

CHAPTER 1

An invitation to begin with hope and vision:

Begin with hope.

Hope is the thing
with feathers
that perches in the soul
and sings the tune
without words
and never stops- at all.
-Emily Dickinson

We hope to create a place where children can unfold to become who they are meant to be. We begin with our heart's desire to make a difference. We dream of welcoming tomorrow's families in the full flourishing richness of their diversity. We envision a vibrant play space that is also a thriving workplace for adults, free of gossip and negativity. Quality care and education for children and families stirs the core of our vision. Emboldened by hope, we keep our eyes on that prize.

Hope predicts first semester grades better than SAT scores.. A hopeful director greets each family and staff member by name daily, with an "attitude of gratitude" for what each person offers. Moods are catching Optimism frees our brain pathways to recall more. Laughter heals broken hearts and lifts us to the balcony for a breath of perspective. We believe that "as we change the life of one child, we have changed the world."

We trust the research that says abused and abandoned children thrive when they are unconditionally loved and cared for by one adult, during their first three years. We want also to believe the data on resiliency: adults who survive traumatic childhoods can flourish if they too experience the gift of unconditional loving acceptance.

Begin with faith in ourselves. By becoming a director, we accomplish what we may always have wanted; we are in charge of our own enterprise. Some of us have always dreamed of welcoming children into our homes. Some of us dreamed of creating our own center on a piece of land or nested in a building. Some of us have grown from the classroom into the boardroom, by knowing what works for children. Others have chosen to leave behind different, perhaps unfulfilling careers to enter an inspiring profession. Whatever pathway we take, hope beckons us to begin.

Begin with clear eyes. This journey is not free of obstacles. We have heard horror stories of lawsuits, staff shortages, burn out and not making enough money to make payroll. Taking the long, clear view also requires noticing what is directly at our feet. As the song says: “I can see clearly now, the rain has gone. I can see all obstacles in my way. Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind. ‘Gonna’ be a bright, bright sunny day.” On a clear day, obstacles enrich the journey.

We know our profession is indispensable. We live with paradox: service professions earn less respect than “hands-off” professions. Labor statistics show the child care workforce is paid less than garbage collectors and termite exterminators. We may have endured gatherings where some one called us a “glorified babysitter” or asked us what it was like to play all day. More than one incredulous person has sniffed: “You get paid for that?”

Men in our profession understand they are likely to be accused of child molestation at some point in their career. Standing out and taking a stand still come at a price. We may know gifted teachers who, because they do not perform well in academic settings, find it difficult to gain the credentials to continue their work. As more states set higher standards for director credentialing, we know we must always find time for ongoing training.

Women in our profession report that the majority of us have experienced gossip, backbiting, catfights and shunning/exclusion from our female peers in the workplace. Twenty-five percent of us say while we have endured these unproductive dynamics, we also have experienced support, collegiality, humor and creativity in the company of women. We accept the challenge and opportunity of managing and mentoring women.

Eighty percent of child care leaders test as “conflict avoidant”. We prefer to think that problems go away magically, that staff can “get the message” by imitating what we do, and that we will not have to “call anyone on the carpet”. Many of us get butterflies in our stomachs or lumps in our throats when we think of confronting a staff member’s inappropriate behavior. We need to face our own demons and confront societal standards to gain skill sets we may be lacking.

With clear eyes, we see also the –ism’s: racism, sexism, class-ism, age-ism. Power is a challenge to all of us. We have seen and experienced abuses of power. Can we use the power of our position to right ongoing wrongs? Committed to developing organizations that honor and reflect the diversity of the children and families we serve, we meet formidable adversaries. Interpersonally, we may question whether we can always model inclusion when we have our own blind spots. Studies at Harvard, cited in Malcolm

Gladwell's Blink, show that even the most educated of us still harbor racism, almost against our will.

To create a multi-cultural village, we need ground rules that allow for differences to be honored, while insuring that conflicts will be resolved, not merely buried. We need to learn languages other than our own. We need to help staff open their hearts to families whose core values differ from our own. When Kaori's (age one) mom insists Kaori should use the potty, who's developmentally appropriate standards do we uphold? When Rashon's dad proudly tells you he healed his son's cold by the process of coining, must you report him for abuse based on the angry red marks you see on Rashon's back?

To become a director in the childcare profession is a lifelong journey of continuous learning, improvement, honesty and courage. May "your heart's desire be with you" as Shakespeare said. May you know that: "Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance." (Samuel Johnson)

With hope and clear eyes, we embark.

I'm going to clear the pasture stream

You come too.

-Robert Frost