

# [Supervisor Core 2]

[Leadership in Child Welfare]

WRITTEN BY THE INSTITUTE FOR HUMAN SERVICES  
FOR THE OHIO CHILD WELFARE TRAINING PROGRAM

[June 2010]

# [SUPERVISOR CORE 2]

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## [Leadership in Child Welfare]

### Welcome

You are about to attend the second in the Supervisory Core series. The emphasis of this training is to help you understand the importance of leadership in child welfare and the role you have in leading your unit and being a leader within the agency.

### Getting Ready

The assignment below is designed to help you get ready for this training. You will be asked to read a short article and come to the first class prepared to discuss the article with fellow trainees.

### Assignment

1. Read the following article entitled, ***Taking the Balcony View***. This article presents a leadership principle taken from the work of Heifetz and Laurie, *The Work of Leadership* (1997).
2. After reading the article, take a moment to “come out of the trenches and take a view from the balcony” as suggested in the article and think about the following questions:
  - When you step back and look at your agency (as though looking at it from a balcony) how many leaders can you identify that you admire (leaders could be administrators, fellow supervisors, as well as caseworkers who take leadership acts)?
  - What characteristics do these leaders embody that make them stand out?
3. Come to your next Core classroom training prepared to share your thoughts with fellow trainees and trainer.

# Taking The Balcony View

## Taking the Balcony View

### Acknowledgement

The following information is adapted in part from Heifetz and Laurie, *The Work of Leadership* (Harvard Business Review, 1997), and from an article written by Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) entitled, *Asking the Right Questions – A School Change Tool Kit*, available online at: [www.mcrel.org](http://www.mcrel.org)

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*Leaders have to be able to view patterns as if they were on a balcony. It does them no good to be swept up in a field of action... what is needed is a balance between being on the balcony and being in the field.*

*R. Heifetz*

The child welfare system is so complex that it can be hard for supervisors and managers to see the whole picture. It is often a case of not being able to see the forest for the trees.

Becoming too involved in day-to-day activities can cause supervisors to lose sight of important trends or needed changes. As Heifetz (1994) points out, leaders must be able to "view patterns in the environment as if they were on a balcony. It does them no good to be swept up in the field of action" and miss important, unfolding patterns of change (p. 125).

One of the first requirements of "getting on the balcony" is distancing personal perspective from what is happening in the field of action. Supervisors must strive to become objective observers and then interpreters. Getting on the balcony means seeing what is occurring rather than what one would like to occur. It requires supervisors to not be focused exclusively on their own perceptions or on the views of someone else but, rather, to step back and consider the bigger picture (McREL).

Some supervisors are not comfortable with the idea of being on the balcony. There is the expectation that they belong in the trenches with their caseworkers or other staff. But, according to Heifetz and Laurie, what is needed is a balance between being on the balcony and being in the field. As Heifetz and Laurie (1997) point out, the balcony view is especially important when the organization is facing what they call "adaptive challenges" (i.e., systemic problems with no ready answers):

*Without the capacity to move back and forth between the field of action and the balcony, to reflect day to day, moment to moment, on the many ways in which an organization's habits can sabotage adaptive work, a leader easily and unwittingly becomes a prisoner of the system. The dynamics of adaptive changes are far too complex to keep track of, let alone influence, if leaders stay only on the field of play. (pp. 125-126)*

Leaders must learn to monitor and adjust progress toward their vision based on what they see from the balcony. Therefore, one key leadership principle for supervisors and managers in the child welfare field is to remember to periodically come out of the trenches and **take a view from the balcony**.