

KEEPING LINKED

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LINKAGES: CALWORKS AND CHILD WELFARE COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

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Tips From the Top: Insights and Advice From Linkages Leaders

by Leslie Ann Hay, MSW

How has leadership influenced the success of Linkages? This was the topic of a set of interviews conducted earlier this year. Linkages leaders from around the state described the innovations, bright ideas and personal management styles that led to Linkages successes. In the collaborative spirit of the project, these leaders have pooled their wisdom, in the form of insights and advice. Everyone working in Linkages, from both sides of the aisle, can find guidance and innovation in these tips from the top.

Be the standard bearer: Carry the Linkages torch proudly! Maintaining a strong belief in the initiative and an investment in its successes helps convey to staff your commitment to its outcomes. Whenever possible, visibly demonstrate the vision and rationale of the initiative, in your partnerships, communication style and priorities.

State your values, again: Repeat the values and benefits of Linkages over and over again. Help it sink in as a integral way of doing the work; less an external mandate than a living, evolving approach that supports and feeds the larger goals of the organization.

Trust your leaders: Empower your staff to take responsibility, make decisions, own a piece of the work. Open avenues that encourage innovation and endorse those who follow through with successes. Acknowledge them as often as you can.

Be present: Stay up-to-date with the advances and challenges of the initiative. Know what's coming up for your own organization's Linkages advances as well as for the organization's with whom you're partnering.

Listen deeply: Your team is its own wealth of information. Listen carefully to their ideas, suggestions and complaints. Hear the wisdom of embedded in their perspectives. After setting parameters, sit back and allow your staff to draw their own conclusions. Ask critical and clarifying questions before giving advice, taking action or coming to your own conclusions.

Bust barriers: As the executive, you have the power to open doors and dismantle obstacles, creating new possibilities for problem-solving. Make it clear that you're willing to break silos: demonstrate your understanding that many habits and assumptions about how things are done are more historical than real.

Start with small wins: Take the right-sized first bite. Target collaboration opportunities that already exist, using natural footholds like coordinating TDMs. Make your first undertaking be fully achievable, then tout the success and move on to the next small bite.

Keep tight partnerships: Demonstrate the nature of Linkages by keeping a high degree of collaboration at the executive level of CalWORKs and CWS. Mirror the partnership that needs to happen at the front line by create new solutions together, embracing and understanding each other's overall missions, then supporting those goals in your collaborations.

Recognize your power as a manager to make things happen, then empower the people who are doing the real work come up with the best solutions.

Julie Hornback, Fresno County

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Consider Linkages as helpful in lean times: Linkages can strengthen services in lean budget times. As a leader, you can set the tone that in a resource-scarce environment, partnering deliberately with the other side of the house keeps everyone better served. Linkages isn't fueled by money, it's run on partnerships.

The recent budget climate we're facing has only strengthened Linkages as a way to maximize resources and utilize each other more deliberately.

Ana Pagan, Merced County

No two Linkages are alike, as every county's CalWORKs/Child Welfare partnership has its own flavor. Similarly, every Linkages leader will have his or her own personal style, organizational priorities and ways of relating to staff. As your organization moves ahead in its Linkages partnerships, or as your county approaches implementing Linkages, consider these morsels of Linkages leadership wisdom. The opportunity for creativity and innovation is as limitless as the Linkages partnerships themselves.

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