

Attracting And Keeping Parents, Children, And Team Members

Steve Alley

The children's ministry (CM) is the Lord's work; but He has given us the responsibility of caring for it! We are, therefore, to be good stewards of what He has given us!

In today's world, there are two words that represent critical concepts regarding what people believe about the CM: "reputation" and "impression." When we ask God to create an environment that "keeps" parents, children, and CM team members, we must pay close attention to those two words!

We may know for sure that the CM cares deeply for the children, but if that care isn't reflected in the CM's reputation in the eyes of the parents, then we have a problem! We may also know that the vision of the CM clearly supports the children and the CM team members, but if they don't get that "impression," then we will have people leave the ministry. Working hard, with God's wisdom and strength, to create an environment that attracts and keeps parents, children, and CM team members is a vital part of being good stewards of what God has given us! Walt Disney understood this concept when he built Disneyland in the early 1950's. He wanted Disneyland to be "The happiest place on earth." There is much to learn from Walt Disney as we build the CM!

The book **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute has excellent wisdom for what we might call "customer service." I've inserted quotes from the book into related areas.

Attracting First Time Parents And Children

1. **"Do I know where to go?"** – Make the CM easy to find (signs, greeters, etc.).
2. **"Is it safe?"** – Make the CM obviously safe (courteous safety checkpoints and greeters, check-in system, CM ID badges, CM personnel in hallways, at least 2 CM team members in each room).
3. **"Is the CM pleasant?"** – Incorporate pleasant background music and pleasant scents in CM areas.
4. **"Do I feel welcomed?"** – Friendly and welcoming church and CM personnel throughout walk-up, check-in, and check-out.



"At Disney resorts and parks, there are four quality standards. In order of importance, they are: safety, courtesy, show, and efficiency."

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

5. **"Does my child feel safe and welcomed?"** – Make the children feel welcomed (eye contact, use of name, high-5, reassure the parents).
6. **"Did my child have fun?"** – Make sure that there is a significant amount of fun! The children define "fun," so we need to make sure they view what we do as "fun" from their perspective!
7. **"Was my child challenged and inspired?"** – Challenge and spiritually inspire the child (utilize "walk-away" items (items brought home that represent the lesson), or statements from the lesson).
8. **"Does my child want to come back?"** – Invite the child to return (use "continuation" ideas or "hooks" for next week).

9. **“Did we feel valued?”** – Compliment parents on their children (child was respectful, friendly, fun, smart, interactive, etc.), and use parent and child names as often as possible.



“...superlative face-to-face service is just one element of exceeding guest experiences... It means analyzing that experience from the guest’s perspective.”

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

Attracting New CM Team Members

1. **“Is this a successful ministry?”** – Unashamedly “display” the “fruit” of the CM (number of children who accept the Lord, compliments from parents, children, and team members, etc.) in posters, bulletin announcements, screen advertisements, etc.



“...we always use our brand and culture to make a good first impression, and to ensure that potential cast members understand what will be expected of them...”

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

2. **“Is there a purpose that inspires me?”** – Clearly display the ministry vision in posters, bulletin announcements, screen advertisements, etc.
3. **“Are my talents or interests needed?”** – Specifically mention the value of being a good listener, understanding children, being fun, telling stories, interest in sports, musical talent, or any other unique ability that might be interesting to children.
4. **“Will you train and support me?”** – Specifically identify the CM training process, and the value of teaming CM team members together in rooms, etc. Develop and highlight the CM “mentor” process.
5. **“Will I enjoy being on the team?”** – Highlight the stories of CM team members who have served for many years! Do this through on-stage or video testimonies, and in posters, bulletin announcements, screen advertisements, etc.



“Making courtesy a quality standard means turning it into a set of organization-wide behaviors. As an organization, it makes the Disney parks and resorts responsible for recruiting, hiring, and training a cast with great interpersonal skills.”

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

“Keeping” Returning Parents

1. **“Is it safe?”** – Consistent, obvious CM safety (check-in, policies, CM personnel presence, limited access to rooms).
2. **“Are the people friendly?”** – Church and CM personnel friendly, welcoming, and helpful!
3. **“Do they care about us?”** – Personal attention given to parent and child (eye contact, use of name, smiles, compliments).
4. **“Does my child want to come back?”** – Make the environment fun and enjoyable for the child, so he/she wants to come back.
5. **“Are my needs being met?”** – Deal with parent needs directly and immediately. Give support, help find answers.



“Quality service means exceeding your guests’ expectations by paying attention to every detail of the delivery of your products and services.”

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

6. **“Are my ideas welcomed?”** – Listen to parent comments and questions. Give instant support and feedback, with thanks.
7. **“Is my child challenged to grow spiritually?”** – Make sure to challenge the child, rather than just impart knowledge. Practical applications at home and school are powerful!
8. **“Is my child challenged to serve others or lead?”** – Give children opportunities to serve and lead and inspire them to do so at home and at school. Make sure parents know about these challenges!
9. **“Do they keep me informed?”** – Use every possible communication tool available (text, email, tweets, Facebook, Instagram, printed handouts, apps, etc.) to keep them informed!



“‘Guestology’ is what Disney calls the art and science of knowing and understanding customers... Guestology establishes an initial course of action, and as new customer information is gathered, that data is used to fine tune and improve performance.”

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

“Keeping” Returning Kids

1. **“Do I feel safe and secure?”** – Protect them from “bad” people (intruders, or unkind kids).
2. **“Are they glad I came?”** – Use the child’s name, welcome him/her with eye contact and some sort of physical contact (high 5’s, fist bumps, special handshake), ask about school, pets, prayer requests.
3. **“Is this fun?”** – Do all you can to inject “fun” into the experience. Understand the child’s definition of “fun,” and use it.

4. **“Do I feel challenged?”** – Give the children realistic, age-appropriate real-life challenges, and remember to compliment their efforts. Inspire them to “push” into challenges with God’s help!
5. **“Is there something for me to do?”** – Provide increasing (based on their age and abilities) leadership opportunities (within the room and beyond).



“...when you know who your guests are, you automatically know who your guests are not. Figuring out who is not doing business with you, sometimes triggers huge changes in service theme and strategies.”

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

“Keeping” CM Team Members

1. **“Am I valued?”** – Provide regular affirmation (verbal, written, etc.) of the team member. This can be done “corporately” in large pre-service meetings or dinners, or privately through the coordinators.



“You can dream, create, design, and build the most wonderful place in the world... but it requires people to make the dream a reality.” (Walt Disney)

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute

2. **“Do I feel confident?”** – Provide effective training in every aspect of the ministry (parent relations, kid connections, problem solving, protecting the safety of the kids, using the curriculum/leading small group discussions).
3. **“Do I feel connected?”** – Connect the team members to each other in age group departments or in specific ministry teams. Make sure each team member has phone numbers and email addresses for the whole team. Establish “mentor” team members within each team and assign them specific team members to support.
4. **“Am I appreciated?”** – “Guarantee” that each team member is thanked and appreciated weekly. This should be done personally by a coordinator, service supervisor, or director.
5. **“Is there more for me to do?”** – Opportunities for service or leadership within the CM are offered with complimentary comments like, “I really think you would be good at this,” or “I need your help.”



“We don’t put people in Disney. We put Disney in people.”

From **Be Our Guest** by Theodore Kinni of the Disney Institute