

# Leading from the Floor: An Early Intervention Leadership

Music 0:00-0:12

Gina Federico 0:12

Welcome to Leading from the Floor: An Early Intervention Leadership podcast. This series is produced by Early Intervention Technical Assistance on behalf of the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. The topic of this podcast is self care and staff morale. We'll also spend some time talking about teamwork and transition. In this podcast, you will hear from three Early Intervention Technical Assistance consultants.

Jen Furness 0:42

Hi everyone, my name is Jennifer Furness and I have held almost every role a teacher can in preschool Early Intervention in addition to many years as a Preschool Early Intervention Supervisor in two programs in Southeastern PA. I've spent most of my doctoral work focusing on staff morale and Early Intervention and I'm so excited you guys are listening to us today. Now I'm going to pass it over to my colleague Brandi.

Brandi Binakonsky 1:05

Thanks, Jen. Hi, everyone, I'm Brandi Binakonsky. I have also spent the majority of my career in Preschool Early Intervention as both a supervisor and program administrator here in Southwestern Pennsylvania. During this time, I was fortunate to have been part of both the Pennsylvania fellowship program for special education leaders, and the OCDEL policy fellowship. And I'm delighted to be here with all of you.

Gina Federico 1:30

Hi, I'm Gina Federico, I have lots of preschool, Early Intervention and early childhood classroom experience and I organize the OCDEL Policy Fellowship. I want to get into the heart of our discussion today about teamwork, and talk first about leaders' self-care. Brandi, can you talk about some of the ways that as a leader, we can reboot and take care of ourselves in order to put the best out there for our program?

Brandi Binakonsky 2:01

Absolutely. I think there are really three things that help me to kind of ground myself, and really know how important it is to be able to take care of myself so that I can support others. And that first piece is, in order to give the best to others, you have to have the resources within you. So although I've not come up with this analogy, I really like the concept that comes from the idea that you need to put on your own oxygen mask first. So whenever you're on a flight, the first set of instructions they give you in the event of an emergency is, "be sure that you put on your own oxygen mask before you start to help others." We have all been placed in situations where our stress is high and our fear of failure can prevent us from moving forward. When we recognize that we are not in control, and we live in the present moment, by

caring for our own needs, we can then be refilled so that we can support others. I also think that it's very important to practice gratitude. I know that the research shows that people who practice gratitude are 25% happier. So we know that it's important to acknowledge the hard work of staff and families who on a daily basis are supporting the needs of young children. But at the same time, as a leader, it's really important to take the time to give yourself that appreciation, and be able to recognize that you have accomplished a lot. Don't forget to thank yourself. That last component that I really believe is important for self care, is just to remember to breathe. When you're able to take a breath, it can bring you back down to the present moment, instead of doing some things like ruminating on the past, or perseverating on the future possibilities of what could go wrong. In order to take the weight off of you, it's really important to just basically say, alright, I have to be here living in the present, take a breath and move forward. And I think if you're able to take care of yourself, give gratitude and remember to just breathe so you're really able to help support those who really need your care and your devotion.

Gina Federico 4:14

Thanks, Brandi. I think something that I've tried to get in the habit of similarly to that piece about gratitude is writing in like a one line a day journal. Right? Especially those highlights of my day even when it's been a tough one, or writing down that one quick low light of my day so I can put it in the past and move forward. I think it's something that has personally helped me with self care. And it almost gives me that moment to breathe and collect myself before you know I head off to bed for the evening. So I really like those three concepts. I hope our leaders can take something out of it because when is the last time that anyone remembered to take a moment to give themselves a pat on the back and take a deep breath. Thanks for sharing that. Now, Jen, I want to talk even more about the teamwork aspect of our discussion. Can you tell me a little bit about how you maintain morale among your team as an EI leader?

Jen Furness 5:14

Of course Gina, and for those of you who know me, you know, I'm very passionate about staff morale and Early Intervention. So I'd like to start off by saying a quote that is really important to me. And if you've ever heard of training from me, you know what this is, "it is really hard not to smile at someone if they smile at you first." So that's really the first tip to maintain morale. Brandi mentioned appreciation and recognition of our staff, it belongs to everybody. Giving a smile will get you a smile in most of our interactions. The second thing is decision-making from the beginning. Now, this can be painful, because we as leaders know that sometimes really gaining the input and opinions of a lot of our staff is time consuming, at times frustrating. But I promise you, if you get all that information from the beginning, and people are part of those hard decisions, you're going to have buy-in and it's going to be easier on you in the end. And then the last one is to ask them what they expect of you. And what that means is something that I practiced as a leader every time I was in a new situation with a new staff member. You are far less likely to disappoint someone if you can say what you can and can't do for them in the beginning. If I know what you expect of me as a leader, and you know what I expect of you as a staff member, that gift of time can demonstrate active listening, and you can write down what each other says during that meeting, and really get to know each other.

Music 6:42-6:50

Gina Federico 6:51

Now that we've spent some time talking about self care, and building staff morale among our teams, I want to dig deeper in talking about transition between programs. As we all know, a huge part of each transition process comes down to working together as a team, whether it's between parents and service coordinators, infant toddler programs, supervisors and preschool programs supervisors, and school district officials, everyone needs to work well as a team to ensure that all children are able to transition successfully. Transition will look different from program to program, but the results of successful teaming will be consistently evident. Like when a service coordinator makes sure that families have important information ahead of time, so the team can more easily make decisions and have a smooth and seamless process. It could also look like an EI program hosting the transition night for families with their school-age colleagues, where they can discuss the transition process together. Transition time is a wonderful opportunity to share successes amongst existing team members, receiving team members and family members. But it is also a good opportunity to share what did or did not work for each child. These are just a few examples of how teamwork can lead to a better transition process for all. As a refresher, according to the Early Intervention Transition Announcement, infants and toddlers are identified at least 90 days prior to their third birthday to begin the transition to preschool EI and that by February 1st of each year, the preschool EI program needs to identify all children who are eligible to transition to their local school districts. For more information on the transition process, feel free to visit the professionals page of the EITA portal and visit the transition subpage. There, you'll find the Early Intervention Transition Process Padlet, which is filled with resources for both families and professionals, as well as professional development opportunities for staff. Now, here's a comment from one of our EI family members regarding the transition process, Sadia Batool.

Sadia Batool 9:11

My name is Sadia Batool and I have a wonderful seven year old daughter who has a diagnosis of autism. When my daughter was transitioning from one program to another, such as Early Intervention infant toddler to Early Intervention preschool and then finally to elementary school, we were very excited yet overwhelmed because there was a lot that we did not know about the program and the professionals that we were transitioning to. However, our Early Intervention professionals provided us with a lot of support to not only better understand the program that we were transitioning to but also helped us build a meaningful relationship with the new professionals that we would be working with in the future. We were provided with multiple opportunities to better understand the program and these opportunities came in the form of one on one meetings, as well special events like a transition event, where we were not only connecting with different professionals getting answers to the so many questions that we had, but were also making connections with other families that were in the same process.

Gina Federico 10:13

Thank you all again so much for listening to us today. I'm Gina.

Jen Furness 10:17

I'm Jen.

Brandi Binakonsky 10:18

And I'm Brandi.

Gina Federico 10:20

Don't forget to leave us a review and let us know what new strategies you've tried. Join us again next time when we talk about leading from the floor. We'll see you then!

Music 10:31-10:52

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>