

# A personal

A nursery's success ultimately depends on the personal effectiveness of the leader, who has to inspire and guide her team, while driving the business. But that's easier said than done. Sue Churchill turned to some of the sector's experts and asked them what their personal challenges were and how they overcame them. And, yes, time management came top, but you might also find the answer to some of those niggling problems you haven't even articulated.

## Managing time



**Christel Brown,**  
manager, Angel  
Community Nursery,  
Pimlico (LEYF)

"Like many, the most challenging aspect of my role as nursery manager is time management. Yet I refuse to be beaten by it! I have learnt how to manage my time effectively over the years as a manager - however, what I have discovered is that it is a journey of self-discovery. There is no one method that works

for everyone, and working within an environment where each day is different requires you to be flexible.

"I believe prioritisation is key; knowing what needs to be done, but knowing what requires urgent attention and what doesn't. Having good delegation skills works side by side with effective time management, while knowing what to hold on to and what to let go is a vital skill for managers. Much like the story of life!"



**Clare Roberts,**  
CEO, Kids Planet

"Time management and delegation have been one of the most challenging things for me. We have

grown from being a group of two nurseries to eight - soon to be 20. I think it's the art of being able to let go and develop and trust others to take over responsibilities and accept that you can't know everything all the time. Constantly reviewing our policies and procedures means that everyone is always clear on how to handle any situation."



**Jean Smart,**  
director, Collin Care

"Timetabling myself to attend nurseries daily and meeting briefly with each manager often leads

to more driving than relevant discussions! I now monitor it, then decide who needs my expertise on certain weeks. This has led to more meaningful monitoring and conversations with managers and to the knowledge shared being used for more beneficial development.

"Naturally hands on and fixing things myself, I realise this is not physically possible as our company grows. So, tasks need to be delegated, leaving me time to use my knowledge for greater benefit."

## Handling mistakes



**Kate Plews,**  
managing director,  
Sunbeams Day  
Nurseries

"I believe that a business needs a learning culture to be successful and setting the culture starts with me. The instinctive behaviour when something goes wrong or doesn't work is to blame rather than learn, and I believe each mistake, no matter how small, is an opportunity to learn. If you blame you miss that opportunity.

"Like any behaviour the initial response is the most important, as this is what people remember. I use positive language and facilitate team debate rather than finding a scapegoat. We break down the situation, identify learning points, plan, then implement the practice."

## Managing your to-do list



**Stephanie Molnar,**  
director, Elmscot Group

"When we started up our first nursery in 2001, it was such a steep learning curve and there was so much to do. I struggled to sleep as I had so many tasks and ideas running through my head - but writing them down was hard in the middle of the night or whilst I was driving.

"To everyone's amusement, I took to wearing a voice recorder around my neck - it was much easier to access whilst on the go than my phone. It worked. My to-do list, although now unavoidable, was always completed and no good idea was forgotten!"

# challenge...

## Self-awareness



**Linda Baston-Pitt**,  
managing director,  
Old Schoolhouse  
Nursery

"One of the most important lessons I've learnt over the

years is that to become an effective leader you need to understand yourself first. You need to start by knowing the values you hold close to your heart and think about how they align within your own organisation. It's very easy to stay in a permanent state of 'busyness', but the risk is that you don't see the bigger picture.

"The challenge is to know when to step back, to stop and see things in a different way. I always make time to just sit and observe the flow; consciously trying to see things from a new perspective."

## Assertiveness



**Mariessa Devlin**,  
managing director,  
Enchanted Forest Early  
Learning

"As a people- and child-centric person, assertiveness has

been a skill for me to master over the years, as historically I have had the tendency to want to please others over doing what was best for the business.

"To overcome this, I clearly focus on the direct needs of children, families and staff in our care, ensuring they are at the core of every decision I make. This affords me the ability to be clear in my communication in a fair manner, whilst ensuring that everyone is accountable for improving outcomes for children.

"For more challenging meetings, I prepare well and use notes to guide me in ensuring I communicate the messages that are required."

## Learning from others



**Stephanie Molnar**,  
director, Elmscot Group

"When we set up our first nursery in November 2001. I was an unqualified but very keen mum

of two toddlers. On our first day, after playing outside in the bitter cold, I thought a glass of warm milk would help us defrost. Our uber-qualified new manager however gave me short shrift when she found me with four pre-schoolers sitting on the kitchen floor: it was pointed out that I was neglecting every health and safety directive possible.

"I never behaved at work as I did at home again, I pulled my professional socks right up. I learnt to always involve, where relevant, members of our team who were better qualified than I: childcare, teaching, HR and finance. Reduced my workload too!"

## Learning body language



**Jean Smart**,  
director, Collin Care

"With over 30 years' experience, knowledge and practice, it should be easy to share

learning. However, barriers are often in place, unwittingly preventing the transfer of knowledge.

"Fear, resentment and dislike can often be apparent when the 'boss' appears. In our environment, where CPD is key to good practice, learning to be more aware of my body language, speech and even appearance when working with staff helps learning and development. I have to accept that my learning journey is not over and new ideas and good practice from my staff further my knowledge and understanding of children's learning."

## Budget management



**Mariessa Devlin**,  
managing director,  
Enchanted Forest Early  
Learning

"Year one, I arrived at our accountants with a bag full of

receipts and was known for spend, spend, spending on our children and staff – clearly, this was not too effective when running a business. Following coaching from my husband and business partner, I now remain focused on the ongoing need to maintain sustainable levels of employment for our large team and, in doing so, I now have the ability to look at the bigger picture regarding business expenditure.

"Our children are provided with quality resources that are longer lasting, and decision-making is no longer whimsical, but based on output from management reporting, quality audits and input from staff and children."

## Managing change



**Linda Baston-Pitt**,  
managing director,  
Old Schoolhouse  
Nursery

"Part of being an effective leader is about managing

change. The challenge is to get the message across to the team that just because we've always done it this way, it doesn't mean it's the best way. I am constantly scanning for pockets of excellence that we can replicate or build on. It's so important to recognise and appreciate the strengths of the team and to encourage their ideas and creativity. I've learnt that you don't have to come up with all the ideas – by simply observing and listening the ideas will come to you!" ■