



SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

# How Aliya Roberts Shifted Her Mindset & Set an Example For Her Center



*“To be able to sit back and watch the transformation unfolding is like, ‘Oh my goodness, this is really happening!’”*

**ALIYA ROBERTS**

Pratt Street and Bustleton Learning Centers



## About Aliya & Her Business:

Aliya Roberts is the co-owner and director of the Pratt Street and Bustleton Learning Centers in Philadelphia, PA. Aliya partnered with her mother to open the Pratt Street Learning Center in 2008, and it is now a STAR 4 facility offering quality care to infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. In 2017, they opened the Bustleton Learning Center, which serves over 150 students from the local community.

### CHALLENGES

#### *“Why do I think I can do all these things and do them well?”*

Aliya Roberts grew up in a household that had a childcare program in the basement. From the time Aliya was just a toddler, her mother cared for children in the neighborhood as a way to make an income while looking after Aliya at home. That meant Aliya was around children all day, every day—including Christmas—for her entire childhood. So, when she finally left home to pursue an education, she vowed to never be a part of the childcare industry.

However, life had its own plans for Aliya. After obtaining a degree in fashion merchandising, she intended to move to California with her 5-year-old daughter to continue a career in fashion.

Around the same time, her mother was acquiring a new building for her childcare program, and she wanted Aliya as her business partner. Despite her vow to stay out of childcare and her passion for the fashion industry, Aliya ultimately chose to accept her mother’s offer, feeling that the timing and opportunity felt right.

Partnering with her mother turned out to be the right decision, but what came next wasn’t easy.

Aliya struggled to transition into her new role as director of the childcare center. A self-proclaimed multi-tasker, she found it difficult not to get involved in every aspect of the business. Despite working what felt like endless hours, nothing was getting done effectively. Everything felt disorganized, and there was no system in place to prevent issues from escalating.

Once the COVID-19 pandemic began, Aliya’s situation went from bad to worse. Disorganization turned into chaos due to limited resources and changing protocols, and to make matters worse, the center was dealing with unprecedented turnover. She found herself working 10–12 hour days, and her kids were complaining that she wasn’t around.

Then, while on a retreat, Aliya found herself listening to the Schools of Excellence podcast. It was at that moment she began to realize that, despite her tendency to multitask and overwork, she wasn’t a machine. She realized that if she didn’t adopt healthier habits and a different mindset, the center’s culture wasn’t going to change.

With her newfound resolve, Aliya decided to join the Director’s Inner Circle so she could connect with other leaders, receive guidance and support, and find solutions.

#### *“Am I not doing what I’m supposed to be doing?”*

## Challenges

- Struggled to let go of her need to multitask
- Dealt with disorganization & limited resources due to the pandemic
- Worked long hours for the sake of staying busy
- Neglected her family, missing out on quality time for connection

## Solution

- Shifted her mindset from automation to autonomy
- Led by example, empowering her staff to take accountability
- Adopted a gratitude practice amongst her staff
- Set better boundaries around her time for both work & family

## Results

- Embraced her role as a school leader
- Started the transition from director to visionary
- Transformed the culture & feeling within her centers
- Found balance between her work & home life

## SOLUTION

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*“At some point I adopted the mindset ‘I’m not a machine.’”*

Inside the Schools of Excellence’s Director’s Inner Circle, Aliya found herself among a group of role models and problem solvers that could give her the support she had been searching for. By looking to other leaders for guidance, she was able to shift her mindset from automation to autonomy and begin to embrace her role as a self-aware and accountable leader.

As Aliya observed her fellow leaders in Director’s Inner Circle, she began to realize the kind of transformation that would take place in her centers if everyone started leveraging their own skills and talents. So, rather than work long hours and take responsibility for everything happening in her schools, Aliya started to set better boundaries around her time and trust in the abilities of her staff. She also began spending more time at home with her husband and kids.

At first, the adjustment was challenging. As Aliya saw her staff beginning to function on their own, she questioned whether she was really doing enough. What’s more, she worried that they were doubting her contributions now that she was working behind closed doors rather than in the spotlight.

The most difficult moment for Aliya was when she returned from maternity leave. Although her staff was happy to see her, they seemed unaffected by her absence. They had gotten along just fine without her and would continue to do so now that she was back. Even though Aliya knew in her heart that this was a positive transformation, it was still a hard one. It was painful to know they no longer needed her in the same way.

Yet despite how much it hurt her, she recognized that her staff were finally taking accountability—and she knew she had to continue to do the same.

One of the biggest ways in which Aliya took accountability as a leader was to adopt a more effective gratitude practice at her centers. By setting an intention at the beginning of the school year to make gratitude a priority, she completely transformed the culture of her center. As she began to take the time to offer her staff feedback and appreciation for their contributions, she saw a shift in their behavior. Suddenly, everyone wanted to say thank you to someone else in the center. It was a simple change that had an enormous impact.

With the help of Director’s Inner Circle, Aliya started to internalize that she was a human being who deserved balance in her life. By adopting a gratitude practice, setting boundaries around her time, and acting with intention, she was finally seeing the transformation in her professional and personal life that she had been searching for.

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*“Everyone wants to say ‘thank you’ to someone else in the organization.”*

## RESULTS

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*“They don’t need me in the way I thought they needed me.”*

Thanks to the support and guidance from Director’s Inner Circle, Aliya was able to shift her mindset and initiate a personal transformation that then rippled out to her staff and center. By fully transitioning into her role as a director and leading by example, she empowered her staff to support each other and step up in ways they never had before.

Now that Aliya has fully embraced her leadership and a life with healthy boundaries, she no longer works 10–12 hour days for the sake of staying busy. She doesn’t receive any more phone calls from her husband to find out when she’s coming home. Instead, Aliya now works with intention and prioritizes her personal well-being so that she can leave work at a reasonable hour and spend quality time with her family—like going on walks at the park.

Thanks to her personal transformation, Aliya’s staff have also changed the way they operate. Inspired by her example, they now feel empowered to leverage their own skills and make their own decisions, which has only increased the amount of gratitude within her centers. Aliya now understands that her staff don’t need her in the way she thought they did. But rather than feel hurt and question her own contributions like she did before, Aliya trusts in the culture she has helped create and takes advantage of her newfound freedom.

Additionally, because of the center’s new gratitude practice, Aliya’s staff feel more appreciated than ever and are passionate about paying it forward. Not only are the bi-weekly staff meetings now full of coworker shout-outs, but her staff initiated their own gratitude practice: At the end of the last school year, they created a “giving tree” to share notes of gratitude with Aliya and her mother. In short, Aliya’s efforts have completely transformed the feeling within her centers.

Finally, Aliya feels confident in what she and her team have built and is hopeful about moving forward. She’s proud of what her centers have accomplished and feels motivated by her desire to never return to how things were before. Now, she has her sights set on transitioning into her place as a visionary, so she can carry on the legacy her mother once started.

Aliya’s involvement in the Schools of Excellence’s Director’s Inner Circle was instrumental in helping her to shift her perspective, adopt healthier habits, and transform the culture of her centers. Her mentors inside the Director’s Inner Circle gave her the courage to take accountability for her actions, embrace a growth mindset, and lean into the support of her community.

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*“It’s a liberating feeling. It feels so powerful.”*



SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

**Lean into community,  
express gratitude,  
and transform your  
center.**

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