

Qualities of a Good ESL Program Director

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In fact, the director must not just listen but hear and understand the underlying meaning of what is said. Rogerian listening (or repeating what you think you heard) helps in reducing comprehension errors. Deficiency in listening may result in many lost ideas which could have been beneficial to the program. In addition, a director who neither listens nor heeds the messages he or she is given will stir up resentment. Employees may wonder why they should listen to the director if the director doesn't listen to them. If you want to destroy the morale of a program, start by not listening to your employees.

D Delegates. A director should not try to do everything single-handedly. The director's job is to get others to work together as a cooperative group, and part of working as a group involves the dissemination of labor. Martha Pennington (personal communication, 1989) has pointed out that directors who do not delegate may want to be the star, but trying to do everything that needs to be done may result in a shooting star—bright for a moment and then burns out. Let others shine instead; you will reflect their brilliance.

I Inspires. A good leader needs to inspire the team that he or she leads to meet challenges. Often, working in an inspired manner inspires others. Conversely, working in an *expired* way will have a like effect on the staff and instructors.

R Respects. Directors should respect those who work for them. This includes their opinions, experience, and knowledge. The sum of the parts of the organization are stronger than any one person. A director needs to understand that employees are talented and valuable in some ways which may be complementary to the director's talents and skills. Directors who fail to exploit the talents of their staff or instructors and other members frustrate everyone involved. Lack of respect begets the same, and respect is nearly impossible to regain once it is lost.

E Elicits. A good director elicits ideas and plans from those who work for him or her to help solve problems. Neglect in this area leads to a director who must be responsible for all creativity. As imaginative as he or she may be, one person's capabilities will pale in comparison to the creativity of many minds working collectively.

C Cares. A rather all-encompassing quality, caring entails a real concern for the employees, the program, the students, and the community. Failure to care about any of the above will lead to the director's downfall. This quality of caring is seemingly an obvious prerequisite for any director. However, time or the pressures of the job can lead to apathy. Directors must consistently check their attitudes. Directors who cease to care should consider a new program or even a new occupation.

T Transforms. A negative program may be transformed into a positive program by redirecting negative attitudes into positive ones by consciously working to turn them around. For example, if you know that communication is a problem,

alleviate the situation by initiating informal meetings, rap sessions, or some other method of encouraging real communication in a relaxed atmosphere. Communication is of paramount importance to an ESL program. Lack of communication will cripple the program's potential.

O Orders. Sometimes a director must issue imperatives. If a director has the big picture in mind, sometimes unpopular courses of action must be enacted for the overall good of the program. For some personalities, this may be one of the hardest things to do, yet the ability to give orders when needed is critical for the success of an ESL program director. A director who is unable give orders is ineffectual. Employees will lose respect for a director who is unable to be firm.

R Rewards. A director should reward those who go above and beyond the minimum job description requirement, even if it is for their own reasons! Sacrifice and commitment need to be recognized. Loyalty will be reduced and discontentment exacerbated if rewards are not forthcoming.

Here again, is what a director needs to keep in mind:

E Energize
S Select
L Listen

D Delegate
I Inspire
R Respect
E Elicit
C Care
T Transform
O Order
R Reward

Of course, these are only some of the skills and actions that an ESL program manager must exhibit to maintain an efficient, harmonious organization. Following this format, I am sure it would be a relatively easy matter to extend the acronym to at least as far as A MODERN AND SUCCESSFUL ESL PROGRAM DIRECTOR. A successful director, in fact, implements a long list of active verbs to ensure an active, vital program.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Martha Pennington at City Polytechnic of Hong Kong for inspiring this piece during her class "Introduction to ESL Program Administration," at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and for helping to refine it.

About the Author

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Qualities of a Good Program Director: An Acronymic Approach

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Being an ESL Program Director is a multi-faceted task which requires a number of skills. Many of these skills are innate for some directors, but other skills need to be learned. Inexperienced or ineffective directors have fewer or less developed skills. Moreover, the novice or ineffectual program director might have trouble recognizing these skills, let alone remembering or developing them. To help out, I spell out here an acronymic approach to describing these skills. If you find yourself in trouble with the program you are supposedly directing, remember:

E.S.L. D.I.R.E.C.T.O.R.

E Energizes. A program director needs to energize a program by encouraging staff and instructors. The director provides leadership by helping employees to

envision the value of the program to the students and to themselves. Reviewing the potential of the program will often energize all involved. Directors who are listless and apathetic will fail to set any example for their subordinates—except a bad one.

S Selects. A good program director selects good employees. When hiring, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If a director fails to hire teachers and other employees carefully, he or she will have the unpleasant task of having to let them go later. Even worse, poor hiring decisions can jeopardize the program, and ultimately, the director's own job.

L Listens. Listening to students, instructors, and staff members is essential.

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TESL Reporter

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