

TJ Solutions - Management Solutions for Your Child Care Organization

Managing Matters Newsletter from the Desks of Joy & Terri

What if you suddenly left your job?

Gone are the days when child care organizations could promote someone to the top position just because they have been at the Centre the longest, they have been dedicated to the centre, and everyone loves them. While those are still wonderful attributes, today's child care requires an Executive Director/Supervisor with knowledge based on best business practices and skills to lead the organization into the future. As any current Supervisor knows the risks associated with running a child care organization are ever increasing as the demands created by new legislation, municipal requirements and all day learning continue to grow.

Succession planning is one challenge every child care is bound to face at some time, unfortunately the process is usually neglected until something happens. It is the old question that gets asked but we often do not plan for "What if your organization has to deal with a sudden departure of the Executive Director/Supervisor either permanently or for an extended period of time?"

While succession planning can be a touchy subject, all organizations must remember that the departure of an Executive Director/Supervisor (even a planned one) always impacts the day to day functioning of the organization. Unfortunately, in the case of a sudden departure there is often no time to put a plan into place to deal with the difficulties and challenges that arise in trying to maintain the status quo.

Does your organization have an emergency succession plan in the event that the organization needs one? Some planning questions to think about:

- If tomorrow you had to replace yourself and there was no chance to ask any questions, how would your replacement learn about the job?
- Do you have operational manual for all of your administrative systems, financial management systems etc? Are these manuals easily accessible, detailed and current?
- If someone had to come in and take over your office would they be able to make sense of everything?
- Is everything you do written down somewhere or safely tucked inside your head?
- Do you have a current job description that captures everything you do?
- What type of legacy are you leaving behind?

- If the Executive Director (you) is suddenly unable to work etc do you have someone in your organization who can do the job?
- Does this person have the required leadership style, financial knowledge, contacts, and necessary experience to take charge of the organization and continue to provide programs to families without interrupting services?
- Will the centre lose organizational knowledge if you were to suddenly leave?
- Is there someone else in your organization that knows everything you know and do?

An emergency succession planning process provides an organization with a unique opportunity to examine the current leadership structure, job responsibilities and organizational policies, procedures and manuals. Often Supervisors/Executive Directors are too busy with day to day operations to do a complete operation evaluation. Boards, Owners/operators and even co-managerial staff are often not fully informed of all key responsibilities placed on the Executive Director/Supervisor. By strategically evaluating your current job duties, all of your files, and manuals the organization can begin to develop an emergency succession plan.

The first step is to begin to document what you do and all the skills you have acquired in order to be effective in managing the entire day to day operations of the organization. Identify which of those skills will need to be replicated in a new Executive Director/Supervisor. This exercise will help you in developing a comprehensive list of leadership skills, competency skills, expertise and experience that would be required should you leave your position.

The second step is an organizational review. Are all of your policies and procedures up to date? Are you compliant with current legislation? Where are your documents stored? If you weren't there could someone find them, interpret them and implement them?

The final step is looking at the "soft skills" strategies used to manage staff relations, Board of Directors relations and relations with your clients. Is this information documented or simply in your head?

We all would like to believe that time is on our side and that we will have the luxury of time to train our replacement. Just remember that being proactive and planning for change is part of risk assessment and a best business practice to safeguard all that you have built in your organization.

If you would like to get started and don't know where to begin contact us for additional information.

Wishing everyone all the best for success,

Joy & Terri

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