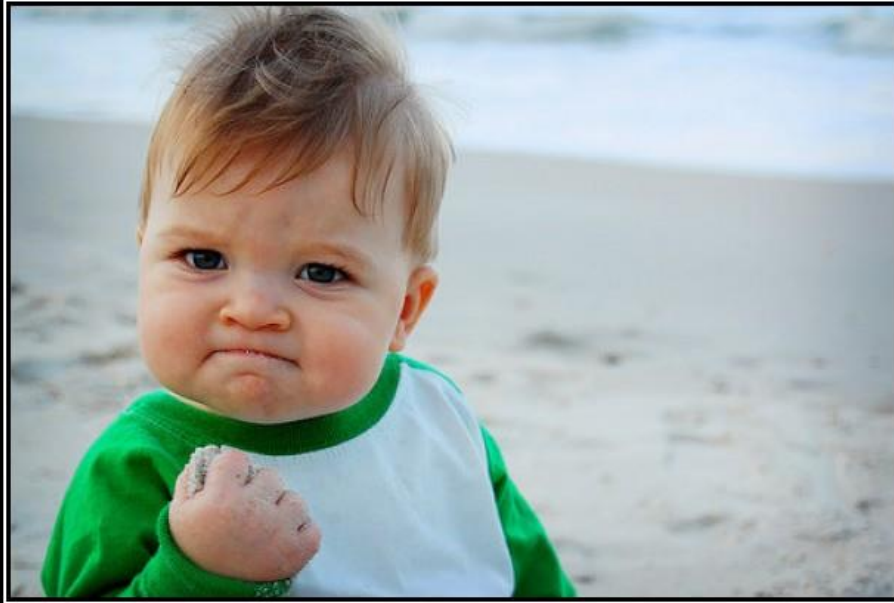


How to free up more of your time whilst delivering outstanding results in your Nursery.



S U C C E S S

Because you too can own this face of pure accomplishment

In your nursery we know your time is precious and that you are constantly juggling lots of activities and duties. If only you could make things simpler for yourself by freeing up more time, reduce your admin burden and stress levels in order to find some time to focus more on the children.

This easy to follow guide aims to help you reduce your day to day mountain of jobs and the ever increasing to do list. By improving how you complete the tasks within your nursery will enable you to free up the time you are craving so you can focus on activities you really want to be more involved in. You will feel more control in how you approach your daily duties and will feel the stress and pressure begin to ebb away as you move towards a time management system that works for you.

Motivating Staff

Employees are a critical part of your nursery and having them fully engaged in what you are seeking to achieve will make life much better for everyone. But how do you motivate and encourage staff to give you 100% of their effort day in day out. The following tips will help achieve this within your setting:

1) Get to know them

One of the most powerful ways to instantly build rapport and engage with your employees is to meet with them. Having a face to face or 1-2-1 meeting with each and every person who works in your nursery and is a part of your team shows you are interested in them and in turn you show them you are someone who is approachable and cares. This single activity in itself can catapult your relationship with your people faster and more effectively than anything else.

However it is a common problem that this simple action can be neglected. It isn't always treated as a priority and becomes a 'nice to do' rather than an essential element of improving performance. Failing to do this could put you immediately in the low performing nursery category.

Just a 10 minute catch up on a regular basis is all that is needed to benefit the relationships between people. The meeting should not be formal. It is not a performance review but it should happen and be used as a platform of engagement. If you don't already do this then I strongly urge you as someone who has reaped the benefits of doing this myself to make this a habitual practice within your nursery.

2) Share your vision and goals

There is a simple litmus test that can be carried out to see whether your employees understand and are aware of the visions and goals your nursery has. It is this ... ask them! Go and randomly select and speak to an employee in your nursery and ask them if they know what the nursery's vision is and what goals you are seeking to achieve.

Naturally be sure not to make the individual think they will be persecuted for not knowing the answer but it might surprise you that less than 20% of a typical workforce could actually answer this question. This is about how well you have communicated your vision to your team as well as how well they have listened and remembered what you have communicated to them. Therefore keep asking yourself how well are you communicating to your employees about what your nursery is striving to do and the vision it has?

Without clear guidance how can you possibly expect your employees to share with you in the vision and goals you may have set or to know what they should be working towards? In many situations employees focus on their specific tasks and become insular because they are not included in the bigger picture or understand what it is that the big picture looks like. Instead of painting by numbers they are painting without a brush! It isn't their fault. Unless you give people the full detail about the nursery's future direction and vision they won't know what to focus on.

So if you haven't already done so make sure you set out clearly the setting's vision and aspirations and the goals it is working towards. Then make sure every single person in your nursery knows about them and understands what it is the organisation is looking to do now and in the future. Give people a sense of connection and purpose and you will be pointing people in the same direction and the right one at that!

This will also provide a platform for achieving an outstanding rating with Ofsted. A unified approach being delivered by a team who understand the role they play in this is so important for the future success of your nursery.

3) Ask your people for their help and give them the chance to shine

It should come as no surprise that the effort of many is better than that of just a few and this absolutely applies to this step. The majority of human beings who walk this planet want to help. They want to feel like they are contributing to something worthwhile and

want to demonstrate their abilities. This is a basic element of human nature and it exists within the work environment.

Rather than facing a difficulty or problem on your own or with just a few of your closest advisers why don't you share your problem with your people? Have you heard the saying 'a problem shared is a problem halved?' This is so true and the beauty of asking others for help is you have a greater number of people and energy all working towards finding a solution for that same problem. What this also does is gives people the opportunity to shine and demonstrate their abilities. People can have all of the ability and motivation in the world but without an opportunity to showcase this they won't be able to improve or get better.

So the next time you are faced with a challenge why don't you ask your people to help you out and who knows you might just find the solution you have always been looking for and identify a few high performing individuals in the process!

4) Use a performance development model

The structure and process of assessing employee performance should not sound as frightening as many nursery managers think. In fact setting clearly defined goals and discussing them in an engaging and transparent way is a very powerful activity. If done right it inspires and motivates. If done wrong it can feel dictatorial and controlling. This is a fine balance folks and it requires a good, clear and transparent process to make it work!

One of the first parts in the process which needs to be established and shared with your employees very early on in their employment with you is the performance development model that you use to engage with them through. Do not make this a complicated 30 page document, full of business jargon that you can't understand because neither will your people. Make it simple and straight-forward otherwise your messages will be lost in translation.

Here are a few suggestions of what you could include within your performance development model:

- Provide context to explain to employees what the purpose of the performance development process is. Clearly show the aims and objectives.
- Explain the responsibilities of people involved in the performance process (line managers and employees)
- Include line manager guidance so they have the tools and information to effectively deliver the performance process. It should be consistently applied by everyone!
- Incorporate the company's mission statement, vision and values. The objectives must feed back into and contribute to the company's organisational targets and vision. This also supports step 2 of this 10 steps framework.
- Include a personal development plan for each employee, so training and development objectives can be identified. Support your employees to become better at what they do – feed their development. It is an investment not a cost!
- Outline the performance process (preparation; meeting structure; how they are reviewed and the frequency). Don't hide anything. Be transparent!
- Use the SMARTER objective setting tool (there is more detail on this in the next section)
- Use appendices to include the following information:
 - Company values
 - Guidance on how to set objectives
 - FAQ section for employees
 - FAQ section for managers
 - Finally if you link performance to pay be clear on how this is applied so people are absolutely aware and understand how the reward system works.

Following these steps will mean the performance development model you use will be clearly laid out and will be a structured way of managing performance effectively.

5) Set clear, tangible objectives using the SMARTER framework

This is probably the most commonly used and one of the most effective performance measuring framework tools used in business today. It identifies 6 key steps to implement and assess a performance process and the acronym makes it easy to remember. Usually there are just the SMART steps used but in order to complete the full cycle of using this model it is important you also have a way of evaluating and determining what results have been achieved. Here is a breakdown of each of the steps:

- S** = *Specific*
- M** = *Measured*
- A** = *Achievable*
- R** = *Realistic*
- T** = *Timely*
- E** = *Evaluate*
- R** = *Results*

This is really simple to follow. You need to make sure that when you are setting goals with employees you are specific about what they are. There should be a way of measuring the goal and it must be achievable and realistic for the individual to engage with it. There should be a finite time scale applied so the goals set do not continuously roll on and never get done. It is important you check in with each person and find out how things are going, in order to maintain momentum through the evaluating progress. Lastly, there should be a final review to establish what the results are and what has been achieved.

6) Use employee feedback surveys

This is a useful way of collating feedback from employees as a collective group. It should be used to get quality data that the business can analyse in order to make changes that will improve how things are done. Typically such surveys tend to be anonymous so people feel comfortable in being completely open and honest without being identified.

The survey should try to capture both quantitative and qualitative information. So for example a question such as *'on a scale of 1 to 4 how much personal development support do you believe you receive from your line manager?'* is a quantitative question as it is measured.

Another question such as *'can you provide an example of what support you receive from your line manager to improve your personal development?'* is a qualitative question as it is asking for a narrative description. Using both styles of questioning will provide a much richer blend of feedback.

It is a fact that getting everyone to complete a survey is usually unheard of, however you can improve your chances by making it as easy as possible for people to complete it. A popular way of conducting surveys these days is online and would appear to be the simplest way to do them. However if your nursery is predominantly made up of workers who do not necessarily work from or have access to a computer then a good old fashioned paper based survey might be more appropriate. If you are able to complete a survey online then a good place to start would be survey monkey www.surveymonkey.com

Another tip when looking at putting together a survey and using scales to measure responses with is not to make it possible for people to select the middle option. For example in the quantitative question used before I used a scale of between 1-4. This means if someone selects 2 it shows they have a stronger preference to their manager not giving them support but by selecting 3 it would show a more positive opinion of their line manager providing support. If a scale of 1-5 had been used it is quite common for people to select a 3 score and sit on the fence! It doesn't really provide you with a true indication of how they feel, therefore reducing the quality of the response you will be getting.

7) Encourage a culture of learning and knowledge sharing

This is one of the utopia cultures that a business can achieve. Learning and encouraging people to share their knowledge engenders a high performing culture. It breeds success, innovation and creativity. How many people are in your Nursery setting who have a wealth of tacit knowledge, all stored in their brain, in their personal filing cabinet, that you would love to access? These people are precious and very valuable but what are you doing to enable them to pass on their knowledge and share their expertise?

Any single person in your nursery may have a fantastic idea that could be your next big innovation or service, can you risk leaving this potentially untapped? The chances are these people want to share their ideas with you and others but they may not know how to or may not feel they are being encouraged to do so. Break down these barriers immediately and make it the policy in your nursery that creativity and knowledge are king and put in place mechanisms that enable these two levers to be unearthed.

Google is a great example of a company who make it easy for employees to share their ideas. One of them is for people to jot down a new idea or innovation that could be used within the business on a post-it note and place it on a wall for everyone to see. What a great and easy way to get instant access to your employees' minds. So ask yourself what could you start doing today to create a first class learning culture in your nursery?

As you will be acutely aware this is also a critical area when it comes to your Ofsted inspection. For example how are you encouraging and embracing personal development within your setting and showing how it meets and even exceeds the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework. Showcasing how you encourage a culture of learning and knowledge sharing is a great way to do this.

8) Operate a flat hierarchical structure (remove bureaucracy)

The traditional structure of a business has typically been that of a pyramid. You have the senior management team at the top and then the next layer of middle managers and the next layer of supervisors and the next layer you get the picture. How motivating it must be for employees to know their place in the pecking order.

Now I am not suggesting that running a nursery should not have structure and people must have an idea of their place in the business but does it have to be done in this hierarchical fashion? No it doesn't. As part of the learning culture we have explored in step 7, empowering your people will naturally erode any negative perceptions held about who sits where in the pyramid. Make it easy for your people to speak with you and share their ideas. Likewise show your people you value the contribution they are making by treating them well and saying thank you when they have done a job well. It is amazing how motivating those two simple words can be but believe me they are under used.

A really effective way of showing you are a part of a team, operating on an equal footing is to be amongst your employees. You may not be able to do this every day but for a few hours per week why not work alongside a particular team or colleague. Make it a part of

the culture for senior management to be amongst their teams. Not only will this build stronger relationships across the entire nursery but your management team will have a finger on the pulse and understand how people are feeling and performing. This is much better than being tucked away in an office away from everyone.

9) Produce a team charter

Here is an opportunity to be an employer of choice by showing respect and integrity to everyone in your nursery. Identifying a code of conduct - or a term I prefer to use a *team charter*, is a brilliant way of showcasing the values and behaviours the nursery expects all of its employees to apply. There are a myriad of things you could include within a team charter, but underpinning everything must be an absolute agreement that everyone should treat each other with dignity and respect.

The language used should be exciting, vibrant, and be engaging. Your employees should also be invited to make suggestions about what should be included within the team charter. This will in turn get their buy-in and support and it will become the company's own table of commandments that everyone takes pride in and believes in.

Some examples of items included in team charters' that I have seen are:

- Make a difference to others and they will make a difference to you.
- God gave you 2 ears and 1 mouth, therefore listen more than you speak.
- Feel inspired and come up with big ideas.
- Respect your fellow colleagues, one day they might become your boss.
- Failure is one step closer to success.

So get creative and with your people. Produce a first class team charter!

10) Treat everyone in the same fair and consistent way

Human nature would suggest that people will always compare how they are treated against others. Rightly or wrongly we have all done this at some point and it is something that is typical in every business. People like to be treated fairly and equitably and much of the employment legislation that is kicking around today supports this. So to make things easier on yourself when dealing with any of your people management activities, make sure whatever process you apply is fair and consistent and that you are using the same process for everyone. This might seem very straight forward but it is amazing how many businesses do not apply this simple rule.

The consequences of not getting this right can be highly disruptive, negative and costly. Therefore ensure you are using clear documentation across your business that makes every process and procedure you use completely transparent and understandable to all. Ensure that everyone in your business is applying the same procedures everywhere and is not deviating away from the rules identified within the team charter.

Finally make sure that whatever process you are applying is compliant with current employment law and meets with Ofsted regulations. Unless you want to find yourself in hot water with a claim being made against you for not treating an employee fairly then I would strongly suggest you get your house in order. That is if you haven't already done so.

Some of the core mechanisms you should have in place to ensure compliance, consistency and fairness are:

- Employment contracts
- Core policies and procedures (i.e. absence, safeguarding children, maternity, disciplinary, grievance, recruitment, performance)

- Employee handbook
- Induction

Increase Productivity

Increasing your and others productivity within your nursery will generate a huge amount of 'free time' that you never thought possible. By applying the following 9 tips on how to increase your productivity you will experience some amazing results:

1. Be aware of how much time you are spending on tasks

It is very easy to get carried away with whatever you are doing and not realise how much time you may have allocated to a particular task. It's the classic *head down and get on with it focus*, which although shows a real tenacity to get a job done can start to get out of control if you are not tracking your time effectively.

A really simple technique to ensure you never overrun on your allotted time is to use a timer. Set it for the amount of time that you know you have available to focus on the task in hand and when the beeper goes off to let you know your time is up stop what you are doing. You can always go back to the activity when you have more time available at a more convenient time of the day but don't allow it to completely take over your day and leave you feeling like you haven't achieved what you had wanted to.

Giving ourselves deadlines increases our focus and our ability to achieve more within a set period of time. Give it a try and see for yourself how just by doing this one simple thing the positive impact it will have on your productivity levels.

One final thing to note with this particular technique is to never set yourself a deadline of longer than 90 minutes as it has been proven that working for longer than 90 minutes continuously makes us less productive. Anything up to 90 minutes and we tend to be at our most productive and achieve more.

2. Make sure you are taking regular breaks

This can be easily neglected but by taking regular breaks your productivity will increase and you will feel less stressed about tasks you undertake too. Even 5 minutes to just step away from what you are doing, make a drink or grab some fresh air can make a real difference to your performance and wellbeing throughout the day.

3. The 2 minute rule

A simple trick introduced by entrepreneur Steve Olenski is that when you identify a task that you know will take less than 2 minutes to complete, just do it there and then. Don't procrastinate and return to doing the same task later in the as this often takes up more time than just getting done immediately.

4. Hold your meetings standing up

The idea of having your meetings standing up may seem a little odd at first but it is certainly growing in popularity. The very fact you are standing up means you are more engaged in the conversation as your energy levels will be higher but more importantly you won't want to be stood for huge periods of time so you are more inclined to focus on getting the meeting done sooner and with more clarity around what the meeting is seeking to achieve. The other golden nugget to remember is to never hold a meeting without a clear agenda!

5. Utilise your commute time

If you have a good proportion of your time taken up by your daily commute are there ways you could use this time more productively? If for example you use public transport to commute to and from work is there some work you could do whilst sitting on the bus or train?

If you walk or drive to work could you record or listen to information that is supportive of the activities you need to get done at work? For example are there books on how to motivate your employees that you could download on audio and listen to or some other audio books that will enable you to become super effective at work and free up even more time?

I like to think of commuting time as free education time. You have the opportunity to self-educate and improve how you approach and do your work or any area of self-improvement you are seeking to get better at.

6. Be proactive

A great skill to get into the habit of is being more proactive as opposed to reactive. Waiting for things to happen and then dealing with them is far more counter-productive than dealing with an issue or task before it becomes a bigger issue or task. Take some time to reflect on what you can do to be more proactive and potentially free up lots of time in the short to long term.

One thing you could do immediately is to switch off all notifications you might receive on phones, computers etc. Rather than being notified every 5 minutes that you have received an update on social media or another email has found its way into your inbox, simply switch off the alerts and eliminate the distraction this creates completely.

Rather than reacting straight away to every new notification, select certain points in the day when you can respond to notifications. By batching emails together for example you will be far more productive and responsive in getting back to people than you would be trying to be available to everyone all of the time.

7. Surround yourself with nice things

It is a fact that having something pleasant and visual to look at can be uplifting and increase your sense of wellbeing. This in turn helps boost your productivity levels. This doesn't have to be anything fancy or extravagant, just by placing plants for example in certain areas of your work space can make a tremendous difference to your overall wellbeing.

8. Reduce the chances of you being interrupted if possible

Interruptions kill productivity, especially when you are mid flow during one of those 90 minute focus sessions. Your colleague who has just popped her head around your office door to ask if you would like a coffee has just substantially reduced the amount of time you need to get your task done. All of those little interruptions can impact greatly on how productive you are during the day and the knock on effect is that it eats into your personal time and you end up working late again.

As approachable as you want to be it is important you set some parameters so people are aware when you have allocated time to get stuff done. Unless it is an emergency you should make it clear to your employees that you do not want to be interrupted. A simple way of managing this is to make yourself a sign that you put up on a door of the space

you are working in that clearly shows you should not be disturbed unless there is an emergency.

You will need to communicate this to your staff and explain why you are doing this so they don't just think you are shutting yourself away. You also need to be clear what constitutes an emergency so when you are interrupted you know it is for a really good reason.

9. Get your priority tasks in order (plan ahead)!

If you apply nothing else from this section do this as it will be the one of the most single important habits you will form that will have a profound impact on improving your time management.

You will find that your priorities constantly change and people are always vying for your attention to deal with something that they claim is the most important. A really effective technique to ensure you are truly dealing with the most important tasks, priorities, projects and paperwork driven activities each day is to organise your next days core tasks the day before.

In fact if you can get into the habit of spending the last 10 minutes of your working day planning for the next day you will find that when you arrive at work in the morning you are not spending time working out what priorities you need to focus on for the day ahead. Instead you will have absolute clarity from the minute you step into your nursery about what your core focus activities are.

The following three areas are what I focus on and plan ahead for every day and I strongly recommend you do the same if you want to reap the rewards from this simple system.

I have also provided a form I use and complete every day for the next days activities I need to focus on in Appendix 1 at the end of this Guide to help you with your own planning.

Focus Area 1 - Projects

These are the most critical projects you are working on that will make the most contribution to your nursery. An example of what you can include within this section might be achieving or maintaining an outstanding rating from Ofsted.

Here you will work on one thing each day that moves you towards this goal. The time you allocate depends on the other tasks you have prioritised so it will vary day by day on how long you can dedicate to your project(s). It might be as little as 10 minutes or as much as 2 hours. The point is you will be actively focused on and working towards your key projects as and when you can. This can result in considerable progress over a period of time.

Remember these are your long term goals and should not be expected to be achieved quickly or easily. But by working on them over a period of time and ultimately achieving them they will have a significant impact on your nursery and its performance.

Focus Area 2 – People

This is where you identify people who you have asked to respond to a request or action or people you need to contact in order to get something done in your nursery.

Identify the people you are waiting on to get back to you and follow up with them. It could be an email you send, a phone call you make or perhaps speaking with someone in your nursery. The point is reach out to them and ask them for a response in order to move you forward in your task completion.

Your next task is to establish who you need to contact to get something done or to help with a key priority, for example. Once you have identified who they are get in touch with

them and explain what you need from them. If you don't get a response then move them into your follow-up category as described above and keep connecting with them until you get the response you need.

Focus Area 3 – Key Priorities

This is where you would identify your most critical and important priorities and list them in order of importance. You simply work through them in that order until they are complete. If you do not manage to get all tasks completed on the same day then you transfer the outstanding priorities to the next days planner until they get done.

You will inevitably add to this list or have to move the priorities around as their order of importance changes but the point is you document them daily and work through them as you go. You will start to notice an increase in the tasks you get done and feel very accomplished as you rattle through them.

You will also start to notice that some tasks shouldn't be on your priority list, such as the bottom 10% as they are no longer regarded as being important. A win win!

Conclusion

Through implementing the tips and techniques shared within this guide you will benefit immensely from the amount of time you will generate. Time that you never thought was available to you.

It will mean you can focus more on the productivity of your nursery and have more time to concentrate on the development of the children you are responsible for. This will provide a positive work environment for your employees and parents will value the service you provide even more.

It is my genuine hope that you are able to utilise and benefit from this guide and if you have any questions or comments that you would like to send to me I would be delighted to hear from you. My email is donna@thenurseryhrpeople.co.uk

If you would like more information on The Nursery HR People and the HR services we provide to the Children's Nursery sector within the UK then please visit our website at www.thenurseryhrpeople.co.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide and I wish you and your nursery every success for the future.

Donna Fairbrother

Director, The Nursery HR People

APPENDIX 1 - MY NEXT DAY PLANNER (INSERT DATE)

PROJECTS

PEOPLE

WAITING FOR RESPONSE

REACH OUT TO

KEY PRIORITIES