

I to We = 3

“Good management begins with good people”

by Dennis Vicars

A common refrain among directors goes something like this: “I have to get that food order in now.” “I have to meet with Mrs. Miller about her bill.” “I have to meet with the pre-k teachers today.” “I have to get those marketing packets out today.” Is it any wonder that so many directors are stressed out and tired? Who could possibly do so much and expect to be effective?

Many of us have a tendency to place a sense of urgency on everything and, too often, we believe we are the only one to do it all. This guarantees burn-out in the long-term and does nothing to promote staff growth and teamwork. For me there is no greater way to develop a team and eliminate the director’s ‘I’ syndrome than marketing.

Marketing is a big task, and ultimately the life blood of any school or center.



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It must be conducted internally on an ongoing, consistent basis to retain enrollment and externally to gain the few FTEs (full-time equivalents) in each program to ensure success beyond break-even. Unfortunately, directors are often so overwhelmed with everything they take on themselves, they allow marketing to slip through the cracks. Done alone, marketing can be an overwhelming project. However, when done as a team — where everyone is involved for the good of the program — marketing can be a fun activity that unifies staff through mutual buy-in and benefit.

The first step is for directors to recognize that marketing is not a solo act. Increased FTEs benefits the entire school/ center by providing extra funds for merit raises, benefits, supplies, and equipment. A full school/ center is also a happier place where more children are benefiting from high-quality care and education.

The next step is to bring staff together to identify the needs and goals of your school/ center. Whether it’s 98% retention in all programs over the next 90 days or 5 additional FTEs in the Toddler Program, specific goals help you adopt strategies to help you be success-

ful. For each goal, you will want to state how success will be measured and what role each team member will play.

After the team and director have identified goals and agreed upon the strategies that will be used, implement a three-month marketing calendar in place listing the daily activity each staff member will play. These daily activities do not have to be large, but they need to include everyone and be executed without fail:

- The assistant director might commit to cleaning the front door glass 3 times a day.
- The pre-k teachers will ensure that Hamster Fred’s cage smells good.
- The director might make follow-up calls to 3 inquiries from parents.
- The cook could promote “Happy Friday” with coffee and cookies for families.
- Every staff member can pay extra-special attention to their service to families.

The point is this: Marketing is most effective when everyone is involved, knows their role and responsibilities, and is working together toward established goals. Everyone wants to be a part of a team! If given the opportunity and

rationale for contributing, everyone will want to help. While not everyone is bold enough to dress up like a clown and walk through the neighborhood shopping mall wearing a "Come Visit Us" sign (which I would discourage), even the most shy staff member can help stuff envelopes, design posters, check Facebook for competitors' ideas, or simply ensure that paper isn't blowing around the playground after recess. There is a job for everyone that will help the school/center be successful in its efforts.

Here are a few group marketing ideas in which your entire staff can participate.

Internal Activities (meant to retain current children):

- Have every team member name **one** thing that makes the school/center such a special place. Share these positives in your monthly newsletter.
- E-mail pictures of each child having fun to mom and dad (preferably to the workplace).

External activities (to new families):

- Have the entire staff go through the school/center and make recommendations on how to 'de-clutter' and better organize the environment to be more guest-friendly.
- Host a Health and Safety Fair, which is promoted to the local community, area elementary schools, etc. Invite the Fire and Police Departments as well as parent doctors, nurses, etc. Staff can even dress up as medical staff and have a Teddy Bear clinic for children to ease their fears of going to the doctor.

The point is simply this: Your entire staff can and should be your marketing team. The financial health of a school/center is not an 'I' activity, but a 'We' necessity. It takes more than one person to sell a school/center. Let everyone join in the fun and watch the teamwork increase and the FTEs climb.