved at all levels of the agency.

Project staff will work with interested states and agencies to explore options for delivering services tailored to agency needs and available resources. Fees will be established based on scope of work, staff time, travel and material costs to deliver the services requested.

If you are interested in learning more about the availability of training and consultation services, contact:

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