



Build Your
**Dream
Team**

Thomasa Bond, EdD

How to
Recruit, Train, and Retain
Early Childhood Staff

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Published by Gryphon House, Inc.

P. O. Box 10, Lewisville, NC 27023

800.638.0928; 877.638.7576 [fax]

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Library of Congress Control Number:2019957879

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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

Round Up Your All-Stars!

Finding the right people to staff your early childhood center is a real challenge! Have you ever hired someone you thought was perfect, only to have her leave after a few months? Or filled a position with a "warm body" to maintain the adult-child ratio because you couldn't find a more qualified candidate? Do you hire based on qualifications or gut instinct? Do you plan ahead for growth, or do you deal with today's challenges and leave tomorrow's for another day?

Recruiting is an ongoing process that requires reflection, dedication, and, importantly, a solid plan. But the plan isn't always easy to craft, especially when you're understaffed! *Build Your Dream Team* will help you navigate the complicated recruitment process with expert advice, proven tactics, and approachable tips to help you:

- learn effective recruiting techniques,
- think strategically to plan for growth,
- craft effective job posts,
- work with a diverse staff, and
- conduct data-based interviews,
- train staff for continual professional growth.
- make job offers more attractive,
- onboard new employees to make them part of your team,

Your dream team is out there. *Build Your Dream Team* will help you take the first step to creating your plan and will remain your right-hand guide as you hire, onboard, and nurture your new all-stars.



Dr. Thomasa Bond has more than 14 years' experience as a child-care licensing consultant and 30 years' experience in early childhood education. She earned her doctorate in organizational leadership, and she works with program directors to help them to build centers that not only are safe for the children but also provide quality learning environments. A sought-after presenter and panelist, she researches and writes articles on her blog, drthomasa.com


Gryphon House
www.gryphonhouse.com

GH 15964

U.S. \$21.95

ISBN 9780876598412

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