

and kick them up a notch more. Then we'll discuss the techniques used by all business entrepreneurs for setting and reaching goals to put you firmly on the road to your future successes. Finally, we'll cover how you can communicate to parents that you are making changes and celebrate the goals that you have reached.

Start by getting a notebook and writing down your hopes and dreams for you and your business. Read over the next segment and add to it as you get new ideas. Take it with you to meetings and conferences where you will be inspired to set new goals. Make this notebook one of the most important business supplies you own! Use it to organize and plan for each of your goals. Let's begin by looking at the possibilities for personal and professional improvement. Here are four primary areas for goal setting for your child care business:

- Personal development
- Child care environment
- Child care program
- Business practices

Personal Development Goals

Just as your professional image began with *you*, the future of your business depends on you as well. Setting goals to help you improve your knowledge and skills, improve your ability to deal with stress, and improve and strengthen the support system around you will lay a foundation for continued growth and success for your entire business.

○ Continuing Education

Having a clear plan for continued education in every aspect of your business not only supports your professional growth, but also eliminates the waste of your time and money. Taking classes and workshops and getting accredited all cost money. As a businessperson you should be concerned about finding the most cost-efficient yet productive continuing education possible in order to meet your goals.

Considering your career as a family child care provider as long term changes how you look at your continuing education. For example, if you were going to stay in the business only one more year, it wouldn't make sense to spend a lot of money on a college course. But if you are looking at years of being in this business, you may wish to consider a college course in order to fulfill your continuing education requirements.

Although it varies, every state has guidelines and rules on the amount of continuing education hours you will need to take each year to remain a child care provider. As an example, here in Wisconsin a licensed provider is required to fulfill fifteen hours per year of continuing education. Now, if you are considering ten more years in this business, you are looking at 150 hours of classes or workshops. Wouldn't it make sense to plan ahead so that those 150 hours add up to more than a pile of certificates from one-hour workshops? Plan your education so that in addition to meeting state requirements, you are fulfilling an additional goal—a college degree perhaps or a national accreditation. Maybe a two-year associate's degree or even a child development associate accreditation (CDA). Put those hours to work for you! Reach higher than fulfilling state requirements. Even if you attend only the required minimum hours per year, choose hours that can also be applied to the requirements for a higher recognition.

Check into technical colleges, four-year colleges, online courses, and other degree programs offered by institutions in your area. Most colleges and universities now offer accelerated programs with classes at night or on weekends for working adults.

Regardless of your choice to pursue a degree or an accreditation, you will want to plan your education to help you learn and grow in every aspect of your business. A useful resource for doing this is to become a part of your local registry. At the time this book was written, it is offered in only six states, but there are similar programs in many other states. The registry is an agency that helps you document your professional path by categorizing all your training, experience, and professional involvement. It will chart out your training

into percentages so you can see at a glance which areas you have the most training in and which areas are lacking.

Generally, the areas of knowledge include the following: child development, cultural and individual diversity, developmentally appropriate practices, family relationships, guidance, healthy and safe environment, observation and assessment, and professionalism.

Using this list as a guide to plan your continuing education will help to ensure your path as a professional—you will be planning for enrichment in *all* areas of your business. Having a state or national accreditation as a result of hours of training will not only boost your self-esteem and benefit the children in your care, but also can become a fantastic marketing booster. What better indication of your high quality to parents? They don't have to just take your word—you are now backed in that opinion by a higher authority!

○ **Dealing with Stress**

As you work on your training and making changes in your business, you will also be working with children each day, and inevitably will have some moments, sometimes entire days, when the stress brings you down and you can't remember what you're doing or why. This is a stressful career—recognize this and plan for it. Set yourself up for success, not failure. Write policies that help your business run smoothly, set hours you can handle, take families you can build partnerships with. But even if all this works, there will still be plenty of moments of stress. Usually, they will last only a moment or two, but when they happen it can feel like hours. So plan ahead.

Think of ways to give yourself a time-out. When things are going crazy—get crazy! When the kids are running crazy around the room or involved in a nonstop argument and I just can't take it anymore, my favorite stress buster is to stand on a chair with a blanket over my head in the middle of the room. I don't say a word—I just do it. Within seconds, children stop what they are doing to look at me, and then surround me with questions of “Why . . . ?” and “What are you doing?” After a minute or two (still under the blanket) I announce that Pat is not here anymore; she's gone. This gets

the kids going as they try to prove to me that I'm still there, eventually pulling me down off the chair in a monkey pile of giggles and hugs! It's virtually impossible to still feel stressed after doing this!

Another stress buster for me is to sit for a moment and write. The poem "Remember Why" in this chapter is one I wrote on a particularly stressful morning. I keep it in my room now and take a moment to read it whenever I start to feel a little nuts. Consider what relaxes you and find ways to incorporate them into stress relievers for your bad days.

○ Getting the Support You Need

Going down the road to professionalism is a long journey with lots of bumps in the road, and it is too hard to be taken alone. Finding support through your family, friends, and other providers will become essential to your motivation to reach your goals.

Communicating with your family and friends about your goals for professionalism educates them about the new levels of quality that you will reach. Hearing the commitment in your voice and seeing it in your actions will give them a new respect for you and your business. Having this respect can be a strong motivator in your continued growth.

During a keynote presentation at a state child care conference, provider

REMEMBER WHY

*Bridget screaming, her vocal substitute for
"I'm hungry!"*

Peter is crying because, "Sarah hugged me!"

Mikey's drooling and has soaked his shirt,

Bridget's eating a shoe, covered with dirt.

Bret took Katie's doll and threw it out the door,

Sarah's in the bathroom wiping her poo poo

on the floor.

Rachel is telling them each what to play,

The gate was left open and Bridget is on her way.

They're all screaming now, some for fun,

some are sad.

Some scream 'cause they're hungry, some scream

'cause they're mad.

They're leaking from everywhere, I wipe but

there's more.

Brian's running naked and Peter's peed on the floor.

I wish I could go somewhere quiet and green.

The room is as messy as I've ever seen.

But I'll pick it all up, wipe the noses and floor.

Give everyone hugs and catch Bridget at the door.

I'll give Katie her doll, tell Bret and Rachel

to be nice,

Take the shoe out of Bridget's mouth,

probably twice.

I'll feed them and hug them and tell them I care.

I'll chase after Bridget whether it's here or it's there.

I'll do what I can and if I'm real lucky,

When I serve them their lunch I won't hear

"That's yucky!"

And when I sit down to rest, and get attacked

by the mob,

Between hugs and kisses, I'll remember . . .

I love my job!

Patricia Dischler

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Elaine Piper laid out a twelve-step program for professionalism. Ten out of twelve of these steps involved some form of reaching out for support from family, friends, and community, and through state and national organizations. She made it clear that connecting with others is key to reducing stress, improving self-esteem, acquiring knowledge, and promoting yourself and your business.

When looking for motivation, respect, and support there is no better place to find it than with other providers. Every provider you meet, whether she just started her business last week or twenty years ago, can be a source of wisdom and strength. Hearing the excitement in the voice of a provider to whom everything is new can reenergize your commitment. Getting advice from a seasoned professional can motivate you to try new ideas. As different as all the children in your care are, so are all the providers you may meet. Each one will be able to teach you something. And in turn, you will always be able to teach them something new in exchange.

Find ways to connect with other providers in your area and far away. Join a support group where you will have a place to get advice, share your ideas, and get support when there is a problem. Building friendships with other providers in your community gives you a place to turn when things get rough. You've got a biter you can't seem to control? Having another provider to call for advice can be a real stress reliever. Want to attend the state conference? Going with your support group can turn a boring day of training into a motivating and energizing party!

Your family child care may be an island, but it is in a sea full of other islands just waiting to build a bridge to you. As all the participants in state and national child care conferences can tell you, the hours when they learn the most is the time in between the workshops when they meet other providers and share ideas, stories, and camaraderie. Providers have dozens of those little tips that can change a stressful activity into a fun one. Gathering in groups can mean an exchange of hundreds of ideas in a short amount of time.

Joining state and national organizations keeps you connected with other providers. Most organizations produce a newsletter that

can become a source for new ideas and inspiration. Becoming a board member or helping to organize a training event can expand your interests in this field and give you new motivations. Contacting your local resource and referral agency is the best place to start. Look into all the possibilities for your area and find what's right for you.

Goals for Your Child Care Environment

Making improvements in your child care environment not only benefits the children, but also helps you by providing you with a nice place to work. You spend a lot of time in this space. It's to your benefit to create a more pleasant atmosphere filled with the supplies, equipment, and toys that will inspire learning, creativity, and developmental growth for children in your care.

○ The Classroom

Your classroom goals may range from simply finding an overall space, to building a jungle in your play area. Wherever your space fits on this continuum right now, there will always be room for change.

Stay inspired by creating an atmosphere that is creative, colorful, and cozy. Paint the walls, move the furniture, put a bright cover over the couch. Take a look at how the room flows when the children are playing in it and create a master plan. Make it more than a collection of small areas of play; give it a big picture. Think of a theme that will provide motivation day after day, without becoming irritating.

For example, I once had my classroom in the lower level of a small house. The room had only two small basement-sized windows plus a window on the door going outside, and worse, they all faced north so there was little or no sunlight. I decided to paint the room "Polynesian Sun Yellow" to give it a sunny look. It was definitely brighter! But I wish I had done some research on colors and their effects on people (and children). I soon found out that bright yellow makes you anxious and wild. The kids were going crazy and so was I! Now my classroom has soft blue walls with white clouds sponged onto them—aaaahhh! Much better!