



Bright Horizons®

Insider Guide



Parenting, Caring & Leadership

This guide uses LEAD (Lead, Expectations, Acceptance, Discipline) to explore the key strategies needed to transfer your personal and professional skills from home to work and back again.

Leadership

“In wider career development, transitions are central to accelerating leadership development.” Jennifer Liston-Smith & Margaret Chapman, Equal Opportunities International Conference, 2008.

It's easy to feel that we are asking to be accommodated as parents at work, and to see parenthood in terms of deficits as a result. But what about choosing to focus on what we are better at since becoming a parent? How does this transition help us to unlock our talents and enhance our working capability?

Parenting and caring can impact positively on:

- Time management
- Confidence in a crisis (stress management)
- Clearer sense of objectives in negotiating conversations
- Empathy or better diversity awareness
- Improved communication and influencing.



Key actions for Leadership:

- Stop apologising
- Act up - behave, dress, and influence (act as if you work a level above)
- Take a look at flexible working options - how much control do you have over when/how you work?
- Be proactive: ask yourself, 'what's possible here?'
- Make more of your transferable skills.

Expectations

In combining work+family, we face challenges from outside, as well as managing our own internal pressures, such as self-defeating perfectionism. Learning to accept that mistakes are the stepping stones to success is vital for leaders.

Emotional intelligence, research and observation tell us that getting upset or angry reduces our chance to learn from experiences or improve performance in the future. Being able to make choices and respond rather than react can lead to a better work-life balance and helps us avoid damaging stress hormones.

Empathy can be one of the most elegant leadership behaviours. It can win contracts and settle family conflicts – it requires the ability to be aware of others in times of stress.

When leaders describe the most stressful times in their lives, it is often a result of pressures outside the workplace; when the real 'you' comes out. So, if you realise that the real you is a strong, capable and empathetic human being at home, it becomes far easier to recognise the same at work.

Key actions for Expectations:

- Keep an open mindset and make peace with who you are
- Manage your emotions, don't suppress them
- Be a role model
- Choose what you want to emulate, and challenge what you don't.

Example: Expectations and being a role model

Katherine recently resigned from her position. She loved her work and was also very good at it. When asked why, she replied "because I couldn't keep up with my boss sending emails at 1am in the morning. This is what she expects me to do and I cannot compete."

Katherine began to have panic attacks at work, anxious about how she would get her work done. After she resigned, Katherine found the courage to ask her boss about this. She discovered her boss' partner worked late on Saturday nights, so she liked to catch up on emails while he was away. It kept her awake until he came home.

Her boss had very clear boundaries in managing workload, she discovered, but had never communicated them to her team. They thought she was a workaholic! It's important to manage expectations through communication to ensure that all team members know what's realistically expected of them.

Acceptance

Adversity can bring meaning to the experience of life and encourage new connections with others. You may find this happening during the busy whirl of early parenthood. The ability to bounce-back is a critical leadership capability and family life transitions build and strengthen this.

When we're finding a situation stressful, there are only 4 ways forward:

1. Change the situation (fight)
2. Walk away (flight)
3. Change my reaction
4. Keep on feeling stressed.

Ask yourself: Which way am I choosing to respond?

'Losing it' doesn't help. Accept what's there. This reduces anger and helps us handle the work or home situation much better. Acceptance needs time.

Studies have shown that, though we feel more stressed in today's society, we actually have the same amount of time to do tasks; we just feel we have less.

Using time 'in between' other activities can allow you to focus, plan or relax. For example, using your commute or taking ten minutes to get some fresh air when you are having lunch - these are both transitional moments that can provide you with time to reflect or strategise about the bigger picture.

Key actions for Acceptance:

- Ask: 'what can I take from my experiences?' - reflect and learn
- Strategic planning: keep your eye on the bigger picture
- Make the most of 'in between' time.

Example: Acceptance and changing the situation

Bridget got upset when her new boss asked her to see him at the exact time she was supposed to leave for her son's Sports Day. Instead of responding immediately, Bridget checked her reaction and successfully changed the situation. Rather than just saying 'yes' or 'no', she explained that she really wanted to meet with him but had committed to Sports Day and asked if it would be possible to see him another time.

She was clear that she would have cancelled Sports Day and told her boss so. After explaining the situation, the new boss was adamant she shouldn't miss such an important day for her son. The situation was resolved through Bridget checking her reaction before approaching the issue with her boss, and it was also useful for her to learn that her boss supported her work-life balance in this way.

Discipline

Discipline is energising, and it's not only important for the practical routines in our daily lives but also when looking towards the future. Knowing what your work+family values are and sticking to them is a key leadership skill.

If we need to put the smart phone away to have quality time with our children, then we can also do this with our teams at work. Just as we focus on making sure time with our family doesn't get eaten up by being busy, we need to think about whether we're spending our time most efficiently at work. Are we in the right meetings, with the right people?

Take time to do the important things. Whether it be increasing your profile at work or taking half an hour for a reflective meeting with yourself. Let's make time for the things which are important and give our lives purpose. The priority is not always what's most urgent.

Key actions for Discipline:

- Managing energy - take micro-exercise and micro-relaxation; it's not all about a trip to the gym

- Prioritising - ask 'what's really important here?'
- Mindfulness and meaning - stay present in the moment/notice how you work best.



Further information

To find out more information, please see the resources below.

Resource	Website	Contact
The Compassionate Mind: A New Approach to Life's Challenges (2010) <i>Paul Gilbert</i>	www.amazon.co.uk/Compassionate-Mind-Approach-Lifes-Challenges/dp/1572248408	N/A
Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment (2004) <i>Martin E. P. Seligman</i>	www.amazon.co.uk/Authentic-Happiness-Psychology-Potential-Fulfillment/dp/1857883292	N/A
Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life <i>Martin E. P. Seligman</i>	www.amazon.co.uk/Learned-Optimism-Change-Your-Mind/dp/1400078393	N/A

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