

Are You a VIP? Yes, You Are!

By Kathy Rousseau

Years ago, I earned my living waiting tables at a high-end restaurant. If a VIP was seated in my section, the host would inevitably say, “That is so and so, make sure they get excellent service.” I was always tempted to ask him to clarify which table, so that I wouldn’t mistakenly provide excellent service to the wrong customer. Everyone seated in my section deserved excellent service regardless of their celebrity status. I’m happy to report that I learned from that experience.

Today, I’m the first point of contact at our organization. Thanks to that restaurant host, I know the importance of being polite and gracious to each and every person walking through the door or calling on the phone.

Great customer service is critical to your early childhood program, too. Whether a visiting board member or community leader, a parent, or a delivery person, they all play a key role in your early childhood program and they all deserve the same degree of customer service.

CREATING A VIP EXPERIENCE

Following are a few tips to help make visitors feel welcome:

Always Extend a Greeting

“Hello, welcome to..... My name is.... How can I help you?”

Phone Calls are Important, but...

If you are on the phone when someone walks in the door, look up and acknowledge their presence and, if possible, excuse yourself from the call long enough to extend a greeting and let them know you will be with them shortly.

A Smile Goes a Long Way

There are difficult people in this world but I love turning them around by “killing them with kindness.” It is my experience that even the toughest of them will crumble when confronted with a smile, respect, and kindness. If you look pleased to see them, they will feel happy to come through your door.

That Smile Can be Sensed Over the Phone

Even though you can’t be seen, it doesn’t mean that people don’t pick up on your mood while you’re on

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the phone. A smile and pleasant demeanor are just as important when you are on the phone as they are in person.

Call People by Name

It pays to ask for a name. (I recommend writing it down so you don't have to ask twice.) Most everyone loves the sound of their own name and using first names makes people feel important and welcomed.

Offer Assistance to Waiting Guests

If a parent or other guest is waiting to talk to a teacher or other staff member, take their coat, offer them a glass of water or a cup of coffee, and let them know the location of the restrooms so they don't have to ask.

Market your Program

This is also a great opportunity to give them information about your organization to read while they are waiting. Not only does this help them learn about your organization but it also relieves the discomfort of sitting there staring into space.

Kathy Rousseau is an Administrative Assistant at the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership. She serves as receptionist and is the first point of contact for most people visiting or calling into the Center. Her background in Public Relations makes her a good fit for this position.

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