

Interview Transcript

Introduction

1. How many years have you been in this sector?

I have been in the centre for 10 years.

1.1. At what year did you become a principal?

In the year of 2017. I have been a principal for 1.5 years.

1.2. Why did you take up the principal role?

I did not think much about the position, but it seems that the company saw potential in me. The opportunity is there, and it is not something that I do not want to do. But I see it as a challenge to take up the principal role.

The company look at one's effort, what one is capable of. It does not look at how long one has been in the sector.

Main Topic - Educators leaving the centre

2. Did you encounter teachers requesting to leave the centre?

Yes, with different types of requests.

2.1. What was your response?

- I accepted their request because they have already thought a lot about it.
- For teachers who are stressed and emotional, I will ask them to think first. E.g. "As compared to positive moments, is it worth it to leave over a negative issue?" This happens to young teachers, especially those in their first year which is the adjustment year.
- For older teachers who are tired, I will speak to them and try to change their minds.

Generally, I will help staff to think through decisions, making sure that they know the consequences of leaving, especially younger teachers that are in adjustment period/immature.

2.2. How does this impact the manpower in your centre?

Teachers are required to give 2 months notice before leaving:

- Within the 2 months, the HR would try their best to hire replacement teachers. So that

there will be a teacher in class, ensuring that there won't be a time without a teacher.

- In the event of failing to find somebody, the staff will help each other out and the manpower team will fix the issue by deploying other teachers to the class.
- Usually there will be a replacement as there is time for overlap.
- We will plan ahead for next year so that children will not be affected.

Build on response

Work-life balance

3. What do you think of the work-life balance educators have in the sector?

During peak period, the work would pile up. Educators just have to push themselves. It is up to the educators to decide how they would want to spend their time. They could choose to do work during the children's nap time, or they could choose to bring it home and finish it. But if I (the principal) have to collect the work, they will tell me that they are stressed etc. when they choose not to do their work during the children's nap time.

3.1. Do the educators get enough family/personal time apart from working hours?

It depends. If the teacher is family-orientated, I will ensure that they will spend time with their family. Or the teachers would ensure the work is done so that they will be able to spend some time with their friends.

3.2. Some of the educators left due to work-life imbalance. Do you think work-life balance is important?

Yes. It is important.

3.3. How do you enforce good work-life balance in your centre?

I ensure that I acknowledge the teacher's effort, when they choose to do their work over personal time during break/overtime. Acknowledgement makes a difference and encourages them to continue put in hard work. I would also buy food for them, or have certificate for good achievement during PTC. I also do not encourage teachers to take overtime. Sometimes, I would personally take over the class for story reading sessions so that the teacher is able to complete their work. I am ready to give one to one help when the teacher has to study a degree after work, to the point where I will help them with their assignments and time management. In the end, it is the teacher's choice if they choose to leave.

3.4. Are the teachers paid according to their workload?

No.

3.5. In your opinion, do you think the educators are paid appropriately in comparison to their workload?

No, I think that the teachers deserve more. Some teachers work more than the others, though the expectations are the same. The salary is not decided by the teacher, but by the company. I will grade the teachers, based on their performance and give increments accordingly.

Passion

4. Do you think passion plays an important role in remaining in the early childhood industry?

Yes, if passion is defined in a way where the teacher is passionate in teaching the children, contributing excellence to the children's development.

4.1. Have you ever seen teachers being burnt out from work?

Yes, when the expectations in the teachers' head are not met, the results deteriorate.

4.2. How did you help the teachers rebound back to working with passion?

I cannot speak to them when they are upset, because emotions will get through. So I will speak to them when they are calmer/the day after. If the teacher approaches me immediately, I would ensure that I will listen to them without getting upset myself.

Through the talk, I will give suggestion and help them to find the solution together, without imposing the solution on them too much.

4.3. Were there times that you considered changing industries?

In 2011, when I was in my transition year as an educator, I took a toll and told my boss that I did not want to renew her contract. When I became a principal, I felt that I was disliked by the parents because I had a different style as compared to the previous principal. But after I went through the transition period, I felt that it became much better.

"You know you like your job if you don't hate Mondays."

4.4. Do you think age contributes to the loss of passion?

No, it all depends on the maturity of a person. This is because if one really want to be a teacher, they will definitely give their best. So it's not about the age, but because of the uncertainty one have on what they want to do.

Professional Development

5. In what circumstance do you send the teachers to attend a training?

- Individual development plans (tracks on what you want to be, e.g. mentor teacher, curriculum development, principal)
- Required trainings (e.g. toddlers)
- Extra trainings geared towards the tracks they want to go (e.g. leadership for principal)

5.1. Are they assigned to go for workshops or do they sign up based on their area of interest?

They can choose to sign themselves up or assign them to the suitable courses

5.2. How often do the teachers go on training?

The basic requirement is 20 hours a year and the centre requirement is at least once a term, four times a year (includes external and internal trainings). Some teachers might even go for 100 hours a year.

5.3. What is the duration they are gone for?

1-3 days.

5.4. How do you accommodate with the teacher's absence?

When teachers are on training, other teachers are not encouraged to take leaves so that they can cover others who go for training. E.g. 3 dates to choose from, 2 teachers in one day, another 2 on another day. Also, the teacher child ratio are not maxed out so other teachers can replace/go to other class; shuffling teachers.

5.5. Do you think the training are effective and necessary?

Yes, because the teachers don't go on trainings they don't need. Furthermore, training gives

information to the teacher so they can be on par with the current trends. Most of the Chinese teachers are keen and enthusiastic in applying for training because most of them are old and they would like to learn more.

5.6. Do you think the teachers are satisfied/welcome to the idea of constantly attending training?

Yes, it's like a working break and they choose their own trainings, so they will be satisfied.

Loss of Interest

6. Why do you think that more educators are losing their interest in teaching in the recent years?
(Link to passion and work-life imbalance)

- Expectations not met. Environment is different from what was expected when the educator enters the field. And maybe there are incomplete notions and different perspectives of what being an educator is like.
- Some may use as stepping stones to get experience to pursue a degree so interest may not be there.

Efforts Taken

7. So how do you get your teachers to stay in the sector? (e.g. bonuses, chances for self-development)

- Appreciation is much needed for staffs. E.g. nominating teachers for awards to acknowledge their efforts.
- Share the praise and successes. E.g. When people congratulate me about the sparks certification, the efforts of the teachers were mentioned.
- Listening intently to their opinions.
- Giving opportunities for teachers to do things they suggested.

7.1. How effective was the method that you have used?

Effective.

7.2. How often do the staff have retreats or bonding day?

Retreats once a year. Bonding days twice a year. These are official ones conducted by the

company. From time to time, they have movie screenings during lunch time and bonding over food.

7.3. Do you think these team-bonding activities helped the teachers?

Having a support group among the teachers is good as it helps to diffuse difficulties and give encouragement.

7.4. Do you think that the government is putting in enough effort to attract educators to this industry? (e.g. schemes and grants)

Yes, it has gotten better in collaboration with the companies through social media and roadshows in schools putting up NIEC in recent years.

7.5. In your opinion, what do you think is the hardest when hiring new educators?

- The HQ is in charge of hiring new educators so expectations and beliefs will be different so it is difficult to hire.
- Some teachers wait for performance bonus before resigning.

Closing

Satisfaction

8. Lastly, do you feel that the staff here are content with their job?

Yes.

8.1. What about you?

Yes, I am grateful for the opportunities given despite coming from Philippines at a young age.

8.2. Do you have any advices for people who are pursuing a career in this industry?

- Be sure and certain about the industry before going in. Research on the centre's philosophies.
- Do a lesson plan to hone your skills.