

BEYOND QUICK FIXES: WHAT WILL IT REALLY TAKE TO IMPROVE CHILD WELFARE IN AMERICA?

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Paper Four: Agency Priorities- Keep Focused and Don't Get Lost in The Chaos!

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Preamble: this is the fourth in a series of articles regarding the current status of child protection services in the United States and proposals to address its challenges. For decades, state and local agencies have struggled to provide the appropriate quality of responsive child protective services. Untold dollars have been spent at every level of government in an effort to protect children and, at the same time, address issues within the family structure that may put a child at risk of maltreatment. Too often, the system's efforts to improve or correct the perceived deficiencies within an agency have been misdirected, misguided, or even inappropriate.

These articles are designed to identify specific issues, analyze typical or traditional responses to those identified issues, and propose fundamental and substantially new alternatives to addressing the issues faced by child protective agencies. It is important to note that no single recommendation will provide substantial improvement in the quality of response and services. The system is far too complicated and interrelated for a single improvement to successfully improve the system for any length of time. These articles must necessarily be integrated to allow for substantial transformation, which will be real, meaningful and long-lasting.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Leadership of a child protection agency is critical in setting the agenda and maintaining focus, particularly in challenging times. Often, a new leader of an agency will accept the position during a period of turmoil. In most cases, there is little opportunity or time for successful succession planning. The opportunity for a change of direction, regardless of how it comes about, is often healthy for an administration. It provides an opportunity for change and transformation.

Given the extremely complex nature of the child protection system, a new agency leader should move forward with four initial steps: 1) Establish or re-affirm the agency's vision and mission; 2) Get to know the organization: its culture, status, reputation, and operational capabilities as well as the environment in which it operates; 3) Select the priorities and agency initiatives to move forward; and 4) make a plan for doing so.

SET THE VISION AND MISSION

A new agency leader's first step should be to define the organization's vision and mission. If these already exist, he or she should carefully evaluate them to make sure they align with the agency's many responsibilities as well as his or her own ideas for the direction of the organization. Evaluating the agency's structure and its ability to support and meet responsibilities and initiatives is a critical step in setting the agency's vision and mission.

KNOW THE ORGANIZATION

There are literally dozens and dozens of programs, policies, issues, practices, and opportunities for an agency leader to consider. In order to develop priorities, leaders must first assess the "as-is" state of their organization and the environment in which it functions. Important factors to consider include:

- The political and economic climate
- Workforce Capacity, particularly the capacity and professionalization of caseworkers in the organization
- Agency culture, traditions, and readiness for change
- Current technology and data capacity and issues

CHOOSE AGENCY PRIORITIES

Leadership has the responsibility to decide which programs, services, products, opportunities, or philosophies the organization will focus on. Categorizing the options being considered as **critical, important, or supportive** becomes an important task of leadership. Those that are critical, must be the focus of the agency leader. The following are suggested critical priorities.

- Establish caseworkers' case load standards
- Develop data and metric reporting
- Utilize predictive analytics
- Invest in technology
- Develop a practice model
- Improve media relations
- Invest in services that work
- Develop a process to respond to fatalities and tragic events

While there certainly are other considerations for designating priorities within a leader's vision and mission in determining those priorities to be critical, eventually a solid foundation for the framework and function of an agency must be established. The above recommended critical priorities provide the framework and the best opportunity for success in fulfilling the traditional vision and mission of the child protection agency.

MAKE A PLAN TO MOVE FORWARD

The following activities will help ensure that the agency's priorities are moved forward successfully:

- Reinvest savings
- Obtain agency support, internal and external, public and private
- Review how the agency buys services
- Review the agency management structure
- Identify, justify, and advocate for critical budget issues
- Manage change

BACKGROUND

The job of leading a child welfare agency has been called "the toughest job in government."ⁱ Leadership of the child protection agency is critical in setting the agenda and maintaining focus in challenging times. Often a new leader of a child protection agency will accept the position during a period of turmoil. This may occur because of a change of an administration through an election, through a series of tragic events that cause the previous leader to leave under a cloud, or the retirement or resignation of the previous leader. In most cases, there is often little time for successful succession planning for the position. Regardless of the circumstances of that leadership change, the new leader has a unique opportunity to reevaluate and redefine the mission and vision, organizational structure, agency goals, objectives, and priorities. **This opportunity for change of direction, regardless of how it comes about, is often healthy and important for the administration and the new leadership. It provides the environment for change and transformation.**

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STEPS FOR A NEW LEADER

Step 1: *Visions/Mission*

Step 2: *Know the Organization*

Step 3: *Choose Agency Priorities*

Step 4: *Plan to Move Forward*

STEP 1: Establish or re-affirm the agency's vision and mission

The first step for a new leader in this role is to define a vision and mission for the agency. The Yogi Berra adage, "If you don't know where you're going you might not get there" certainly applies to new leadership in a child protection agency. If vision and mission statements already exist, the leader must evaluate those existing statements and revise or reinforce them. This means that the leader must immediately work to understand the complexity and interconnectedness of all of the parts of the child protection system – the agency itself, the sister governmental agencies at the state and local level, the judiciary, advocacy groups, foster families, provider community, consultants, the media, and more.

Child welfare agencies have varying degrees of responsibilities. Some child protection agencies are responsible for child protective services only, some include other responsibilities such as mental health or child support or child care. Others have broad authority over Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), emergency assistance, juvenile justice, juvenile corrections, housing, health, Medicaid, and an array of other services for children and families. The vision and mission must be designed to address that broad array of responsibilities. Each one of those services may have its own vision and mission but the child protection agency must have its own clearly defined vision and mission. Every action that the leader takes going forward must be in alignment with the vision and mission that the leader has established for the agency.

- *Need Vision and Mission*
- *Evaluate, Revise Or Reinforce Existing One*
- *Know Complexity of Agency*
- *Future Actions Must Align With Vision and Mission*

At the same time, the new leader should review the organizational structure to determine whether or not that structure is sufficient and appropriately designed to support the agency leader's management style and direction. Evaluating the organizational structure's ability to meet and support its responsibilities and initiatives is a critical step in establishing the agency's vision and mission.

STEP 2. Get to know the organization

Prior to selecting priorities, a new leader should undertake a process to understand the "as-is" state of the organization. This will not only help make priorities clear, it will also help evaluate the level of effort it will take to move initiatives forward. Consider these important factors:

- **The political and economic climate.** Whatever the jurisdictional makeup may be, a political climate exists that must be considered. This includes the political climate in a broader context of the community at large and the general sense of whether the agency can produce the results expected. There may be a climate that supports removal of children from a home, as an example, when there is an allegation of abuse or neglect. Or there may be a climate of support for placement with relatives. Or there may be a broad base of support for community engagement in the work of the agency.

- *Political/Economic Climate*
- *Politics and Community*
- *Funding History*
- *Budget Flexibility*

The adage, "Money isn't everything, but it ranks right up there with oxygen!" is material and relevant to a child protection agency. It is not uncommon that the investment made in a child protection agency, though large, does not provide sufficient financial resources to ensure excellence in service delivery. Also, during difficult economic times, it is common for the budget of a child protection agency to be reduced. Restoring that budget to its original levels - much less adding additional investments - is problematic. Too often, the money is categorized in inflexible ways and cannot meet the changing circumstances that exist within a jurisdiction or within the philosophy of child protection. Understanding the current budget environment, including the extent to which the current administration and legislature have historically invested in the child protection system, the degree to which they have allowed some flexibility, and for what types of services and programs are important for new leaders to understand.

- **Workforce capacity, particularly the capacity and professionalization of caseworkers in the agency.** Virtually nothing within the organization is more important than the caseworkers who represent the agency in the implementation of policy and practice. Critical to the success of the agency, and therefore critical to the vision and mission of the agency are the following: 1) having an adequate selection process to acquire and retain quality caseworkers; 2) maintaining a sufficient number of caseworkers to handle appropriate caseloads; 3) providing initial and ongoing training to ensure appropriate knowledge of the policies, practices, and philosophy and 4) promoting sufficient professionalism within the designation of caseworker.

- *Workforce Status Caseload/ Workload Data*
- *Historical Workforce History*

Reviews of current practices in these areas and additional analyses such as a caseload and workload study may be required to determine the "as-is" situation as well as the desired "to-be" state. The new leader should review data showing historical caseload numbers, current caseload numbers, vacancy numbers created by caseworker turnover that impact case transfer, and policy and practice arrangements which address potential vacancies.

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- **Agency culture, traditions, and readiness for change.** A new agency leader typically brings about a reevaluation and reconsideration of current policies, programs, and initiatives. This will typically occur because of three reasons: 1) a change in philosophy brought about by new leadership; 2) new approaches supported by data and evidence-based practices; or 3) a crisis suggesting that prior practices and initiatives are not meeting the goals and objectives. These new initiatives bring with them resistance from supporters of prior programs and practices and little support from those who would not profit from the new programs.ⁱⁱ This is particularly true when the initiatives fundamentally impact the traditional culture and practice within the jurisdiction.

- *Agency Response to Change*
- *Agency Readiness to Change*
- *Current Crisis Quotient*

- Moving from a traditional practice of substantiation or un-substantiation to one that incorporates alternative or differential response.
 - Emphasizing family preservation through intensive family preservation services at the front end of the system.
 - Engaging relatives at the initial stages of the assessment process which include searching for absent custodial parents, typically fathers, and placing with relatives at the earliest possible point.
 - Evaluating the appropriateness of residential placement with a view towards fewer residential placements, which includes the least time in residential care and implementation of intensive family reunification services.
 - Implementing evidence-based programming or performance-based payment plans to move from other traditional per hour or per diem payment plans.
 - Requiring more complete access to Medicare services through a local or state-funded programs such as Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT).
- **Current technology and data capacity and issues.** How an agency views its own data and how it uses that data is often a challenging process. Too frequently, agencies have not trusted their own data so that the reports and information are neither viewed nor used as a management tool. Staff often view data reports as a barrier to overcome when initiatives are evaluated. In fact, given the extent of the data available to most agencies, the failure to ensure data accuracy and the subsequent use of inaccurate data and metrics to support the work is a fundamental flaw of many leaders and agencies themselves.

Typically, the technology is outdated. Bringing more modern technology not only has a cost, but is rarely viewed as having a return on investment. However, the new, younger government workforce expects and even demands access to the latest

technology in order to provide them with known data as well as assist in making better decisions. The new generation of employees also expects that technology will assist in doing the jobs well and will allow employees to be “connected” to a society that is more and more open and transparent.

- *Ensure Data Accuracy*
- *Update To Modern Technology*
- *Know Internal IT and other Agencies*

This means that there is a responsibility to have a working relationship with the IT department of the jurisdiction and the ancillary agencies such as child support, mental health, education, justice, health, motor vehicles, and Medicaid. Having a positive understanding and subsequent support from these partners is an important part of acquiring the technology and then using it effectively.

STEP 3. Choose agency priorities

In choosing what will become the focus of the agency under new leadership, also consider what is currently in place. Frequently, the willingness to discard current initiatives and practices means that those supporting those initiatives and practices will feel disenfranchised and potentially resist change. A leader will then run the risk that agency staff may then conclude that any newly created initiatives and practices can similarly be discarded when another leader appears. Just because a policy or program existed at the time of chaos and crisis or was supported by a prior administration does not mean it has no value.

Often there are so many existing and proposed initiatives and programs that it becomes easy to be overwhelmed by the options.

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AS A NEW LEADER, WHAT PRIORITIES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

The following is a list of initiatives proposed for consideration as meeting the responsibilities for a new leader and the administration. These will help to determine priorities that will support the vision and mission of the agency. This is by no means exhaustive nor is it intended to be complete, but rather it is a list of considerations that may be critical in establishing priorities to meet the goals and objectives of a new agency leader.

agency attorney representation	hotline establishment/protocol
assessment tools	judicial relationships
budget issues	legislation – state and federal
case transfer	local community support
caseworker caseload	media relationships
caseworker hiring practices	mental health services- children
caseworker overfill	mental health services-adults
caseworker professionalism	mentoring for new staff
caseworker retention	office vs. field culture
caseworker training	parent mentoring
CFSR and PIP	parenting support
chief executive support	performance-based contracting
child well-being	policy vs practice issues
children aging out	portability of information
confidentiality/transparency	predictive analytics
cost neutrality vs. ROI	prevention program funding
data/metrics reporting	reinvestment of savings
differential response	residential treatment use
distance learning initiatives	risk vs. safety issues
drug and alcohol programs	safety, permanency & well-being
educational outcomes	service standards
emphasis of children under six	sister agency networking
establishing a practice model	social impact bonds
evidence-based practices	supervisor caseload
family finding efforts	supervisor training
family-friendly initiatives	technology investments
fatality issues	time to permanency
fatherhood initiatives	Title IV-E reimbursement
federally funded programs	Title IV-E waiver
foster parent recruitment	zero to 3 initiatives
foster parent retention	

CRITICAL PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Leadership should always have the responsibility to decide which program, service, product, opportunity, or philosophy the organization will focus on. In many instances, there are multiple and that is the dilemma for a leader. The opportunities for success can quickly spiral downward. Make the right choices and it looks like brilliance. The success of those choices most frequently relies on the individuals who must implement them.

Even with those choices, often there is compromise along the way. Sometimes those compromises are necessary and, in fact, helpful to the success of the selected option. On other occasions, however, those compromises may undermine the very

Initiatives:

- *Critical, Important, Supportive*
- *Compromise Wisely*
- *Compromise Has a Price*
- *Rarely/Never Compromise Critical*

effectiveness of the selected option. Again, leadership has the ultimate responsibility of making the decision regarding the type and degree of compromises.

Once a compromise is made, it is the agency leader who will be judged by the success or failure of the selected option, regardless of the justification for the compromise. Agency leadership should determine whether or not a choice is **critical, important, or supportive** to the vision and mission of the agency. Having made those designations for the selected program, service, product, opportunity, or philosophy, the issue of compromise of that selected option becomes paramount to how the leader communicates those selections to both internal and external individuals and agencies.

Once a chosen option becomes critical to the vision and mission of the agency, the issue of compromise becomes the most convicting decision that a leader will consider. While there are dozens of programs, services, initiatives, considerations, funding options, or philosophies to consider, there are certain options that a leader should consider as critical as he or she assumes the leadership role of the agency or pursue significant transformation for the agency.

Having selected these as critical to the leadership of the agency, compromising the implementation must be extremely limited or not considered at all. Once identifying the priorities and providing details within each category, the issue of compromise becomes limited. Disclosure is a matter of choice and frequency for the leader to determine, including what should be vetted through the chief executive officer of the jurisdiction (governor, mayor) and through media representatives.

“Dogs Don’t Bark At Parked Cars”

A wise man once said, **“Dogs don’t bark at parked cars.”** The priorities chosen should challenge the status quo, be designed to accomplish a set of goals, be consistent with the vision and mission, be measurable, and be intended to have lasting impact. Conviction and dedication to the choices are essential. Expect resistance and questions – if there are none, find a moving car and add it to this list.

CRITICAL PRIORITY OPTIONS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. **Establish caseworkers’ caseload standards.** Within any child protection agency, there is no person or position more critical to the success of the agency than the caseworker. Their importance to the vision and mission cannot be overstated. There are volumes written about caseworker roles and responsibilities, but nothing is more indicative of a caseworker’s importance than a discussion with a child or family in crisis who has had the

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good fortune to work with a compassionate, empathetic, well-trained, experienced, supported, and professional caseworker. These individuals are known to other caseworkers and to everyone in middle-management. Too often, however, they are not well known to the agency leader and the leadership team.

Having a successful caseworker begins with hiring the right person. The responsibility of working with the most difficult, challenging, dysfunctional, damaged, and resistant individuals of our society is not for everyone. Agencies are beginning to emphasize the difficulty of the responsibility of caseworkers by pre-application or pre-hiring videos or other means of disclosing the work of a caseworker.^{iii,iv}

Once having been hired, a major responsibility of the agency head is to train caseworkers well. Looking at other first responder professionals, training may take three months, six months, or up to one year in some instances. Too often, child

protection agencies have been in such a hurry to fill a position and to get a child and family on the caseload of a new caseworker that training is not sufficient to fully inform and prepare

a new caseworker for his or her responsibilities and obligations. The question is, "What is the best way to provide training to ensure continuity and consistency of the practice model?" Many child welfare agencies have partnered with a school of social work in the jurisdiction. Too often, training is compromised by shortening training time and assigning the new caseworker to the field, often with "workarounds" implemented at the local level because of high caseloads increasingly challenging cases as well as ever-changing policy and practices.

That being said, and assuming that training is sufficient in length and clarity to recognize the professional demands of the caseworker position, nothing is more critical to a caseworker's success than having a caseload sufficiently low and uniform; this will allow the workload requirements to be adequately and appropriately complied with. Caseworkers' responsibilities are much too extensive to list, so a determination must be made for an adequately limited caseload so that caseworkers can do their work effectively and appropriately. Compromising this requirement will lead to an inability to comply with the vision and mission of the agency.

That said, caseworkers, at times, do leave their positions. When a caseworker with an assigned caseload leaves, a vacancy can be filled in a number of ways - some of which are appropriate and some of which compound the problem. Every time there is a departure of a caseworker, there is a case transfer of that child and family to someone else who may reconsider, reevaluate, or even redirect the work done previously. Simply filling a position will not establish trust between a new caseworker and a child or family.

This issue can be addressed in several ways to, at the very least, minimize the impact of case transfer. Consider implementing a teaming method with which the child and family have two caseworkers assigned to their case. Both of them are familiar with the child, family, and circumstances and have a trusting relationship. This teaming approach will minimize the possibility of case transfer when one of the caseworkers leaves. Another option to address this issue is to "overfill." This option considers that a specific number of caseworkers with sufficiently limited caseloads are needed to accurately meet the staffing ratio needs of caseworker to child and family. While challenging, particularly at the intake or assessment level when a child and family are first referred to the agency, what is more challenging is convincing policymakers and budget leaders to fund more caseworkers than might be numerically justified.

The ultimate issue is twofold – familiarity with trust-building relationships and return on investment:

- a. **Trust-building relationships.** Research has shown that case transfer - assigning a new caseworker to a child and family - has implications on service direction, permanency plan, length of time in care, and ultimately, funding. Retaining caseworkers through career opportunities and recognizing that professional responsibilities directly impact the "life of the case" once a child and family are referred to the agency is critical. Understand clearly that retaining caseworkers and building on their training, expertise, and experience by recognizing and supporting them as professionals builds trust relationships.
 - b. **Return on investment.** The return of investment through 1) sufficient and extensive training, 2) adequate mentoring and support of the supervisor, 3) providing technology and other tools for effective case work implementation, 4) paying them as professionals, comparable to other first responders, and 5) providing recognition for length of service as well as excellence in caseworker performance more than provides the return on investment to the taxpayers, the jurisdiction, the budget agency, and to society as a whole.
2. **Develop data and metric reporting.** Child protection systems, primarily through the federally supported State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), have extensive data and information which has often been underutilized or not understood. Virtually every jurisdiction, whether county or state, has an information system into which data elements are designated and available. The database relies primarily on caseworkers to input that data on the many daily activities of a particular case. Even when and if the data are inputted timely and properly, it is often not used appropriately to manage by data.

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In an age of rapid development and employment of technology throughout many parts of the public and private sector, child protection services often lag behind in those advancements. Even when caseworkers have access to modern technology such as smart phones, notebooks, tablets, or other portable electronic devices, often the data reporting and metrics are not an administration priority and therefore the creation of reports and metrics for measurement historically do not allow for evaluation of trends, outliers, or deviations.

The federal government has improved the awareness and response to requests for information and data through the Children and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). Begun almost 15 years ago, states are measured through the submission of their National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) and Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data, followed by a state review which provides an in-depth look at

a select group of cases (in most states or counties, approximately 50 cases). This includes intensive reviews by teams

- *Create Data/Metric Measures*
- *Manage to Data*
- *If It's Important, Measure It*
- *Reward/Consequences For Data*

from the federal and local jurisdiction. The reviews have been met with criticism and suggestions for significant reform. The federal government has attached requirements to improve the data and metrics through a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) if a jurisdiction does not meet established federal standards; there have been significant compliance and financial penalties imposed as a result of a failure to meet those standards.

The new federal CFSR will include three standards: safety, permanency, and well-being. The safety measures will measure whether children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect and second that children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate. The permanency measures will measure whether children have permanency and stability in their living situations and second that the continuity of family relationships is preserved for the children. Finally, the well-being measures will measure whether families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs; that children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs; and that children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health.

All of these are important to understand because they are the standards by which the states and counties are uniformly measured. There are, however, additional measurements that management should consider: determine trends, allocate staffing resources, adjust budget considerations, inform the public and governmental entities of the state of affairs of child protection services and, finally, prepare to respond to crises when they occur. For that, it is suggested that the following additional data elements be established and reviewed not only for point-in-time but for trends and justification for investment and return on investment:

1. caseworker caseloads
2. casework supervisor to caseworker ratios
3. caseworker turnover
4. hotline calls
5. percentage of screen-outs
6. number of cases assigned to alternative/differential response if implemented in the jurisdiction time of response
7. length of time cases are assessed according to jurisdictional standards –this may be legislatively or administratively set
8. number of cases assigned to investigation / assessments
9. percent of substantiations
10. number and percentage of children under supervision and placed in-home, relative care, foster care, therapeutic or specialized foster care and residential care
11. average length of time caseworkers have been employed
12. supervisor turnover
13. number assigned to a case along with length of time the case is open
14. monthly (or 30 day) visits to children and family
15. data on the diagnosis of children in care
16. number of children in care more than six months, 12 months, 18 months, 24 months, and longer
17. once children is removed from home, length of time the children are relative care, foster care, therapeutic or specialized foster care, and residential care
18. length of time that children are removed from home and then placed back in the home
19. utilization of listed service array
20. dollar amount of expenditure per program category.

All of these should be regularly reviewed by the agency and available for review by other governmental entities. It is, however, not sufficient to just have these data elements available. The results and information must be used for management purposes. If something is important enough to measure and to review, it is important enough to be used for reward or accountability.

Ultimately, this means that once data and metric elements are determined to be important, the agency leader, executive team, managers, supervisors, and line staff must be prepared to review and respond to the results. Virtually every business and sector of society is managing to data and being held responsible for data. Data can be the best evidence that investments have value and the vision and mission of the agency are being successfully met.

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3. Utilize predictive analytics. A child protection system often has not adequately used data for purposes of analytics to inform itself and others about the agency's work and outcomes. The use of metrics is significantly different than using data for analytical purposes and different also from predictive analytics. The use of data for analytical purposes is to analyze the data for trends, anomalies, and outliers for the purposes of forming conclusions about specific issues. This requires a certain degree of expertise in training and many agencies are hiring qualified individuals to provide an analytic profile of particular issues and trends.

Predictive analytics is entirely different and is being implemented in virtually every sector of society – government, private, and not-for-profit. The purpose is to use the same data and metrics to look for trends, anomalies, and outliers, but with purpose

- *Data/Metrics are First Step*
- *Use To Inform and Predict*
- *Support Field Work Decisions*

of predicting behavior and outcomes to a degree of certainty that justifies patterns of treatment and services. Through predictive analytics it is possible to determine the type of service that is most likely to positively impact identified markers, the order of service delivery that is most likely to have a greater positive impact, and the program or service that is most likely to have a more effective treatment intervention throughout the "life of the case."

Recent research has demonstrated the impact predictive analytics is having on other segments of society. For instance, a recent report indicated that a predictive analytic program has been developed so that college and professional basketball programs can predict what play, player, and often similar defensive patterns will be implemented in specific circumstances and at specific times during a basketball game.^v Predictive analytics has been utilized in a number of different situations such as what bakery goods should be made in the morning that have the highest likelihood of being sold that day, what assignments should be made to child support caseworkers to have the greatest possibility of obtaining child support payments for custodial parents, and what cases should be given extra consideration in child protective services to prevent fatalities from occurring in the future.^{vi,vii}

The child welfare system has only recently accepted analytics as a tool supporting a practice model. The issue of predictive analytics is the next and perhaps most important tool that the child protection system should support. The more forward thinking agency leaders should quickly begin to adopt and

develop a process that supports the sharing of information so that predictive analytics be used to support a practice model and service delivery. Several jurisdictions have begun the process through request for proposals to develop predictive analytic models. These jurisdictions understand and have accepted the challenge of moving forward with the design and implementation of a predictive analytics system that will better serve children and families and provide better outcomes for jurisdictions and agency leaders.

4. Invest in technology. The child protection agency is, in essence, a business. It has leadership, management, staff, funding investment, outcome and metrics, and accountability. In many respects, too many child protection agencies remain a business believing that it is entirely about people and providing service to those in need without a significant degree of accountability. This has changed over the last decade. As accountability exists in every part of society, it is no less true for a child protection agency. A child protection agency is not immune to the vagaries of funding that confound and cause conflict within the private sector and other government agencies.

Child protection agencies typically are not afforded the same technology advancements that exist in other government agencies and certainly not in the private sector. In an age when many elementary school students have laptops and smart phones, child protection case managers are commonly not afforded adequate cell phones with sufficient service coverage. Even if they do have cell phones, those phones do not qualify as portable electronic devices providing access to data and information necessary for caseworkers to provide significant work in the field.

In addition, few have notebooks, tablets, or other portable devices that allow for access to the child protection agency and other agencies' information. This is particularly relevant given the millennials entering the workforce; when employed at a child protection agency, they are surprised to discover that the electronic technology they have had access to and used for 10 to 15 years does not exist in this important field. One example of this is the use of social media and text messaging that many in our society see as a necessity rather than an option. Many caseworkers want and need the option to text with the individuals with whom they regularly communicate.

- *Historical Technical Failures*
- *Millennials Raised with Technology*
- *Review And Update Computer Base*

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The failure to have up-to-date technology is a barrier to good practice and may contribute to crisis or chaos. This applies not only to the technology available to caseworkers, but also to the backbone computer network that many current child protection agencies have in place. Since the late 1980s, many agencies have implemented what are now called “legacy systems” that have design and architectural issues which are difficult to modify without significant investment and challenges.

Recent efforts to modify federal standards to allow more creative approaches to the design, development, architectural coding, etc. have produced some changes in resistance to modification of design requirements. If the backbone of a child welfare information management system was designed and implemented more than 20 years ago, is it a surprise that we have difficulty obtaining more modern technologies for caseworkers?

It is the agency leader’s responsibility to ensure that technology for the caseworkers is continuously updated and refreshed. Developing a plan that will modernize technology available for caseworkers every three years, at a minimum, will ensure that there is constant improvement of the tools available to

- *Must Have a Practice Model*
- *Update Current Practice to the Model*
- *Policy, & Practice Meet- or Change One*
- *Incorporate Vision and Mission*

caseworkers to do their job. Portability of the use of that equipment is essential. Expanded use and access of that information, including key stakeholders having

access controlled by the agency and the opportunity to input information to the system without affecting the structural integrity of the system is critical.

- 5. Establish and improve a practice model.** Very few things are as important to a child protection system as the existence and continuous evaluation and improvement of the practice model. A practice model is a method of doing business with foster children and families and those associated with them, as well as a method of inputting data and information that demonstrate practice model fidelity and integrity. Without a specifically designated and implemented practice model there can be no consistent and uniform process or accountability for either the agency itself, its staff, or the children and families the agency serves.

The ultimate purpose of a practice model is to ensure that the agency’s vision and mission, coupled with the values and principles, are incorporated by the system and to allow children and families to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being by a common practice throughout the agency. In its best design, the practice model will impact hiring procedures, drive and be supported by training, be reviewed through quality control programs, and ensure that children and families throughout the jurisdiction receive same or similar services with common goals and objectives.

The practice model may be developed by the establishment of the common theory of child and family engagement, child and family teaming, extended family participation, common assessment tools, consistent planning and service delivery, and review of effectiveness through quality assurance and quality control initiatives. Without a common practice model uniformly taught and enforced, it is difficult to imagine that there can be a child protection system.

In its best model, the practice model will do the following:

- a. Offer a consistent authority for how child welfare practice is implemented in the jurisdiction
- b. Drive the way children and families experience service delivery within the system
- c. Ensure consistency in addressing child and family issues within the jurisdiction
- d. Impact and guide the policy of the agency
- e. Direct design and teaching in the initial and ongoing training
- f. Form the basis for the development of a quality assurance program
- g. Provide support and information for career advancement within the agency
- h. Become a part of employee performance reviews and expectations
- i. Influence organizational structure.

The practice model will have implications of incredible consequences within the agency’s operation and services within the community. The following processes and services will be affected and impacted by a practice model, to name a few: differential/alternative response, mentoring for new staff, family finding efforts, fatherhood initiatives, parenting support services, mental health services for children and adults, prevention programs, children aging out of care, permanency timing, 0 to 3 initiatives, drug and alcohol programs, foster parent retention, parent mentoring, judicial relationships, and data and metrics establishment.

Immediately, the new leader should review the existence of a practice model within the agency. If none exists, establish a process to implement one. This is a challenging, time-consuming, and critical effort, one which will provide consistency and opportunities for transformation and improvement. It will also impact service delivery as a practice model and will likely change the philosophy and practice of those service providers who have become comfortable with their own practice model and processes. The implementation of a practice model will alter how the agency responds, involving a likely reallocation or reassignment of funding resources.

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If there is a current practice model, it will be important to review the philosophy, tenants, and policies supporting it. This should be done in two respects. First, determine whether or not the current practice model supports the vision, mission, and philosophy of the agency leader. Second, determine whether or not the current practice model is being properly instituted and implemented by caseworkers and supervisors. It is not unusual that local staff develop “workarounds” or their own method of implementing an established “practice model” such that there is no consistency or uniformity from one location to another.

- 6. Improve and have a plan for media relations.** Child protection systems across the country have traditionally considered themselves limited by confidentiality requirements and have often responded as a closed system. This practice developed in step with the emergence of the juvenile court system, which began in 1899 with the first U.S. juvenile court

in Cook County, Illinois. Within 25 years, most states had set up juvenile court systems and the commonly held belief was that public exposure would prevent juvenile offenders from changing behavior because public pressure and knowledge would deter improvement efforts.^{viii} The idea may have been reinforced by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974 reauthorized over the last 40 years.

There is a balance between confidentiality of individual circumstances and informing the public, often through the media, of what has happened in an individual case or what the trends and problems are within the jurisdiction. The problem is establishing a policy on how to communicate and what to communicate without undermining the responsibility to ensure healing and transformation of individuals.

Therefore, the leader of the agency must establish and implement a communication process and trusting dialogue with the media. Regardless of how it occurs, there must be a willingness to appreciate the media and its potential importance as a fair and important ally in the vision and mission of the agency. This means engaging in a process of developing a relationship with the media. This will start with the hiring of a communications director who is comfortable with the media, familiar with its processes, and clearly understands the importance of timelines. The communications director must also be comfortable training, directing, and supporting the leader in communicating the understanding of confidentiality issues balanced with the demands of media to report on the work of government.

Frequently, there are two aspects that must be considered. The first is dealing with the day-to-day work of the agency. This includes communicating to the media the direction and philosophy of the leader and the agency by talking about the current state of affairs: trends within the jurisdictions, the vision and mission, the philosophy, and the implication these

will have on the current system. The second aspect has to do with a crisis. Often, a good working relationship develops between the agency and the media when discussing the day-to-day operations of the agency and its caseworkers, but when a tragic event occurs, the relationship becomes strained and the established openness and transparency is not apparent or is nonexistent.

In these situations, an agency must continue to be as open and transparent as possible. Protocol should be established and reviewed with the media on what information can be provided and when under circumstances such as a child fatality. Preparing in advance is the best approach. A leader should never assume that things will always go well, particularly when there are so many circumstances that may be beyond the control of the agency. Developing an established communication practice for a tragedy is the better approach and one most likely to provide a balance.

- 7. Invest in what works.** Too frequently, program services have been created and operated under the notion that, “If it helps one child, it’s worth it.” These concepts have caused generations of children and families to be placed into programs or services that do not work for them. There is simply no way that a single program or series of programs can meet the disparate and challenging needs of all children and families. Programs such as parenting classes, counseling, therapy, domestic violence, drug and alcohol, mental health, and others, simply have not performed well to all too many instances.^{ix}

The good news is that recently there has been a great deal of study, discussion, and implementation of programs that do work well as long as a number of factors exist. There is a process of assessment and evaluation, typically beginning with screening, which can identify and target specific issues of concern and difficulty. There are assessments such as Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS), Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), Functional Analysis Screening Tool (FAST), and the Ages and States Questionnaire (ASQ), to name just a few, which provide direction and focus for continuing service referral and continued treatment. They set the stage for further study, review, and implementation within the child protection system.

The problem arises when evidence-based programs are applied in a community whose culture and systems do not necessarily understand or value the implementation of

- *Implement Evidence Based Programs*
- *Service Providers Are Partners*
- *Determine Needs And Meet Them*

new practices. The local community must be involved in the transformation to evidence-based practices. Stakeholders must be prepared for the significant changes from current practice to one that specifically address clinically identified needs of children and family and match those with evidence-based practices. Both the timing and the appropriate staffing of those programs are critical for their success.

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It is up to an agency leader to prepare for evidence-based practice initiatives by first determining the appropriate assessment tools. The assessment tools will assist in identifying issues for children and families coming into the child protection system. Once the assessment tools are identified, the next step is discovering if the services and programs will meet the identified needs. And if they are not meeting the needs, it is an agency leader's responsibility to work with the provider community to develop programs specifically designed to meet the needs of the children and families the agency serves. Finally, the responsibility of leadership is to develop two things:

- a. method of pay for performance that acknowledges successful treatment of identified needs to ensure that the well-being of children and families are being met; and
- b. identification of a system of quality control or quality assurance that review those services for continued effectiveness.

8. Develop a process to respond to fatalities and tragic events. Almost nothing affects a jurisdiction and child protection agency more than the tragic fatality of a child, particularly when that child is in the care of or has had contact with the child protection agency. In the last several years, more than a dozen jurisdictional leaders have left office under the cloud of a tragic fatality or series of fatalities. Many of those jurisdictions have had qualified, successful leaders who have implemented programs and services that provided significant transformation in outcomes of the agency. One thing is specifically clear – once a tragedy occurs, the data, however good, is not a defense.

The question then is what does an agency do to avoid the circumstances that have caused more than a dozen leaders to leave under a cloud? The data showing improvement over

- *Fatalities Will Occur*
- *May Impact Agency's Success*
- *Implement 4 Stage Preparation*

a period of time does not serve as a defense to a fatality. Once the criticism occurs and the agency leader leaves

under a cloud, the child protection system responds, usually with negative consequences. Specifically, the response within the agency and the community is to unilaterally change the practice model that has been implemented and return to the prior program and services philosophy, often meaning removing more children, placing more children in intensive and expensive environments, delaying placement back home, and becoming less open and transparent.

There are four steps that an agency should take to address a child fatality:

- 1. Initial programs and initiatives.** An agency leader should begin his/her tenure by informing staff of the importance of following protocol and procedure. Staff must understand that policies, practices, philosophy, and the implementation of new or additional services are designed to provide the highest likelihood for safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families. In addition, the leader should inform the media of all initiatives and policies and invite the press to be a partner to the agency. Media engagement in the work of the frontline staff is a critical element of this initiative. Finally, enlist the community as your partner. The children are from the jurisdiction and the community has some responsibility in supporting the agency as it transforms itself. Agency leaders should regularly meet with community leaders and community organizations to inform them of the efforts of transformation and ask for their support.
- 2. Initial response about a fatality.** It is not uncommon when a fatality occurs in a jurisdiction that the agency responds by referring to the traditional practice of confidentiality. Often the media is already aware of the circumstances and is going to report what it believes to be true. The agency is much better positioned if it responds by acknowledging the fatality, indicating concern and distress over the death, and indicating the steps that will be taken to investigate and determine the circumstances leading up to the fatality. This can be done through a press conference or a press release, but the immediate initial response is critical in ensuring the media and the public that the agency will initiate a thorough review and investigation of the circumstances.
- 3. Report concerning the fatality investigation.** Once the agency has conducted a thorough investigation, it should provide the report to the chief executive officer and the media. It takes an extended period of time for the investigation to be completed, involving the multiple sources of information that must be gathered and analyzed before a thorough report is completed. Specifically, the necessary information must be gathered from within the agency and outside the agency (first responders, law enforcement, prosecutor's office, coroner, school, etc). It is not unusual for this process to take from six months to a year. The media reasonably expects more expedient responses. Therefore, offer regular reports to the media outlining the steps and actions taken.

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4. Actions taken regarding multiple investigations.

Often there are a number of investigations that occur during an agency leader's tenure. It is important to realize that, consistent with analytics and predictive analytics, there is a need for review and interpretation of several different investigations to determine whether or not there is a trend or common factor that the agency and the community should be addressing. It may be an issue of parental involvement in the death, live-in partner involvement in the death, a certain drug that is consistent with the fatalities, whether domestic violence is a common factor, etc.

Recent federal research indicates that over 80 percent of the child deaths involve children under the age of eight. The compilation of a number of different situations should be a report provided to the agency staff and the media with recommendations to avoid child deaths.^x

STEP 4. Make a plan to move forward

While moving forward requires extensive planning and monitoring, the following steps will help ensure the successful implementation of the new initiatives:

1. **Reinvest savings.** The goal of an agency leader is to improve the quality of service and improve outcomes for the children and families served by a child protection agency. This can be accomplished through the following ways:
 - a. vision and mission of the agency;
 - b. agency's policies, practices, procedures; and
 - c. service delivery toward current best practices within the child protection.

Frequently, the implementation of new initiatives and programs will incorporate policies that include fatherhood initiatives, extended family outreach and placement, more timely permanency, more targeted services through evidence-based practices, implementation of alternative/differential response, more intensive services, and expedited permanency for children under a certain age (for instance three years old or six years old) to only name a few. One of those initiatives discussed nationally at both the federal and the foundation level is the reconsideration of residential or congregate care, either by eliminating it as a choice of placement or by limiting the length of time in such a placement.

Evidence-based research is showing that placement in out-of-home care in either does not have the value that it once was believed to have. The result of this has been initiatives to reduce residential or congregate care. This often results in aggressive responses by those operating the residential facilities. In spite of that, many jurisdictions have had significant success in reduction of either the placement or length of time in care at those locations.

When children have been removed from a custodial parent, a number of states have increased efforts to locate, identify, and approve placement with either a noncustodial parent or with either the maternal or paternal family members. This has resulted in placement not being made in traditional foster homes or other out-of-home care settings. Evidence has shown these initiatives have provided better service with better outcomes and metrics.^{xi} Better services with better outcomes achieve positive results.

These improvements are often met with resistance from those who have benefited from the current system. Too frequently, the opponents to these changing philosophies allege that these improvements

are about money and the argument made is that the only reason these changes are being made is to save money. Certainly that is not the

Reinvest Savings:

- *New Programs – Better Service*
- *Expedite Cases and Better Results*
- *Insist on Reinvesting In Services*
- *Define and Negotiate ROI*

case, but the arguments demonstrate that child protection agencies have traditionally not been effective, or perhaps have not successfully managed the transition from an old practice to a newer.

Traditionally, a new administration or leadership will emphasize new programs and services which means additional resource demands. In addition, the "cost savings" in the transition from prior practices and services to improved practice and services may take years to achieve. An agency leader's challenge then becomes convincing the chief executive officer, the budget agency, legislature, and the media that there is a return on investment when specific and selected evidence-based programs, services, and philosophies of placement are implemented. While it may take time to see the return on investment, there is an absolute need for upfront investment for new programs and a need for additional funding to implement policies and practices that will change placement and other services to a more effective and result-oriented process.

An agency leader has the responsibility to address the issue not as additional funding or more money, but to characterize the possibility of additional budget assignments as an investment that will have a return, both programmatically and monetarily. Reframing the dialogue in this manner has a better opportunity of success when combined with data, metrics, and frequent communication with the funding sources and supporters. Demonstrating improved outcome and metrics justifies the investment initially and the continued use as a reinvestment of those funds that are "saved." The issue for leadership is to be open and transparent with the use of investment funds in the demonstration that there is a return on investment.

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- 2. Obtain agency support, internal and external, public and private.** Primary among the issues that a child protection agency faces is the fact that at any moment, a tragic incident or series of events can be met with tremendous public outcry, second-guessing, evaluation, and criticism. In addition, even without a tragic incident, agency issues are often met with criticism on both spectrums of many of the issues: removing too many, removing too few; returning too many, returning too few; taking too long, not taking long enough; involving family and extended family, not involving family and extended family; placing with relatives, not placing with relatives; having a large budget, not having a large enough budget; etc.

Taken together, there does not appear to be a single important supporter and defender of the child protection agency in a jurisdiction. Virtually everyone can take one side or the other and typically does. Without having that traditional and historical supporter, it is important for the agency to reach out, particularly as it charts a new course and implements new programs and policies. Finding that individual, program, agency, or system that can provide support for the changes is a continuous and time-consuming process. It begins with recognizing the need

Agency Support:

- *Agency Leader Can't Do It Alone*
- *Communicate and Partner-Develop Vocal Supporters*

for support, evaluating those with credibility to provide the needed support, and obtaining that timely

support. This is all the more true with a new agency leader.

The difficulty is in taking the time to find the right supporter and nurturing that relationship at a time when so many other issues must be addressed. This cannot be the responsibility solely of the child protection agency leader.

- 3. Review how the agency buys services.** The child protection agency and the juvenile and family courts are the traditional "privatizers" of service delivery for government. Child protection agencies have always looked to the private community for the provision of services. It is why many agencies refer to their local staff as "case managers" rather than "caseworkers."

Service Purchases:

- *Traditional Purchasing of Services*
- *Include Evidence Based Practices*
- *Procurement Process Review*
- *Performance Based Contracting*

Case managers manage not only the child and family in terms of service recommendation and referral but manage the service delivery

process to ensure that it is effectively addressing the issues of both the child and the family. In many jurisdictions, the providers have determined the service type, intensity, and

cost through various means. In recent times, that process is changing. With the implementation of evidence-based practice and performance-based payment, to only name a few factors, the culture and landscape of service delivery is changing. The philosophy of child protective services speaks more of 1) safety, permanency and well-being; 2) family engagement; 3) home-based services; 4) time-limited, intensive services; 5) evidence-based practices; and, 6) performance-based contracting. These philosophies have caused tremendous shifts in service delivery. This has not only affected service array but services meeting needs as determined by evidence-based assessments such as Adverse Childhood Experiences, Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool (CANS) and others.

This also requires the agency to have a close working relationship with the jurisdictional procurement agency and be familiar with its processes. As performance-based and pay-for-performance initiatives are implemented, including time requirements and reporting mechanisms, the procurement process has to be an important part of the agency's transformation.

- 4. Review the agency management structure.** An important element of a new administration is the evaluation of the agency's management structure to ensure that it is capable of being managed and responsive to the changing times. Many believe that 50 percent of all organizational problems can be solved by reviewing the management structure and making modifications that respond to the agency's current circumstances. Leadership, therefore, has the responsibility to assess the current management structure, consider its vision and mission, list its initiatives and programs, review its priorities, and ensure that it has a management structure that allows responsive interplay and the ability to implement all of those initiatives.

The management structure must be developed in such a way as to allow the agency leader time in the field, in the communities, and time to communicate with external partners to deliver agency priorities and messages.

Management Structure:

Working within a child protection organizational structure often requires that

- *Review Current Structure*
- *Change to Meet New Vision/Mission*
- *Decision-Making Expediency*

significant decisions be made in a short period of time. The intensity within a child protection agency means that often there is little time to review, second-guess, and reevaluate. The executive team must have the skills to make the difficult decisions. The goal is to have a management structure and a management team that can make those decisions consistent with the vision and mission of the agency.

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5. Identify, justify, and advocate for critical budget issues.

Frequently, the first order of business for a new agency leader is addressing budgetary issues. This often occurs because the new administration starts just as the budget cycle is occurring. When budgetary issues are relevant and visible, it is incumbent upon the new leader to review the agency's budget and determine the current status of the budget. This is critical for considering the probability of new policies, practices, philosophies, initiatives, programs, and services regarding the vision and mission of the agency.

It is not uncommon that the agency has been understaffed, underfunded, over criticized, all at a time when society is in a crisis and children are referred to the agency in increasing numbers. This complex confluence of issues creates significant challenges in establishing priorities. Issues include 1) most frequently, too few caseworkers to handle the cases currently assigned; 2) high caseworker turnover creating case transfer issues; 3) placements of children that do not follow federal mandates and judicially reviewed circumstances that the children are in the least restrictive alternative, thereby costing the agency more than if they'd been appropriately placed; and 4) insufficient program availability in the jurisdiction.

Budget Issues:

- *Review Budget History*
- *Budget Meets Critical And Important Goals*
- *Gain Additional Funding Where Needed-Return on Investment*

All of this and more requires the new leader to review the budgetary circumstances and be prepared to hire an excellent chief financial officer. That individual

must know about and understand the jurisdictional nuances of budgeting and be prepared to communicate the issues and concerns. This requires having a close working relationship with the jurisdictional budget agency and the legislative fiscal analysts. It also requires the chief financial officer to understand clearly the policies, practices, philosophy, and programmatic initiatives that are being supported and implemented by the agency leader. Often this occurs during challenging economic times but, even if not in challenging times, there are other government agencies competing for the same jurisdictional dollars.

Return on investment is a method of not only obtaining additional funding but of justifying that additional funding.

- Having a sufficient number of caseworkers means that timely and appropriate permanency occurs and, consequently, increasingly expensive and invasive placement does not occur.
- Providing additional pay for caseworkers recognizes the professionalism necessary to address the issues of our most vulnerable children and unstable families. It encourages knowledge continuity of the system and the most appropriate services and support for families.
- Providing sufficient and appropriate technology means that caseworkers have access to and can make

life or death decisions that serve the child and family throughout their involvement with the agency.

When government is responsible for the most vulnerable children in our communities, it should do no less than make the best investment possible for the best return. It will not be good enough to state that "It is for the kids." An agency leader must demonstrate the additional investment required to transform the agency. He or she must have the ability to demonstrate a return on that investment by explaining the need and the process, indicating the dollar amount, and indicating the timetable for the return on investment.

All of this must be the commitment of the agency leader, supported by the chief executive officer. The most challenging part of this is the leader will have to make commitments and expend political and personal capital to obtain investment. This means that the dollar amount requested, the programmatic outcomes, and the timing of the return on investment will be recorded and remembered. It may ultimately mean that the leader is placing future service with the agency at risk if the identified goals and objectives are not met.

6. **Manage change.** One of the responsibilities of a new agency leader is to make sure that the organization is resilient through the creation and implementation of new programs and services and incorporate those with existing successful programs and services. Leadership, management, and staff must adapt to two major concepts: 1) manage for constantly improving performance and growth and 2) manage for the adaptation that occurs with new leadership in a transforming agency.

Change is inevitable. The philosophy of child protection practice will constantly evolve and improve. The agency itself must be resilient, adaptable, and able to adjust as those changes become evident. If an agency operates with a high degree of integrity and has open communication and dialogue within the

Change:

- *Make Change*
- *Prepare for Change*
- *Manage to Change*
- *Transform through Change*

agency, then the agency culture will reflect that. This occurs when leadership and executive management not only direct and support those initiatives, but actually model them. That is in fact the essence of leadership – modeling the behavior that others are asked and expected to display.

With those characteristics incorporated into the fabric of the agency, relationships with other government agencies and external stakeholders will begin to support the agency leader's new initiatives as they become part of the traditional child protection system. Ultimately, the goal of the new administration is a child protection agency that can transform itself and improve its metrics; an agency for which the next administration can build on that progress. Only with a resilient organization which understands the inevitability of change can the final success of managing to change prevail.

CONCLUSION

A child protection agency must have a vision and mission – a roadmap of where it wants to go. It also must have a list of priorities – the vehicle through which it will get there. There are so many opportunities, programs, policies, practices, and philosophical issues that it is the leader's responsibility to determine which programs, policies, and practices will get the agency where it needs to be. There seem to be two options, each of which has its own potential problems. The first is that an agency need not do anything other than make some minor changes in its current process. The second is that an agency must implement any number of new initiatives and programs because, by appearance and any measure, the old ones were not working well. The problem with the first is that eventually, failing to make significant changes and implement new practices will catch up with the agency – policies and practices five years, 10 years or older will not be able to address the challenges of today and tomorrow. The problem with the second is that those who are invested in the old system will criticize new programs because for them, it is change.

“Dogs don't bark at parked cars.” A leader can get by for a while without implementing new programs and policies, but not for long. The criticism and complaints about new programs and policies often take place because they are designed to “save money” and “not help kids.” The fact is that new programs and policies often are more efficient, effective, and outcome-driven – known as evidence-based practices or best practice. In any event, the leader must decide what programs and policies he/she will move forward with and be prepared to compromise only those that are supportive or important, and not compromise those that are critical. Selecting those programs and policies and then implementing them must have the constant attention and focus of the leader and the executive team. They must be measurable and attainable and designed to fulfill the vision and mission.

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