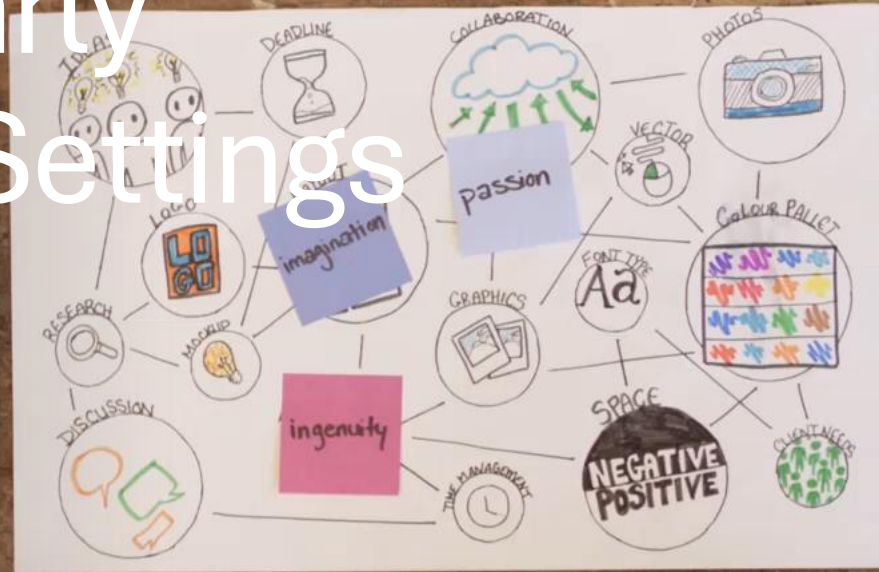


# Creating Strong Teams in Early Childhood Settings



## **Suggested Questions:**

1. Could you share a bit about yourself with our listeners?
2. What do you believe are the characteristics of a strong team?
3. Why do some team building efforts not create long term results of having a strong team?
4. What do ECE leaders and teams need to do to create happy and functional teams for the long-term?
5. I've heard that a team is really an organic, growing thing, can you share a bit more about that concept?
6. What role does "mindset" have in creating a strong ECE team?
7. Perhaps we could have you shift to some practical ideas for teams and leaders to use to strengthen their teams?
8. You've mentioned the term "psychological safety", could you talk a bit more about what this is and why it is important for creating strong teams?
9. Are there any final comments that would be helpful for leaders and teams?

# Introduction to Paula

- Have worked for more than 3 decades with leaders and teams of Canadian nonprofit organizations, including early childhood settings.
- Author of 6 books that help nonprofit leaders be the best they can be.
- Facilitator, educator and advocate of raising the bar and improving practices among leaders at all levels, from team leaders, supervisors, managers, executive leaders and boards of directors.
- Online courses, free resources and books available at [learningforleaders.ca](http://learningforleaders.ca)

# What are the characteristics of a strong ECE team?

A happy, productive, cohesive team of people who:

- Are individually skilled (competent) in their job role
- Opportunities for each member to do what they each do best, everyday.
- Each knows their own strengths and recognizes the strengths of each member.
- Are interdependent – rely on each other and use each person's strengths to make every day great for children and the team.
- Demonstrate psychological trust of each other and their leaders: okay to have different ideas; important to give both positive and constructive critical feedback; okay to disagree; okay to hold each other accountable for being their best.

# What “Team Building” is NOT ...

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Not a “thing” that you do as a group ... like a retreat, event, training day, shutdown to go play and have fun.



These activities are okay (may be fun and good) but will not result in sustainable, long-term team strengthening.



Teams may ask for a “team building” activity or event and these can be fun (also they can be expensive) but their impact is superficial and short-lived. Do them to have fun and take a break and reward hard work.

# What really creates a strong sustainable team?



A strong team is created by intentional and skilled leadership combined with intentional efforts by every member of the team ... that happens with each other every day, all year long.



It relies on a set of positive, engaging, sustained behavior of leaders and team members that create a culture of communication, collaboration and feedback.



It is better that we not think about strong teams as being created by 'team building' per se.



It is better that we DO think about a team as a group of people who do their individual jobs well, willingly collaborate with each other, communicate openly and honestly and who trust each other.

# Your team is like a garden ...

- You cannot plant carrots and expect to harvest potatoes in a few months time.
- Your output will be equal to your input.
- If you want an amazing team, you must pay attention to the thoughts that you think about your team. “Why can’t they just do their jobs and get along?” vs. “We are a work in progress, good things take time.”
- You cannot be negative and talk down about people or your team. Your input will equal your output, just like in the garden.
- As a leader, you will learn more when you are “planted” in a team that challenges you!
- People who work in and who lead positive teams, work at creating “better” every single day.



# Your Mindset = Your Team's Results



- This is true whether you are a team member or leader of a team.
- What you focus on grows stronger. Your brain is constantly scanning for confirmation of what you already believe or think is true.
- If you think your team is weak, you will notice what is going wrong, who's slacking off, the mistakes people make, or examples conflict and poor communication. This is called "confirmation bias".
- It works the other way too. Ask: "What are examples of small things that went well today?" "What were the small wins?" "Where did I see some growth or improvement?" "How did we live up to our potential today?"
- Point out and value the good things that happen. Express gratitude to each person for their contributions.
- Your mind will look for and find evidence that matches the reality you already believe in.

# Baker's Dozen:

## Ways to strengthen your ECE team

1. Shared planning and collaborative decision-making when possible and appropriate. Ask for input first, not feedback after!
2. Stretch assignments (tasks or mini-projects) that match the strengths and talents of individual members.
3. Two-person teaming to get practical tasks done. Independence with clear outcome and timelines. Choose pairs based on each person's strengths and talents.
4. Peer coaches (sharing existing strengths to teach other team members); protect time for coaching conversations.
5. Collaborative reflective practice: What do you/I/we do well? Where is there still room for improvements? What action can we/I take on these?

6. Create a practice of solving not just finding problems: the 1 – 3 – 1 model (one problem ... three possible solutions ... 1 most likely solution)
7. Leaders at all levels must address individual performance or conduct (behavior) issues directly, professionally and in a timely manner. One under-performer drags down team morale, encourages gossip, turns members against each other and leaders/management, causes over-work and resentment.
8. Create rules that are needed by 99% of team members not by the 1%. Fewer rules can be better.
9. For every leader at every level, appoint a designate leader from within the team for their position. Teach, coach and help these people be ready for short or long-term leadership roles.

10. Connect the team's work to the purpose or mission of the organization. Being aware of WHY they are needed changes how they feel about their roles and each other.
11. When change seems necessary, engage people and help them understand what opportunity or problem the change will address. Do not focus on what is changing and how, focus on the impact of the changes on people (employees, children, families)
12. Create a feedback rich environment where leaders role model and team members master how to give both positive and constructive critical feedback.
13. Work to each person's strengths – first know what they are and second create opportunities for people to do what they do best every day

# Psychological Safety

Freedom to suggest new and different ways of working better together.

Develop/teach skills in how to give and how to receive feedback leading to a feedback-rich culture.

Role modeling vulnerability: I made a mistake, mistakes happen, here's what I learned, here's what I will do differently in the future.

Permission and learned comfort to speak up when things are not going well and being solution-focused.

“Nobody can do everything. If you can build partnerships, if you can build a team with those skills and abilities, the team can make it happen – but no one should think that they are the only person able to do all of this.”

- John Lounds





## Summary ...

Part of each leader's and each team member's responsibilities is to ***“do the work”*** each day, month after month, year after year that will create the desired end result of a team that is happy and does great work together.

