

What's the word on the street about your Centre?

Do your families feel they are the most important customer?

How important is this?

Maximising your occupancy through customer service?



Childcare Sales Australia is proud to publish an article from Succeed Consultancy. Succeed follows on their series of articles on occupancy growth and marketing. This is the third article in this series; "What is the word on the street about your Centre"?

If you missed the opportunity to attend our recent "Are you at 100% Occupancy" in-service. Please read below for an insight of some of the valuable content.

As usual it is sound practical information for owner operators, investors and new buyers alike. You can contact Succeed Consultancy on the numbers provided below or visit the Succeed Consultancy website for more information at:

www.succeedconsultancy.com.au

Have you ever been to a shop and have waited for some time to have someone come and ask you "Would you like some assistance". Have you ever been through a bad customer service experience when you feel that you have not gotten what you have paid for? I am sure that we can all say 'yes' to this.

So why is this different in childcare? Why are our customers not always seen as important?

Regardless if you are in Childcare or any other industry; customer service is vital to any businesses success?

The important question here is "Who is customer?"

If you ask many staff in the Early Childhood Industry "who are your customers" the common responses will be children, followed by parents and then staff. All three responses are true and correct; however your core customer is the parent, parents are the ones that make the final decision to use you or not to use you. Happy staff with high

morale will support you and praise the Centre they work with; unhappy staff will tell their families and friends negative experiences they are having.

Happy staff= happy children = happy parents.

Why are parents your core customers? As previously stated they ultimately decide to use you or one of your competitor's. Parents are the ones that pay the accounts; parents are the ones that decide which early year's education they would like for their child; the environment they would like their child in; the type of staff to care for their child.

I am not saying that children and staff are not important, they most definitely are, but predominately parents are the customers that build our occupancy, our centres' word of mouth, the centre's reputation and most of all make the business profitable and viable or on the downside non profitable and not sustainable.

So the underlying question is: "is Customer service important?"

The simple and straight answer is **YES** most definitely.

Did you know that 90% of your enquires are from word of mouth?

This is a very large percentage and just take the time to step back and think.....90% of word of mouth from your existing clients is what is going to build and sustain strong occupancy for you..... **Are your existing families happy with care and service being provided?**

It is much more expensive to find new customers rather than retain the ones that you have, because the ones that you have are customers that are going to build your centre's word of mouth.

It's about revenue, because a lost customer means lost revenue and an unhappy customer can damage your reputation.

How can we ensure that we have consistent, positive and outstanding Customer Service?

Take your rose coloured glasses off and start to think outside the box. It is human nature to slip into a comfortable state in your work environment and become accustomed to your surroundings and your service delivery; as we get caught up with all the day to day tasks in running a childcare business.

Take off your rose coloured glasses and start to look around and see what parents see, ask and find out what do your customers want? Really it's not that hard; all parents want is to feel like they are the only parent in the centre. Is this hard to achieve? Is it hard to put into practice? Is it difficult to maintain?

Most definitely not!!! Simple and cost effective strategies are the ones that are going to make every parent feel that they are the only parent in the centre.

Here are some strategies we use;

- Do a welcome letter before children start addressed to the child. The child will be the first to open this and families will appreciate that their child has been welcomed into the centre with a lot of excitement that little Johnny maybe got his very first letter in the mail off you!

- Ring families after 20 minutes with a new child or upset child. Why do we wait for families to ring us? Imagine how the family would feel that you have taken two minutes out to let them know that their child is fine and has settled in well? How comforting is it to the parent that they know you care about them and are assisting them and their child to settle into your centre!
- Follow up on all your enquiries. When parents first choose childcare they often will visit all in the area so you need to be the one that stands out.
- Follow up on all parent concerns and questions within 24 hours. Parents appreciate and feel special when you have taken the time to answer their questions. There is nothing worse than telling them “sure I will call you back....I will follow up on this” and then this does not happen. That parent feels unappreciated and that their questions or concerns are not relevant or important to you...
- Do a first day letter with a photo. Email this to the family at their work or address, families again will feel that they are not forgotten about and that they are the only parent in the world at your centre.
- Know all your parents by their first name. It is not only respectful to the family but it shows the family that you acknowledge them and their child as an individual to the centre.
- Get your staff to know all families by their first name.
- Acknowledge parents involvement and assistance in the newsletter and foyer areas. Families dedicate their time and assistance to the centre so let's take five minutes out to say thank you in the newsletter. We all love acknowledgement and praise after all...
- Get off your butt and welcome every family and child every day. There is nothing worse than families walking into the centre and not one staff member greets the family good morning or even in the afternoon to say good night. Is this good customer service? Most definitely not and it is these experiences that families will remember. Remember they are the families that build that 90% of word of mouth.
- Record and remember special days, anniversaries, child and parent birthdays etc. Give parents birthday cards made by their child (CCMS has come in handy for another useful cause). Buy or make child birthday cakes (don't forget to tell the parents you do it either).
- Ring Families. What is the most common trend in childcare? Ring the family when the child is sick or unhappy. Why.....Let's do the opposite..... Ring or email families to let them know that their child has had a good day. The .25c will go a million miles.

What are some important aspects of effective customer service?

- Knowing your customers' needs- The key is to know what your families want and this is quite common when families decide to choose childcare. High quality care, safe and clean environment, healthy and nutrition meals but most important to feel that they and their children are important. You can bet that your centre may be clean, well presented and provide high quality care but does this incorporate superior customer service? Does this involve training your staff on superior services for families, making them feel important and special each and every day

- Identifying your key service activities. What makes your customer service stand out from the rest? Have this written down? Give staff key customer service points that they can also refer to. Why are you unique in a world that is highly regulated and controlled?
- In a competitive marketplace it makes sense to aim to provide superior service. Customers base their purchasing decisions on the service they receive, not just price, quality and availability. We all know that childcare is a competitive market so you need to stand out from the rest.
- Promoting your service is not about spending lots of money on advertising. It is about the superior customer service that you provide because existing families are who spread the positive word of mouth and reputation about your centre. What better testimonial from someone who uses your service.
- Research shows that 90% of your Centre's enquiries come through word of mouth recommendations from current parents. This is written again because it is something you should never forget. How are you making your current parents happy?

Remember word of mouth can make you or break you!

Are your parents happy?

So we can see that although customer service is imperative to your business there are very simple, cost effective ways that you can implement to ensure that your customer service is superior and your are providing all families with the sense of being the only family at the centre.

As the saying goes "A happy customer is a customer for life"

100% Money Back Guarantee*

If Succeed Consultancy does not improve your Centre financially beyond their management fees we give you all your money back.

We take on all the risk, giving you confidence, and ensuring you actually get results from an organisation that puts their money where their mouth is.

* Conditions Apply: For Long Term Contracts and Accreditation Only. You need to be pre approved to become a client. Our systems must be followed through the consistent completion of the management agenda's.

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We also encourage you read our second article; "Are you ready for 2010?"

We often get a lot of emails on how our articles have assisted many owner's and Centres like yours, please feel free to share your successes with us at enquiries@succeedconsultancy.com.au



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