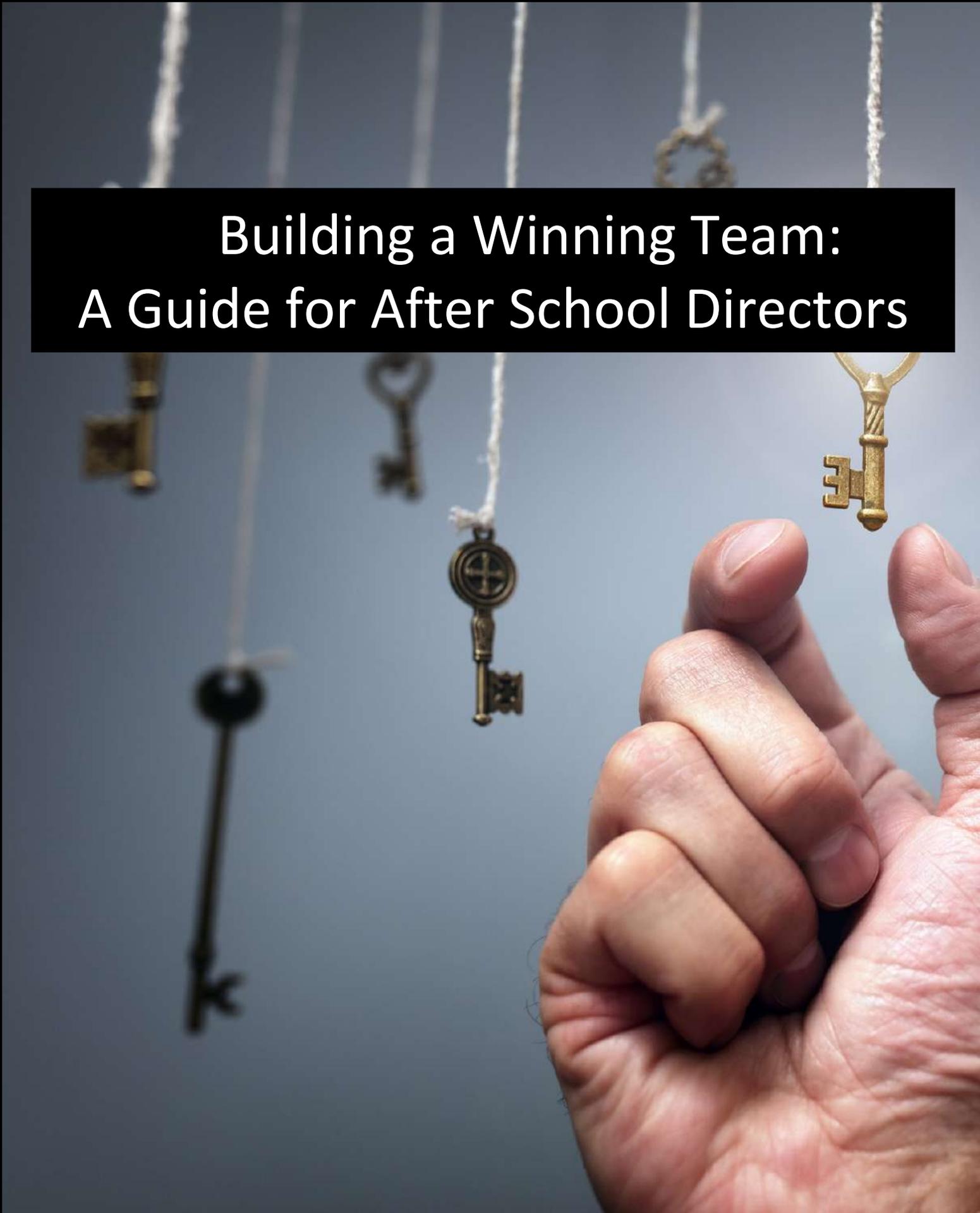


# Building a Winning Team: A Guide for After School Directors



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# Dignity of Children, Inc.

Sparking the inner light in every child, one adult at a time.

## ABOUT US

**For over 8 years,** Dignity of Children, Inc. has served numerous after school programs with the mission of creating a safe and self-expressive environment for children. We train after school directors and line staff to inspire and excite change in children and young adults by arming them with the tools and resources they need to inspire children to be powerful, creative, and emotionally healthy members of society. We have built partnerships with both for profit and not-for-profit organizations to strengthen the efforts of establishing strong foundations for quality programming.

**Our ideal client** is a passionate leader who is committed to offering the best Early Childhood and/or After-School environment where children can individually express their talents and where they are socially and emotionally safe. Our client understands the importance of continuous development for their staff, thereby, complying with all New York City/State training regulations.

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## Introduction

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For many after school programs one of the biggest barriers to a successful program is well trained, engaged staff. With after school under constant attack now is the time to create an environment with intention that can empower your staff to serve your children effectively.

But how? How do you retain and engage staff when you don't even know what their knowledge really is – versus what they bragged about during the interview?

Wouldn't it be great if you could provide quality professional development for your staff with intention?

Let's face it, if you don't put in the time to create a program that supports your staff you will spend every waking hour putting out fires and who has time for that?

So, if you're ready to get started on the road to building a winning team, read on.

You can do this.... I believe in you.

To your success,

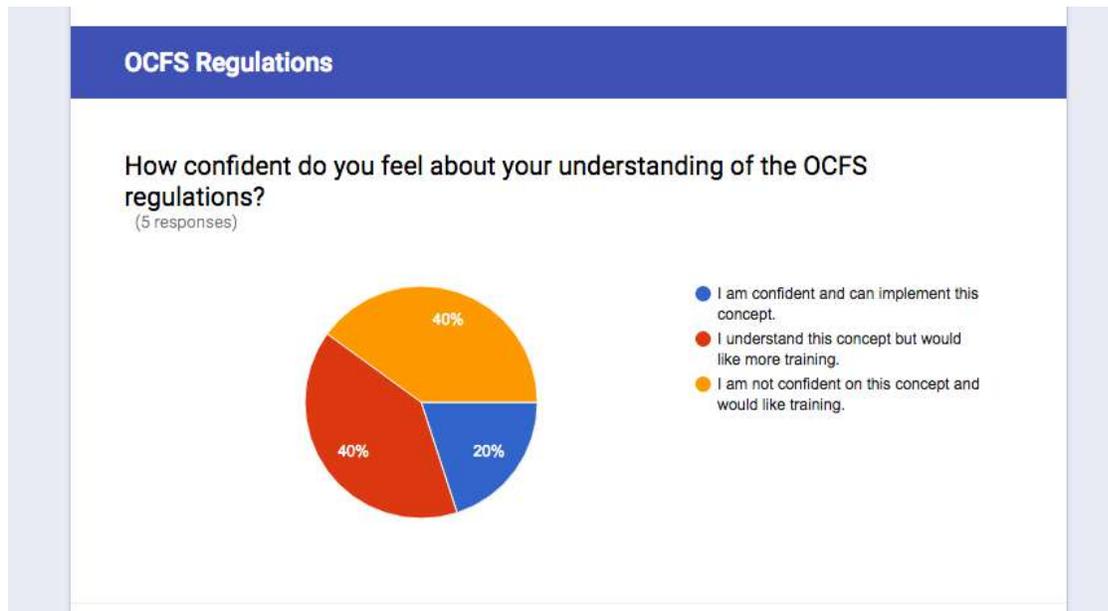
- Sonia Toledo, Founder and C.E.O., Dignity of Children, Inc.

# THE INTENTION: KNOW YOUR WHY

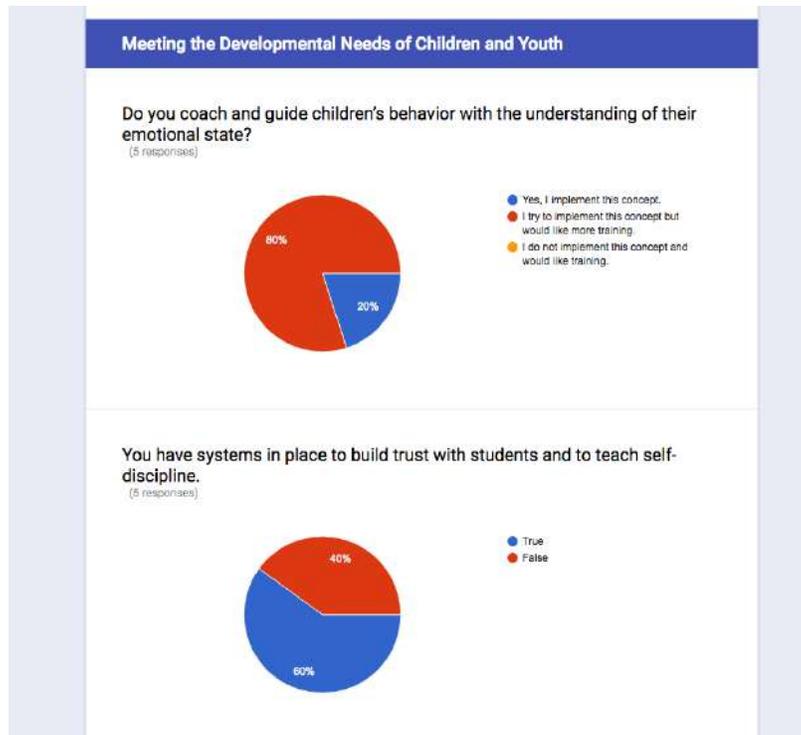
First things first. Before starting any new initiative, you should always know your why. Your why acts as your guiding compass.

Before you can begin to support your staff in an intentional way, you must first understand what their needs are. Tracking and understanding the needs of your staff will allow you to plan effective professional development that focuses on those areas where your staff need the most help.

When preparing a plan for professional development, it is vital that you collect data to help you understand what areas you need to focus on. There are several resources available that you can use such as the DOC Performance Analysis Tool (see illustration below), to help you collect data.



Conducting an analysis of the data collected on your program and staff performance will allow you to identify gaps or potential gaps your program may be facing.



When thinking about your staff, there are 4 elements to consider:

- 1) Staff Needs
- 2) Staff Knowledge Base
- 3) Staff Capacity; and finally,
- 4) Staff Motives

Knowing this information is critical to your success as a Director.

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*Education is not preparation for life;  
education is life itself.*

*John Dewey*

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Quality programming is more than just meeting the mandatory requirements. A vital part is providing staff with the tools to help children grow and learn in an engaging environment. By conducting a performance analysis, you can identify the skill areas staff may need to improve in to ensure that they are meeting performance standards. This will inform you of what they need to perform at their best. Armed with this information, you can then develop an effective plan of action.



To assist you we have laid out five strategies that can guide you toward the path of crafting a winning team.

# STRATEGY 1:

## Assess Individual Staff Needs

The best way to assess individual staff needs is to survey them. This can be done formally using a professional survey tool such as the Staff Performance Analysis or in person. The intention of surveying your staff is to assess what staff really know and identify areas where training is needed. These areas are known as the “gaps”. The “Gaps” are any concepts with which your staff have indicated the need for more training. What does this look like? Let’s provide a fictitious example.

Let’s say safety is a concern for your program. You might have a series of questions on your survey that ask staff about their knowledge in specific situations. One question you might ask is “Do you understand what to do if there is a sick child?”. If many of your staff answer this question incorrectly or not at all it could mean a few things.

1. Staff may not be sure what to do if a sick child comes to program and,
2. Staff may need more training in this area

**This is GREAT.** Now you know this is an area that staff lack knowledge. This is the **Gap.**

Once you make note of this gap your next step is to identify the best way to provide staff with this critical information.

We will come to how you can do this in just a little bit. In Strategy 5, we have provided a list of tips to coach and develop your staff throughout the year.

## **STRATEGY 2:**

### **Putting it all together to identify Professional Development Topics for your Team**

Once you have reviewed the individual staff responses, you will want to review the summary of responses for your team.

In this way, you can note trends in gaps program wide based on overall responses. This also provides an opportunity for you to determine where you are going to focus your efforts for both individual staff as well as the team.

Much the same way, when reviewing individual staff responses, it is equally critical to note trends in gaps for the entire team.

When noting areas of need for the team you can then begin to prioritize which training topics to focus on for future staff professional development. Please keep in mind that you may want to consider using techniques such as information sharing during staff meetings or memos that reinforce specific procedures.



## **STRATEGY 3:**

# **Determine How Information/Training Will be Provided to your Staff**

You must now decide how you are going to provide this information/training to your staff. Note that offering live workshops are not the only way to train your staff.

On the following page, we have listed some additional ways to coach and develop your staff beyond workshops.

Once you have noted individual staff and team needs, the next step is to determine how you will provide training.

There are several ways to do this.

Some areas may simply require the creation and implementation of protocol and procedures.

Going back to our previous example, if many of your staff aren't sure what to do with a sick child in program the best way to address such a situation would be to create a protocol related to the handling of sick children in program, followed up by a procedural memo which would outline steps that staff should take in such situations.

Next, you would review these steps during an upcoming staff meeting. If a protocol currently exists, then you would issue a procedural memo and follow up at the next staff meeting.

For more in-depth topics onsite training might be a better option.

When determining the method of providing information consider the length of time required to cover a specific topic. Topics that require more than 30 minutes most likely should be considered for staff professional development sessions.

## Tips for Coaching and Development:

- Provide Vision/Goals
- Provide Job Descriptions with clear roles/responsibilities
- Encourage flexibility
- Be Transparent
  1. Provide Expectations (Program/Agency/Funder)
  2. Provide the **WHY**
- Promote Relationship Building/Trust/Safety/Belonging
- Know staff interests/passions
- Allow ownership & voice/choice
- Provide Opportunities for Leadership
- Conduct Staff Supervision: 1 to 1 individual (30-40 minutes monthly)
- Conduct Staff Cross Training (i.e.; Train someone for more than one position)
- Provide Critical Child Development Training:
  1. Psychosocial & Emotional Development
  2. Ages & Stages
- Demystify/deprogram stigma of discipline
- Survey Staff
  1. Environment
  2. Staff Needs
  3. Program Quality
- Hold Staff Accountable for Performance
- Provide Guidance & Coaching: Professional/College/Career

## **STRATEGY 4:**

### **Observe, Observe and Observe Some More!**

Once you have surveyed your staff to identify topic areas for professional development you will need to observe your staff in action. The key here is to observe, observe and observe some more!

Your purpose now is to determine and assess staff performance in the topic areas that staff previously indicated they felt comfortable implementing. You also want to assess staff performance in those areas where staff have received training and development.

1. Begin by scheduling observation time within your program at least once a week.
2. During this time, you will make notes related to individual performance as well as the team overall.
3. Referring to your previous notes, compare your observation notes.
4. Do you notice any improvements?

As an example, after you provided the procedural memo and followed up with staff during the staff meeting related to the handling of sick children, you should see a difference during observations. In short, staff should be following the correct procedure.

If individual staff are having difficulty then coaching may be an option, however if most staff are still not following procedure, you may need to revisit STRATEGY 3.

# STRATEGY 5:

## Staff Coaching

As you conduct observations you will want to identify staff that require additional coaching and support beyond team staff professional development.



For such staffers, it will be necessary to create an individualized professional development plan.

### More Tips for Coaching your staff:

1. Role Playing
2. Scenarios
3. Demonstration/Critique
4. Feedback/Feed Forward. Tools/techniques to move forward include:
  - Peer to Peer
  - Supervisor to Staff
  - Parent (Staff, program activities)
  - Participants (Staff, program activities)

## FINAL THOUGHTS & NEXT STEPS:

Now that you know what it takes to build a winning team, the next steps are up to you. As you look to begin the process it is vital that you use a solid survey tool that can assist in collecting data. There are several ways in which this can be done such as creating a survey of your own or using a customized tool such as the Dignity of Children Staff Performance Analysis.

Remember that once begun, the process of assessment and observation should be implemented on a continual basis, *otherwise it will not work.*

To be effective requires the development of discipline so that you can:

- Start the process early *AND*
- Maintain and manage all the information such a task requires.

Such a process is akin to building muscle tissue.

Each time you engage in the process you are sharpening your program's saw, making it the kind of sharp, high quality program that your participants deserve.

Finally, the process is not linear, rather it is a cyclical continual process that will put you and your staff on the road to success.



We hope this guide has been helpful to you. Building a winning team is not easy but it is doable. Dignity of Children is here to help and we have resources especially designed to assist you on your journey.

If you are ready to get the tools to support you in developing your team, the Director's Lab is for you.

**[Register here to begin](#)**

### **The Director's Lab: JumpStart! Edition**

The Director's Lab: JumpStart! Edition Webinar Series supports Afterschool Directors in executing a solid foundation to start-up the new school year. This program will equip directors with tools and strategies to develop staff with intention, implement systems and structures in all areas of their program, maintain state compliance and cultivate a culture of learning for ongoing program improvement.

**[Register here to begin](#)**

