

But don't be daunted. The above doesn't have to mean rousing speeches and ways of being which may conflict with your personality. Successful leaders may inspire 'on the quiet' - yet inspire no less. They come in all shapes and sizes - but tend to share some core characteristics and skills which they have honed over time.

Leaders in the foundation stage have a varied team to inspire and may be very experienced at doing so. Equally they may have little management experience and be unsure about support available. If this is you, and you're interested in helping your team members to be the best they can be, where do you start? What are the leadership qualities that help people to excel? How do you build a team? And how do you monitor the effectiveness of that team? Over this series of brief articles we hope to answer these questions.

Who forms your team?

In order to lead a team effectively, you need to know who forms your team. This is probably more people than immediately come to mind. It includes all the staff who work with children, who no doubt have a range of skills and qualifications. It may also include voluntary helpers, parents and carers. Add to this any trainees in your setting, then all the adults whom you may have overlooked first time round, such as catering staff, cleaners and administrators - in other words, everyone with whom you work who does anything that has a bearing on the learning of the children for whom you are responsible.

Getting started

Draw up a list of all the people in your team. Now critically analyse your own understanding of

- * the roles each individual plays within the setting - these may go beyond their job description
- * the importance of each of these roles
- * the interdependence of each role upon another's.

Ask yourself the above questions in relation to your own role. Now consider:

- * How do you think your team members perceive you? How do you know?
- * What messages are you giving about your role?

Becoming a successful leader

Consider the items below and the extent to which you are developing your own skills in these areas.

How are you developing your leadership skills in these areas?

1. Knowledge – you need to be knowledgeable about the work you are doing – others will look to you for guidance. This means continually learning about changes and developments. The weighty tomes that dog education can be useful tools if you have the skills of speed reading and

a way of retrieving this information at a later date.

2. Being self-aware – displaying honesty about personal strengths and weaknesses, calmly and positively, helps team members to develop trust in a leader. It also helps to show that personal and professional development is normal and lifelong, no matter how senior a position we come to hold in our careers. Such honesty shows a leader has confidence in themselves and in turn inspires confidence in others.

3. Valuing each individual team member – and letting them know it. Think of all the ways in which you motivate children and show them that they are valued – and apply these to adult team members. A quiet word of thanks, a shared smile at a challenge overcome, remembering something that others may consider trivial, but which you suspect is important to the individual – all these things matter. Successful leaders know this and do not see them as ‘extras’. They also don’t expect to be applauded for these actions – but quietly go about their business of interacting positively with everyone.

4. Determination – tenacity is a key skill of a successful leader. Of course, it’s easy to be tenacious about something exciting and interesting, but in educational settings there are often organisational decisions which may not be quite as exciting, but which are just as important to make happen. This may mean sometimes being temporarily unpopular. Leaders need to keep encouraging and enabling action at a point where team members may be willing to give up.

5. Being positive – successful leaders see possibilities where other people may see intractable difficulties. They inspire and motivate through their own vision.

6. Prioritising – there is always ‘too much’ to do in any educational setting. Successful leaders decide on the priorities for that particular setting and then apply point four above.

7. Facilitating learning – successful leaders help team members to do what it is that is required – in this context, to help children learn as much and as often as possible. This means supporting them in a huge variety of ways, whilst keeping their eye on the priority of the children’s learning.

8. Respect and relationships – successful leaders develop a balance of being a professional figure of authority and a critical friend – showing genuine interest in colleagues as individuals. Think of the children again. They know that they are respected and valued – even though sometimes you may not like their behaviour or agree with their actions. A successful leader is able to work in the same way with their team members, maintaining positive personal relationships when addressing professional concerns.

Leading a team is a wonderfully enriching experience. Successful leaders help team members to practise these skills and begin to develop their own leadership qualities. In later articles we will look at building a team and monitoring the effectiveness of that team.