

suggestions will be offered in many categories as a tool to help you consider all the possibilities. Use what works for you, pass over what doesn't, and in the end, you'll have created your own unique professional identity.

Qualities of a Professional Provider

Even though each provider is unique, there are common qualities that professional providers share. It is the combination of unique personal differences and these shared qualities of professionalism that makes some providers the best in the field. By striving to obtain these qualities, you will soon be among them.

- Conveys a confident attitude
- Maintains a polished personal appearance
- Runs a high-quality program for children (chapters 2, 3, and 4), including an educational environment, a developmentally based curriculum, and field trips to enhance the curriculum with hands-on experiences
- Uses professional business practices (chapters 5, 6, and 7), such as productive communication techniques, a parent handbook of information and policies, and marketing strategies
- Sets goals for improvement (chapter 8)

This chapter will have you take your first steps toward a professional image: building a confident attitude and a polished personal appearance. To be sure you reach your goals we will first discuss just why this journey is so important by covering the benefits of becoming a professional. We will also address how to break through the obstacles that may be in your way. At the end of this chapter you should have the tools you need to get started and the motivation you need to keep going!

The Benefits of Professionalism

As providers we have the honor of knowing we are making a difference in the lives of children. But as business owners, many days we feel unrewarded. Be aware of these benefits to professionalism, and you will stay motivated to meet your goals.

- Respect and appreciation that will motivate you to continue to improve
- Higher-quality care for the children
- Successful partnerships with parents with fewer (if any!) conflicts
- Financial success, as openings will be filled quickly and rates can be raised to reflect the higher level of quality
- Increased organization, making your job easier and more enjoyable, so you can avoid burnout

Most providers have a “wish list” in their mind that includes some, if not all, of the above benefits. As someone who has experienced them all, I want to assure you that your dreams can come true! Working toward professionalism is a worthy goal, and the benefits it brings can become the power that sustains it. What I mean is that after reaching your goals and gaining the benefits, the receipt of these benefits actually produces even more benefits. What could be better? When you reach a higher level of quality care, for example, you will gain more respect from both parents and colleagues. When you are financially successful, you will have the income to gain further education that in turn will improve your business. When you are successful with parent partnerships, openings will be a thing of the past, because families will not only stay longer but will become the best marketing tool you have.

You can see the snowball effect here. Professionalism can bring countless and lasting benefits to you as a provider, and these benefits will sustain your continued success and improvement for years to come. As mentioned earlier, however, there are potential barriers on this road to success. Facing them head-on, planning for them, and working past them will help to keep you moving forward.