



SCHOOLS OF EXCELLENCE

How Sharon Hopson Stopped Reacting And Started Acting With Intention



“I can’t imagine not having a community of like-minded people to talk to.”

SHARON HOPSON

La Bella Vita Montessori



About Sharon & Her Business:

Sharon Hopson is the owner of La Bella Vita Montessori, a Montessori school in Omaha, Nebraska. The school first opened in 2014 and has since grown to include classrooms for infants, toddlers, and elementary-aged children. La Bella Vita Montessori is accredited by the Nebraska Department of Education and is led by certified AMS teachers.

CHALLENGES

“In the early years, I felt like I was in fight-or-flight mode.”

Sharon has been involved in the field of education for over 30 years, and many of those initial years were spent as an elementary school teacher. Although she always knew she had an unconventional teaching style, it wasn't until she stumbled upon the Montessori Method in 2012 that she felt like she had finally found her true fit.

Sharon's passion for the Montessori Method led her to open her own school, La Bella Vita Montessori, in 2014. With years of experience in early childhood education under her belt and a deep passion for her work, Sharon was confident that she could run a successful school. However, she soon realized that there was a lot more to being a leader that she had yet to learn.

In the early years of La Bella Vita Montessori, Sharon was in a constant state of controlled chaos. Every day, she was jumping around from one task to the next, solving problem after problem, and trying to make everyone happy at all times. She felt like she had to do everything, all the time.

The issue with Sharon's mindset and approach—aside from causing perpetual exhaustion—was that she was moving too quickly to ever pause and reflect on what she was doing. This lack of quiet prevented her from asking herself questions that would allow her to dig deeper into what she, her staff, and her center really needed.

Instead of setting significant goals that would push her school toward excellence, Sharon's "goals" were simply to address the symptoms of underlying issues that were holding her center back. In essence, she was failing to close the feedback loop that was necessary to make decisions that would move her school forward.

It was only when Sharon started listening to the Schools of Excellence podcast that something started to click. Unlike other industry leaders, who were focused on increasing enrollment and revenue numbers, Chanie dug deeper into what it meant to be a strong leader and how to create a culture of excellence in schools.

Chanie and Schools of Excellence spoke to Sharon in a way that no one else had. It inspired her to finally stop, reflect, and make a decision that would transform her school: joining Schools of Excellence Owner's Only HQ program.

“When you go so quickly and don't give yourself time to sit in the quiet, you don't reflect on anything.”

Challenges

- Jumped from one task to the next
- Tried to make everyone happy all the time
- Neglected to pause and reflect about what was best for her & her staff
- Listened to industry leaders who were focused on the wrong things

Solution

- Slowed down her pace and encouraged her team to do the same
- Wrote more to unload her mind & encourage visionary thinking
- Celebrated the small wins at her center
- Implemented compassionate self-talk

Results

- Understood the value in reaching out to fellow leaders for guidance
- Set long-term goals for her center instead of addressing daily "symptoms"
- Took pleasure in small moments & meaningful interactions with her staff
- Spent more time doing what she loves

SOLUTION

“We don’t give ourselves time to celebrate anything because we’re always feeling like we need to be in action.”

Joining the Schools of Excellence Owner’s Only HQ program played an important role in Sharon’s leadership transformation. Being surrounded by people who had already cultivated the mindset that she was striving for helped her begin to look at things differently.

With fellow leaders as role models, Sharon finally started to slow down her mile-a-minute pace and create space in her day for reflection. She found that an especially helpful tool for these moments was to write down the thoughts and ideas that were often racing through her head throughout the day. That way, she could unload her mind while also encouraging the visionary within her to continue thinking of new ideas and projects.

Over time, Sharon found that the more she slowed down, the more her team slowed down. By following her lead, they also started to pause and consider what they wanted and needed, which in turn helped Sharon continue to slow her own pace. Without consciously intending to, Sharon had created a ripple effect that positively impacted the culture of her school.

One especially transformative season for Sharon and her school was the COVID-19 pandemic. During a time of chaos and uncertainty, it would have been easy for her to return to her old habits and neglect the habit of pausing and reflecting that she had worked so hard to develop.

But with the support of the Schools of Excellence Owner’s Only HQ program, Sharon resisted the temptation to get swept up in the storm and recognized that to a large extent, the situation was out of her control. Realizing this helped her maintain a slower pace and continue to make time for the quiet moments that were crucial to making important decisions for her school.

One of the decisions Sharon made was to remain focused on the future despite the difficulties of the pandemic. She considered her long-term plans and chose to focus on just a couple goals that could keep her center moving forward. To keep morale high, she kept everyone focused on the small milestones along the way, recognizing that celebrating the small wins can be just as gratifying as accomplishing long-term goals.

Overall, however, perhaps the biggest change that Sharon experienced during this leadership transformation was the way in which she spoke to herself. With the help of her fellow leaders, she began to internalize the importance of self-compassion and encouragement, recognizing that—even on the bad days—she and her team were doing exceptional things.

“You have to start telling yourself every day that what you’re doing is great.”

RESULTS

“The fact that they want to spend time with me on a personal level brings me joy.”

Thanks to the Schools of Excellence Owner’s Only HQ program, Sharon now approaches leadership differently. She recognizes the power of slowing down and continues to try to make space for it every day. She also understands the impact that her actions can have on the rest of her team and strives to use her leadership position to create a positive impact.

On the days that she struggles, Sharon knows that she has a support system to turn to. Even though she has full confidence in her abilities as a leader, she sees the value in reaching out to other leaders to ask questions and dig deeper. These days, she relies on Owner’s Only HQ not to help her solve everyday problems, but to aid her in becoming the best leader she can be.

Now that Sharon and her team have learned to celebrate the small wins, they have the energy and the drive to work toward the big ones. Rather than set goals that address daily “symptoms” like before, she now sets long-term goals for two or three years into the future. What’s more, her goals don’t revolve around what might make others happy. Instead, they’re focused on the big-picture vision she has for her school.

Because Sharon has learned to slow down and take the time she needs to recharge, she has significantly more energy to dedicate to the small moments. Some of the things that bring her the most joy are having one-on-one meetings with team members and staying behind after work to chat with her staff. These meaningful interactions would have never been possible had she remained in the “fight-or-flight mode” of years prior.

Sharon also spends significantly more time taking care of herself and doing things she enjoys. She invests in regular massages, travels with her husband, spends time with her mother, and enjoys getting to know local business owners. By learning to slow down, she has created space for the things that matter most.

If there’s one thing that Sharon hopes to pass on to other leaders, it’s that progress isn’t linear. There will be good days and bad days, but what’s most important is that you stay the course. Building a school of excellence takes work, but as long as you keep trying your best each day, you will get to where you want to be.

“You will always move back a little to move forward a little.”



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you can be.**

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