

## **Wearing All the Hats: An interview with Erika Liriano from 4-star Rated Program, Reino Magico**

**Q: Can you share with us, as a Director, how you manage multiple roles (wearing different hats) in your program?**

As a Director of a child care center, wearing different hats is part of the job description. It is important to be on all sides of the issues to try to find an adequate and fair response to each question or situation. You must see the issue at hand in the parent's perspective, the teacher's perspective, and the child's perspective.

**Q: I am sure there must be times when you have felt overwhelmed, juggling different tasks within your program. How did you handle those times?**

I took a break. I was overwhelmed many times. I needed to find that time for myself to re-energize and re-focus. I told my staff to do the same. I stepped out for lunch, just to get fresh air and re-evaluate my goals and how I was trying to achieve them. For my staff, one of the incentives was "Take a Day"; I gave them a personal day so they could recharge their batteries.

**Q: Can you give us some examples of how you plan and sustain the needs of your program?**

Budgeting and knowing what you have and what you really need is the key. We plan for all activities and functions to avoid the overspending. We also have adopted a parent app ("HiMama"), which has brought down costs of paper and office supplies. We make sure to use up all our inventory before purchasing anything needed for the classrooms.

**Q: Are there any applications, websites, or tools you use to help you stay organized?**

Our parent app ("HiMama") helps us to cut down paper costs for parent communication and daily reports. There are also child care applications that can help you budget the finances of your program.

**Q: How do you simplify the tasks that need to be addressed?**

Take it one step at a time. Making and completing deadlines is key. If you look at the task at hand, it's very daunting. However, if you break it down to sections and delegate responsibilities with deadlines, the task at hand becomes manageable.

**Q: What has been the most successful way you have discovered that helps you to manage your time?**

Planning, setting deadlines, and keeping to the deadlines is the key. In my opinion, this will be the only way to complete your task with success and it works for me.

**Q: Does your staff help you to work through challenges in the program? Can you give us some examples?**

Yes! I couldn't do it without them. I have delegated some responsibilities to all my employees. But as I delegated, I sat down with my employees and took the time to explain the task in detail and what I was looking for to avoid going back and doing it myself.

**Q: Are there any hats/roles that are “uncomfortable”? How do you manage those roles?**

Yes. Incorporating home visits into our program was uncomfortable for the entire group. My staff understood our mission in enrolling into Grow NJ Kids, and in some way didn't want to disappoint me by stating that they didn't want to participate in home visits, but I picked up on it very quickly. To make them feel more comfortable, we had a meeting regarding the visits and I told them that I would be with them during each visit until they felt comfortable. This eased their concerns. And it turned out great. My staff learned a lot from each visit and have incorporated it fully into our program.

**Q: What's your strategy to set expectations in your program?**

Communication with your staff is key. My expectations are high, but I make sure to explain in detail what is required to achieve these high expectations.

**Q: How do you make sure the changes you make are sustainable?**

Monthly meetings with the staff and individual meetings. Making each person accountable and responsible to keep up with daily expectations.

**Q: Do you partner with other programs/agencies that can be a support for your own program?**

I partner up with my local CCR&R (Child Care Resource & Referral Network) which is Urban league of Hudson County, and with Programs for Parents.

**Q: What keeps you motivated and moving forward in your program?**

Seeing the level of success in the quality of care we are giving the children in our community is my motivation. Supporting children and families is what keeps me moving forward and finding other ways of improving.

**Q: Your program has been rated 4 Star with Grow NJ Kids. Obviously, you played a key role as a director in this success; any tips or recommendation you have for other programs/directors who also wear different hats within their program?**

It's a challenging process but not unreachable. If you manage your time and take it one step at a time, you will begin to see the changes. The journey is worth taking, and the outcome is very rewarding.