



*"We in workforce development see our children as the future workforce and the foundation to a successful community. Early learning creates future workers who are skilled at reading, communicating, calculating and creativity."*

# BUILDING BETTER EMPLOYEES

by KATHLEEN WOODRING

NOTHING PROVIDES better reinforcement for cleaning out a desk than the search for your birth certificate. This happened to me just last week. After going through every file and drawer, I was able to tidy my home office and find what I needed to prove my citizenship. I also discovered some other interesting items, including a letter to the editor I wrote in 1984 when I was a director of an early childhood center in Pennsylvania. The letter outlined my belief in the need for quality early learning. Here I am 33 years later, a staunch believer in early learning and once again writing about this very same subject.

I switched careers and have been working in workforce development now for the past 25 years. This isn't a drastic career change but more of a move within the continuum of lifelong learning, with the focus of our work on preparing the workforce for the needs of our economy. There are many things that have changed along the way, but there are some things that are constant. Across all industries we hear the same thing and that is that employers need employees who are capable of performing basic skills, such as math, reading, measuring and following directions. They also need employees who have what they consider to be "soft skills," such as showing up to work on time, basic courtesy, working as a team, problem solving, and the ability to communicate. Whether or not we have a tight labor market, employers constantly want these attributes and abilities and state that they will train an employee for a job as long as the employee can bring these fundamentals to work.

I've always believed that children are our future. They are our future workforce and our future leaders. It seems the older I get, the more important this is and the more times that I see examples of children growing up to be good stewards of our community and parents of yet another generation.

The Early Learning Coalition's goal is to make sure that every child is ready to learn. They do this by striving to ensure that each child is given the fundamentals that they need so that when they get to school they're ready. This readiness also keeps them on track so that they can continue to learn and be engaged. We in workforce development see our children as the future workforce, and the foundation to a successful community. Early learning creates future workers who are skilled at reading, communicating, calculating and creativity.

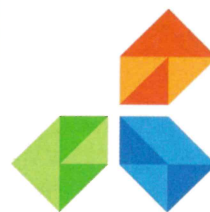
## THE FUNDAMENTALS TO SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE

**As parents, you are your child's first teacher.** As a parent, it's very easy to teach as you go. Talk out loud about things that you're doing. It may seem silly, but it's much better and more acceptable than talking to yourself! Explain that the carrot you're cleaning is orange and that it grows in the ground. When you slice it, you can count how many slices there are, and then get excited because it's a circle. When you're driving in the car, you can point out the squirrel that's hanging on the tree and make up a silly story about Sammy the Squirrel.

My husband's grandmother started this in our house when our son was about a month old. By the time he was six, our "Mousy Mousy" stories had become very elaborate novels about a village of animals, each character with a back story, which was required to be told, every time we drove anywhere... and at bedtime. Oh if only we had known at the beginning to tape record the in-depth character development and the plot lines that grew from night to night.

**Read to your child at least 15 minutes per day.** Reading to your child prepares your child to learn. My favorite book to read out loud, with crazy abandon, is *Stand Back, Said the Elephant, I'm Going to Sneeze*, by





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Patricia Thomas. This book is great to get “audience participation,” it’s funny and witty, includes rhymes, drama and exclamations. It’s a great example of how reading exposes your child to the sounds within the words. It allows your child to go beyond the meaning of a word, and to listen to all the parts that make up a word. They hear the vowels, the consonants and the syllables. This prepares them to learn to read as they then gain a foundation to understand phonetics.

Reading is also a good time for children to learn about emotions. Books reveal reactions to emotions by the characters which will sometimes be funny, angry or sad, but help the child to learn to deal with their emotions. Another favorite read that illustrates this very well is *The Little Mouse, The Red Ripe Strawberry and the Big Hungry Bear*, by Don and Audrey Wood. Lots of color, emotion, anticipation and fun!

Reading is time for comfort and cuddles, fun and laughter, sharing of stories, and building strong family ties. Best of all, this not only prepares a child to learn, but introduces and models a skill that’s fundamental to learning everything else out in the world. A strong reader has a much better chance at learning math and science and also makes for a successful employee.

**Creativity.** Of course, from me, you’ll have to hear about creativity. I majored in art while in college and dabble to this day.

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Art was my favorite class while working in early learning. Painting, coloring, drawing, cutting and gluing develop fine motor skills, while playing with Play-Doh and clay was always a good activity when it was too stormy to go outside. The kneading, and rolling, and pushing and pulling created a time of creativity that actually burns off energy, reminiscent of how you feel after baking some cookies. Who doesn’t still love the smell of crayons and Play-Doh? There’s a reason those smells bring such a strong connection to us. It’s a positive connection from a time of great fun and exploration.

Encouraging creativity helps your child learn to solve problems, follow directions, experiment, and overcome failure; these are fundamental to success in the workplace. We wouldn’t have cell phones, flat screen televisions or flights to the space station if it weren’t for people who were creative enough to realize it could be done.

When you read to a child or make up silly stories, talk out loud to them about what you’re doing and provide time for a creative outlet, you give them the gift of a better description about the world around them. Talking to, interacting, reading and explaining the world around you to your early learner, in addition to a dose of creativity, gives your child understanding and knowledge of how to interact with this world, and ultimately builds a skilled workforce for our future. 🏠