

## **Customer Service**

The cornerstone of a thriving business is outstanding customer service--your relationship with customers can make or break your business. It costs six to thirty times more to get a new customer than it does to service and maintain the satisfaction and loyalty of an existing customer. By consistently delivering a high level of customer service that anticipates the customer's needs and exceeds their expectations for value, you will have a positive impact on your bottom line.

It is paramount to coach staff in the delivery of customer service. When you train staff, let them know that you trust, respect and appreciate their efforts, especially when they have to deal with difficult customers.

Here are a few pointers that will help you and your staff serve parents more effectively:

1. Understand that your customers are listening to (and watching), your attitude more than your words when you are speaking. People can say all the right words but their body language may be communicating something else. It is important to be honest.
2. When listening to your customers, really listen. Concentrate on what they are telling you. It is critically important for you to determine what your customer needs. Often times customers are angry and just need an opportunity to share that anger. When the situation is calm, identify what the problem is and then try to deal with the problem in a way that creates a win/win.
3. When responding to a customer via E-mail, use a professional business style of writing. Don't be as casual as you would when answering personal E-mails. Remember proof reading is vital; check your spelling, choice of words and grammar. Once you send the email to the customer, you cannot get it back. Never type in all UPPER CASE letters. This can be difficult for people to read and, in terms of electronic communication etiquette; it is considered the same as yelling. If you are angry or dealing with an angry customer, it might be best to wait a day before you send the e-mail. Our perspective often changes after a good night's sleep.
4. Follow up—phone call, hand written note, E-mail. In many cases, it is appropriate to contact the new parent after a week or so of using your

Centre. If you can identify what is going well and what is not going well, you can potentially take steps to respond immediately. This will create an open environment for you and the parent to share concerns and ideas over the life of your business relationship.

5. Make it easy for your parents to complain to you. A problem solved can mean the retention of a client versus a lost one. It also leaves the customer feeling like you care enough to listen and the message they share with others is about how you respond, not what you have done wrong.
6. Build a good database so you know what is important to your customers. Knowing birthdays and anniversaries will allow you to help them celebrate and create a sense of family.

Remember, you are partnering with your customers to raise their children so any opportunity you provide for sharing expectations or celebrations will enhance the environment for the child.