



Build Your
**Dream
Team**

Thomasa Bond, EdD

How to
Recruit, Train, and Retain
Early Childhood Staff



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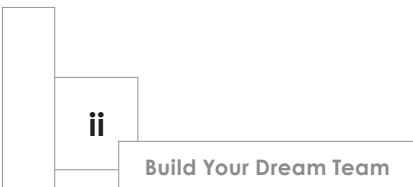


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INTRODUCTION

As I was starting to write this book, I was reminded of a time when I was thinking about returning to work after the birth of my second child. I wanted to work only part-time, preferably when my children were taking their naps. I decided to start looking for a job, so I took out the Yellow Pages and started searching for child-care centers located in my area. (For anyone not familiar with the Yellow Pages: It is a book with actual yellow pages, filled with the names, addresses, and advertisements for businesses.) Oh, did I forget to mention I did not want to travel more than twenty minutes from my home? Once I located several centers, I started calling, asking if they had openings for part-time employment. I called maybe five centers before one said yes. I scheduled an interview for the following week, and I was offered a teaching position in a school-age child care program working with children before and after school. This position was perfect because I could be home during the day with my children. The person I interviewed with stated that she was happy that I had called inquiring about part-time work because she was worried that she would not be able to find someone willing to work with an out-of-school-time program.

The following school year, the center needed a lead teacher in their toddler classroom. I had decided to return to work full-time, so I applied for and accepted the position. After working as the toddler lead for a year, the program director who had hired me resigned. Eventually, I was promoted to the program director position. I ended up working at the center for five years, and it had all started with me sitting on my couch calling child-care centers from the Yellow Pages.

The days of Yellow Pages searches have come and gone. Now, program directors must search harder and smarter to find qualified employees to work at their centers. I share this story to let you know that anything can be achieved if you are willing to think outside the box to achieve your goals.

Understand that you can have the best building, the most up-to-date, state-of-the-art equipment, and a STEM-based curriculum to meet all of the children’s developmental needs. But, the difference between a basic center and a great center is the staff who implement the program.

When you do not have enough staff to maintain the required adult-child ratio, you should not enroll any additional children. Easy fix, right? Well, maybe not. You are in the business of making money, and having children is where the majority of your revenue comes from. A better solution is to hire quality staff who will stay at the center and to hire additional staff who can cover the classrooms as needed. With a developed operating plan, you can ensure there are enough staff to maintain the required adult-child ratio.

Without a well-trained staff to execute the philosophy and vision of the center, you will not have a high-quality program. According to Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., and Gary M. Stern, Jr., authors of *The Trouble with HR: An Insider’s Guide to Finding and Keeping the Best Talent*, “If you don’t hire the right people—and retain them—you won’t be able to devise new products, meet customer needs, and sustain the business.” Therefore, to have a successful center, you first have to recruit and hire the right people.

How This Book Is Organized

The following chapters will provide you with the skills and confidence to recruit and hire the right people to build your dream team for your center. You will gain information on implementing effective recruiting and interviewing, hiring and onboarding new staff, and developing a diverse workforce.

In the first section, we will look at effective recruiting and interview techniques. In the second section we will explore new-hire orientation and initial training, as well as ongoing professional development. Then, we will take a look at working with a diverse workforce, handling staff turnover, and retaining the person for the position.





SECTION ONE

Recruiting and Hiring



CHAPTER 1:

RECRUITING

Make Recruiting an Ongoing Priority

Program directors with limited or no human-resource experience are often required to hire staff. As Harry Chambers points out in his book *Finding, Hiring, and Keeping Peak Performers*, being a program director or center manager “does not automatically guarantee that you have the skills to identify talent and ability or to interview, recruit, and retain highly productive people.” Most program directors are required to hire staff, despite lacking the necessary skill set to recruit and hire the right people for the jobs. Individuals without the proper training and experience in recruiting and hiring techniques will ultimately revert to their limited knowledge base and gut feelings.

Some program directors think that they can hire new employees based on the way the person makes them feel during the interview. They may say, “I can look someone in the eyes and tell whether they’re lying to me or whether they’re going to do a good job.” Chambers asserts that “hiring by psychic power, relying on instinct and hunch, is a deadly and costly managerial behavior.” Furthermore, using the technique of recruiting and hiring individuals based on your gut feeling will not attract the best individual for the position. As Taylor and Stern write, “People matter, and yet people issues, including recruiting and retaining employees, are often put on the back burner. To realize the full potential of your organization, you need to put the right people in place and then develop them to their maximum.” Program directors must develop their recruiting and hiring skills. Hiring and retaining the right people will create a better work environment for the staff, resulting in a more productive and profitable center.

According to Chambers, “In the past, recruiting efforts occurred only on an incremental or as-needed basis. If there was a need to fill a position,

recruiting began and then was suspended until the next need arose. Today, your search for peak performers is a never-ending journey . . . Even in the absence of immediate need, you must constantly anticipate the needs of tomorrow. The peak performer you hire next year may be the result of a recruiting seed you planted today. You never know when exceptional candidates will emerge and present opportunities for unexpected growth or organizational upgrade.” Recruiting and hiring new employees is not a one-time occurrence; it has to be an ongoing process and recognized as an important part of doing business.

Set aside funds in your budget for recruiting. The recruiting budget should be based on the type of recruiting that you are going to implement. For example, recruiting events will cost more than just posting a job opening on the center’s website. Therefore, the amount that is budgeted should be flexible to meet the needs of the center. The recruiting budget may start off small and increase as the center grows. It is important to have a line item in the budget for recruiting so that when the time arises, the center has the funds to recruit for new employees. Chambers asserts, “Recruiting is an expensive task. You must invest wisely in your efforts. Pursuing unfertile areas can waste significant dollars; effective recruiting can be conducted cost effectively if it is well planned.” Effective, ongoing recruiting is worth the expense. Evaluate your recruitment budget regularly to ensure that the funds are being used in the most productive way. Decide whether your efforts are generating the results that you want or if a new direction is needed to recruit new employees. Know your job market. Consider, for example, the compensation package you are offering in light of what the job market is looking for. Julia McGovern and Susan Shelly, authors of *The Happy Employee: 101 Ways for Managers to Attract, Retain, and Inspire the Best and Brightest*, suggest, “When looking to attract and hire hard-to-find employees, you have to consider not only what you’re looking for but what they are looking for as well. Every person who applies for a job brings with them their own needs and circumstances. When working to hire for hard-to-fill positions, you should consider the circumstances of applicants and what might serve as incentives to get them on board.” For example, the pay scale may be fixed, which would make additional incentives beneficial when recruiting new hires

for the center. Incentives such as a signing bonus of \$75.00 or \$100.00 can make a difference. The signing bonus can also be incremental, depending on the position. Twenty-five dollars a year could be allocated for teachers each quarter as a bonus, so that at the end of the first year they would receive a total of \$100.00. Distributing the funds quarterly will potentially increase retention, and money will not be given to individuals who leave the center after they receive the signing bonus. If you choose not to have the signing bonus distributed over the course of one year, then anyone who receives the signing bonus must sign a contract for a minimum of one year of employment. If they leave or are fired due to their actions within the first year, they will be required to return the signing bonus. Additional vacation days or personal time off (PTO) can also be an incentive for individuals who have years of experience or an advanced degree. Dominic Cooper, Ivan Robertson, and Gordon Tinline, authors of *Recruitment and Selection*, emphasize both quality and quantity, urging organizations to attract as large a field of suitably qualified and experienced applicants as possible.

Finding Suitable Candidates

Before the program director can hire the right person for the center, an appropriate recruiting process must already be in place. This recruiting process, including word of mouth, should promote the center as a great place to work. Maintain a list of individuals you can contact when there is an opening, and let the current employees know that they can refer friends and acquaintances to apply for open positions at the center. Place open positions on social-media sites. Have a place on the center's website where candidates can apply for positions and post their résumés. Develop a relationship with professors at local colleges and universities, online-program professors, and teachers at the local high school. The recruiting process will also depend on the position that you are trying to fill. If you are looking for a teacher, the recruiting process will focus more in the direction of universities or colleges and websites for professionals. If you are looking for assistant caregivers, these candidates can have less training and experience in most cases. Therefore, the recruiting process for assistant teachers can be directed toward high school and undergraduate college students. Program directors must target the population with the skill set that they are looking for.

Identify the exact skills that you are seeking so that when the job is posted, it will list the specific qualifications required.

Program directors should be continuously recruiting for new employees to work at the center. As Cooper, Robertson, and Tinline point out, “Word of mouth is still an important means for finding new staff and is still frequently used by those seeking work.” McGovern and Shelly recommend using conferences, meetings, and professional societies, as these are great resources for identifying potential candidates, as well as terrific places to promote your company. Promote your center as a great place to work and explain why. Provide the reasons why working for your center would be beneficial for a candidate’s career. “The key is to get your company’s name out there in a positive way, so that people want to work for you,” say McGovern and Shelly. Recruitment will not work unless you are networking with others within the field, which is why “Your networking activities should never cease,” Chambers asserts. “Become known as a reference point that people can use when they learn of others who may be seeking employment. Do not expect this to be a one-time activity; you must constantly be renewing and replenishing your network sources.” Keep a list of names and contact information for potential candidates. Maintain a list of job fairs and contact information for college and university recruitment advisors and local professional groups that you can reach out to when looking for a candidate.

Develop a connection with a local recruiting firm that serves your area. The firm may not represent early childhood professionals; however, you can provide them with the opportunity to expand their clientele by providing qualified candidates for your center. Contact your local high schools and offer the center as a place for the students to complete volunteer hours. Sunny Fader and Angela Erickson, authors of *365 Ideas for Recruiting, Retaining, Motivating, and Rewarding Your Volunteers*, suggest, “Recruiting is the key to effective volunteer programs, because how you recruit your volunteers affects the kind of relationship you are going to have with them.” Inviting and supporting volunteer involvement provides the opportunity for the center to be a part of the community, and it will look good on a student’s college application. What better way to promote your program than by having students from the community working at the center? Also, retirees with an

early childhood background may want to work part time and in some cases full time. Having a trained professional working at the center can potentially reduce the amount of training required.

Connect with local community colleges and universities, and develop internship opportunities for the students at the center. Visit the campuses to meet the professors and teaching staff. This will allow you the opportunity to promote your center as a quality place for students to learn how to interact with children and will help you find students who can work various hours when needed, either part time or as floaters. Once you have developed a connection with the professors at these colleges and universities, offer the center as a learning environment for the students. This will give them the opportunity to volunteer at the center and to complete their required observations of the children and the staff interactions. Ask the professors to provide you with feedback, both on areas where improvements are needed within the program and on things that are working well. This unbiased assessment of your program will be beneficial for staff development and the overall growth of the center.

Many online programs offer early childhood certificates and degrees. Reach out to these programs and offer your center as a practicum location for students in their programs. Many students take online courses through colleges and universities that are not local to them and thus do not have child-care centers for the students to receive hands-on training and experience. Therefore, if you provide a partnership, the institution will have a center where it can send the students for observation and hands-on training. This will provide you with the opportunity to work with teachers who are new to the field and eager to learn.

Training and promoting staff from within the center is an option that should be used whenever possible. Before the students have completed a child-development program, you can hire them as assistant teachers because they are taking early childhood or child-development courses. Allow them to work at the center; once they have completed their education, you will have a qualified staff member who can fill a lead-teacher position when one becomes available. This is the ideal situation for both the center and the assistant.

The center will not have to recruit and train a new lead teacher because a current assistant teacher already meets the requirements. Recognize that parents do not like change, and if the staff member is familiar with the children and the families, it makes for a smoother transition.

It is also a good idea to advertise your center on social media and local early childhood sites. Advertising on social-media sites can promote awareness of the center and provide the opportunity for interested candidates to learn valuable information about the program. The more individuals learn about the program, the higher the chances are that they will apply for a position at the center. Offer a location on your website for interested candidates to upload their résumés. This will provide you with an ongoing list of interested individuals, and you can review their qualifications at your leisure. This form of recruitment does not require a lot of time or effort on your part, and the benefit could be greater if you find a qualified candidate.

Place job postings at local community centers. There could be individuals who are interested in working at your center but do not know how to apply for a position.

Have an open house for applicants to come into your center when it is closed (without children). This way you can show off the center and provide an opportunity for candidates to see firsthand what the program is all about before they apply for a position. You can screen the candidates during the open house and invite the individuals who make it through that first screening to come back for a formal interview. The open house would be the perfect time for your current staff to mingle with the candidates as they are viewing the center. Each classroom could have a staff member who asks different informal questions to determine attendees' skill sets. The candidates should bring their résumés and copies of their unofficial transcripts for review. Reviewing the transcripts will allow you to determine which candidates meet the requirements before you invite them for an official interview.

Consider offering a monetary incentive, such as a bonus, for employees and recruiting connections who recommend an applicant who is ultimately

hired. “The best resources for identifying and recruiting job candidates often are right in front of you. Your own employees can be great sources of referrals,” say McGovern and Shelly. The thinking is that employees will not recommend anyone who they do not feel is a good fit for the position. McGovern and Shelly point out that most employees are careful with their referrals because they don’t want to recommend an employee who would potentially reflect poorly on themselves. “Employees hired through an employee referral program are likely to succeed because their education tends to be similar to that of existing employees and they tend to have similar work ethics, helping them blend with the team culture,” McGovern and Shelly advise. When using friends of friends as references, be sure to complete the same screening process you would for any applicant, to ensure that the candidate is a good fit for the center. Also, make sure that the employee and new hire work independently of each other. They are not a package deal; they are individual employees. If one of them is having an issue, it should be clear that the other one is not directly involved.

If you are having a hard time locating and securing lead teachers to work at your center, consider hiring an assistant program director with the qualifications. Sometimes you can attract more qualified candidates based on the advanced title of the position. With this hiring approach, you will have a qualified lead caregiver who can function in two positions. The assistant program director can work in a classroom as a lead caregiver part of the day and work as the assistant for the remainder of the day. When a lead teacher leaves the center, the assistant program director can also cover in the classroom until a replacement can be located or an assistant teacher becomes qualified. Either way, the center will be covered, and the children and parents will not have to adjust to a new person in the classroom. Make sure that the applicants are aware that part of their duties at the center will require teaching in the classroom.

Sharing Employees

Sometimes program directors may have to find creative ways to attract quality staff to work at their centers. “If the perfect candidate doesn’t sail through your doors on [the] very first try, ace the interview, and proceed to excel in the position, there are ways to make your own luck when searching for an employee. Consider setting up a training program within your organization,” McGovern and Shelly suggest. Create a floater pool for substitute teachers and assistants. Centers can place individuals in a pool that is shared among multiple centers. This way, when you need someone to work for a short period of time, you will have a resource for temporary staff. This pool will also be a useful resource when you are looking for lead teachers, because you have had previous interactions with these individuals. This will reduce the amount of additional training that the lead teacher will require before starting to work in a full-time position. If you are having a hard time finding assistant teachers who are looking for part-time employment, find another center nearby, and partner with them to share employees. Choose your partners carefully. You want to work with a center that has the same work ethic and focus on quality that you do. The center should monitor staff activities to ensure the quality of care being provided. This can serve multiple purposes because the expectation and training of the teachers will be consistent.

You may be thinking, why would I want to partner with my competition? Think of it this way: When we operate as an island and refuse to share ideas and resources that will benefit children and families, that is just wrong. All children should have the opportunity to have access to quality care. If your center is excelling with enrollment, then helping another center that is struggling would benefit the children and not reduce your bottom line at all. Remember that the overall goal within the early childhood field is for all children to have access to quality care within a developmentally appropriate learning environment. Whenever possible, partner with centers that you have visited to ensure that they operate in the same fashion as your center.

Assistant teachers working within the program could potentially work more hours than one center would be able to provide. If an employee is looking for full-time employment, working at multiple locations can provide those hours. This can also provide the opportunity for you to hire individuals who are in the floater pool when an opening becomes available at your center. This approach offers you a chance to interact with an individual to determine if she would be a good fit for your center. If a full-time position becomes available at either center, the center that recruited the employee should have first hiring rights. However, the employee may also choose to work at one center over another. The employee and the centers should be comfortable with this decision. An employee should not be judged based on her decision to work at one center or another, if this occurs.

A Word about Stopgap Hiring

Have you ever started a job and, after a short period of time, noticed that the dependable people are constantly quitting and the unreliable people are staying? Have you ever hired someone to be a warm body for a teacher position, because you could not find a better candidate or you needed an additional staff member to maintain the adult-child ratio? According to Taylor and Stern, “Despite all the lip service given that people are our most important asset, hiring a new employee is often done using what I like to call the stopgap approach. *Stopgap* means plug the leak as quickly as possible. Get the résumés, see who fits the job, interview, and hire.” Taylor and Stern warn, “Just doing hiring when someone leaves a job is like putting a Band-Aid on an infection. It won’t solve the problem. Companies that hire in an emergency because they are desperate to fill a vacancy are likely to have someone last more than a year about 25 percent of the time.”

Be prepared to fill a vacant position at your center by continually recruiting and having a hiring process in place. Whenever possible, hire part-time staff to work as floaters to fill in when needed. The part-time employee can see whether the center is a good fit for her,

and you can promote an employee from part time to full time without having to recruit and train a new person. The end goal, of course, is to bring in employees who will fit in and will remain at the center.

Writing a Job Description

The more precise the job description is, the easier it will be to know whether an applicant meets the requirements. “Your job description will define the requirements, your salary schedule will determine the compensation available, and your mission statement will help you and prospective employees determine if their goals and philosophy are consistent with those of the program so that you hire the best possible candidate,” Hilda Reno, Janet Stutzman, and Judy Zimmerman, authors of *Handbook for Early Childhood Administrators*, advise. If you want the applicants to be proficient in a certain curriculum, then list that in the job description. If you would like them to work in the infant classroom, then make that a part of the job description as well.

Early childhood centers are becoming more diverse, and they are faced with the challenge of creating a diverse workforce. “People from different cultures do not only look or sound different, they [also] think differently. . . While clear and accurate job descriptions can help all applicants, they can be especially helpful to people coming from different cultures,” say Lionel Laroche and Caroline Yang, authors of *Danger and Opportunity: Bridging Culture and Diversity for Competitive Advantage*.

Creating a Job Posting

The posting for the position is a vital part of the selection process. It should be based on the job description and should provide potential candidates with sufficient information to make a decision about whether to apply for the position. When individuals are looking for employment, they should know what position they are applying for; the expectations of the position; and the center’s philosophy, mission statement, and curriculum.

The posting for the position should include, at a minimum, the following:

- Title of the position
- Contact person's name and information
- Job description
- Salary range
- How applicants should submit their information
- Minimum and maximum qualifications required
- Workdays and hours
- Projected start date
- Closing date for the position or if the position will be open until an acceptable candidate has been hired
- Any additional requirements, such as proficiency in a language other than English
- The center's mission and philosophy
- The curriculum that is used and how new staff members would be expected to support and promote the curriculum while engaging the children in developmentally appropriate practices

Application Review

When people apply, the program director will want to interview the candidates who meet or exceed their expectations for the position. Generate a list of the qualifications that each candidate should have before she is considered for employment. Be very clear and precise when it comes to what the new hire needs to know coming into the position. Remember that anyone can make herself look good on paper. "Selection criteria are very different from the job description, in that the selection criteria delineate those ideal characteristics that, if possessed by an individual to the fullest extent possible, would ensure the successful performance of the job. Obviously, no one person will possess all the characteristics to the fullest extent, and all

characteristics have equal importance in determining who the best candidate is,” advise Ronald Rebores and Angela Walmsley, authors of *Recruiting and Retaining Generation Y Teachers*. Create a list of skills that you are willing to train individuals on if they do not have all the requirements for the position. In some cases, you might have a good candidate who does not have all the skills that you require but could be a great addition to the program with some training.

Who will review the résumés? Will they be reviewed by your human resources department (HR), or is this the sole responsibility of the program director? If this is the program director’s responsibility, make sure that person has training on the center’s hiring policies. Next, decide the criteria by which the individual will be considered or ruled out for the position. (See the Sample Application-Review Form in appendix A on page 88.) Decide if you are going to set your requirements high or use a range for requirements. Consider the following questions:

- How many years of experience working with children in a child-care setting will be required for each position?
- What level of education will be required? For example, would it be acceptable for the candidate to have a bachelor’s degree and no experience? Would a candidate who has years of experience and an associate’s degree be considered? Which is more important—a degree or years of experience?

Note that there are pros and cons to hiring a candidate based on years of experience. According to Chambers, “When you evaluate experience, you must be aware that you are considering years of positive, valuable experience along with the same years of habitual weakness and bad habits. Just because candidates have done something similar somewhere else does not mean they will meet your objectives for the organization’s performance. Hiring experienced mediocrity perpetuates current and future mediocrity. You may be able to relax your requirements for experience if you possess effective skills in coaching or if the organization is capable of training and highly committed to it.”

When reviewing the applications, don't be intimidated by an applicant you perceive as being overly qualified and rule her out without allowing her to be interviewed. Recognize that a candidate with more qualifications than you require can be an asset to the center. Just make sure that the center's pay scale is in line with your requirements. If you want to have highly educated and trained lead teachers, plan on paying a fair market wage to these candidates. If you can pay only minimum wage, you should consider recruiting entry-level candidates who have less experience. Remember that the goal is to recruit the best candidate you can afford. If education or training is a requirement for the position, ask candidates to provide an official copy of their transcripts or certificates. Decide whether a candidate has the experience that matches what was provided on their résumés.

Once you have applicants you would like to meet, schedule the interviews. You do not have to wait until the cutoff date for the posting. You want to make sure that you have an opportunity to start interviewing as soon as possible to fill the position.