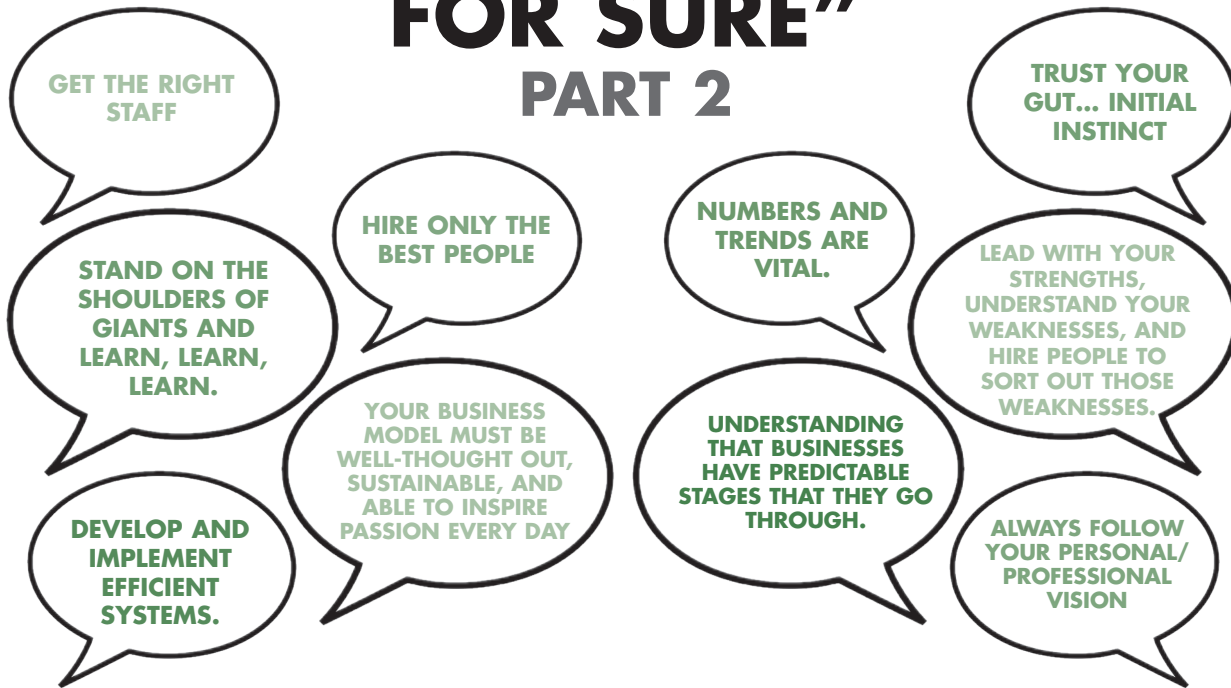


# “WHAT WE KNOW FOR SURE”

## PART 2



By Patti Komara, Tumblebear Connection in Dyer, IN

On the back page of Oprah magazine “O”, she has a monthly column entitled, “What I Know For Sure.” I got to thinking... wouldn’t it be great to ask the top gym owners in the industry what five things they know for sure about owning a successful gymnastics school. Read, absorb, enjoy, get inspired, and go out and do it yourself. Make 2009 your best year yet!

Note: We are planning to publish this article in sections. The following individuals will share their secrets on “What we know for sure” in upcoming issues of *Technique*. The club owners include: Steve Greeley, Dave Holcomb, Lynn Ledford, Anne Josephson, Jeff Metzger, Frank Sahlein, Laura Mikszan, Diane Barron, David Klein, Randy Sikora, Jeff Lulla and Patti Komara. Here is the second section!



**What I Know For Sure by Anne Josephson**  
Culver City, CA

**1. Stand on the shoulders of giants and learn, learn, learn.** Before I even opened Josephson Academy of Gymnastics, I attended Congress and

Brain Trust. Within two years of being open I went to Boot Camp and owned nearly every Patti Komara tape and book. These things were huge investments of time and money when I had very little of either, but I believe they were as essential as finding a building and buying equipment. Why? Because these are the experts in the field, the very best, so I wanted to know what they know. Also, read as much as you can about gymnastics, business, child development and parenting (the four cornerstones of what our business is all about). Talk to other gym owners, look at websites of every gym you can and never stop learning. In fact, the following four items are things I learned from other experts, but here is what is working for me!

**2. Hire great people, pay them more than you think anyone else in your area does, treat them well and, for those key people, give them bonuses tied to the performance of the gym.** In return, demand only their best work, and hire and fire with discipline. Don’t be stingy with paid training and continuing education-- those are investments that are essential to the success of your gym. I firmly believe that I am training my future competition, and I am okay with that. I also believe that if I am not greedy with my success (I share the success of the gym with them) they will be happy at JAG.

3. Always think about the future--the big picture. Planning is key. Summer programming happens in January, by spring we have most of fall hammered out. It doesn't mean that I won't tweak what is going on in the present or take advantage of an opportunity that arises, but mostly I spend my time thinking about the future, and plotting how I am going to get there. Looking at trends (enrollment, financial, school vacations, and dismissal schedules, etc.) helps me understand where we might need to expand or contract based on our population moving forward. It also shows me where to place our marketing energies. Setting enrollment and financial goals are essential. These types of things ensure that I am running the business, not the other way around.

**4. Lead with your strengths, understand your weaknesses, and hire people to sort out those weaknesses.** I am great with parents and kids, and I have a great marketing sense and vision for the gym. So, the vast majority of my work time is spent on vision, marketing and talking with my clients. On the other hand, I am rotten with reconciling my books, and I have no idea how to teach a Tsuk. For that I pay a bookkeeper, an accountant and a team coach. But, I have forced myself to understand (well, kind of anyway!) my accounting well enough that I can understand what is happening with my business and can make intelligent choices based on my numbers; and, I certainly know that a Tsuk is a vault, for level 8 or higher. In short, don't try to do the jobs for your gym that you are lousy doing (hire an expert to do them), but also don't abdicate total responsibility for key functions of your business to someone else--you still have to know what is going on.

**5. Have a strong sense of your mission, values and purpose and be very clear to your customers, employees, and athletes what those things are.** Also, create a brand for your gym and make your gym a community. We are a gym that uses "Character Counts!" as the cornerstone of our values. From the moment you walk into our gym, it is very clear what we stand for by the signage and by the way we speak to one another. We have a five foot poster in our customer service area called "The Gold Medal Pledge" that outlines very clearly how we will conduct business, how we will treat our families and athletes and how we expect to be treated. We conduct on-going training with our staff about our mission, values, and purpose. We talk to our athletes and parents about what we expect from them as members of the JAG community. With respect to our brand: we are the Neiman-Marcus of gyms. The place is clean, clean, clean. The equipment is new. We have free, valet parking. We hire only gymnastics and teaching professionals (no young teens teaching here) who are well-groomed and great with kids. Everyone is exceedingly customer service centered. We give away T-shirts, bags, medals, trophies and send cards for birthdays and balloons for illnesses and injuries.

We have free internet and cafe tables with comfy chairs (no bleachers here!). As a result, we are not cheap--but neither is anything we do! That is the brand that works for us, though it is not the right brand for every market. But having a brand is essential. Finally, we create a sense of community through our interactions with our clients--we know their names, the name of their dogs, where they go to school, where they live, what they like to do, when grandma is visiting, etc. We take a sincere and active interest in them and their lives. Remember: Anyone can quit a gym, but it is much harder to quit a community!



**What I Know For Sure by  
Frank Sahlein  
Boise, Idaho**

*If we can only list the top 5 Success Factors, here is what I believe after 20 years of consulting with clients in our industry!*

**1. Strategic Architecture-- Your business model must be well-thought out, sustainable, and able to inspire passion every day.** You must know how you are going to make money, preferably quite a bit of it! If not, eventually you will find your business in trouble.

**2. Stages -- Understanding that businesses have predictable stages that they go through.** A solution to a particular issue depends on which stage the business is at. Along with the business, both owners and program managers have stages that they go through in their professional career. Recognizing these stages in people, in advance, is a key to smooth professional development planning.

**3. Systems -- Having an overall management system to operate from, so that none of the details fall through the cracks.** This means realizing that you need a network of systems, which all work together like a symphony. This is the only way to develop a turn-key business in which the owner is the master strategist and creates much more value in the business every day. Fourth is Staff Communications-- People either drive businesses forward, or they do not. Therefore, your people must have a crystal clear understanding that they must grasp the entire picture of their position, that they are truly working for themselves, and that they have a vested interest in giving 100% every day.

**5. A simple way to Measure Results-- Accountability and Personal Productivity must be measured each and every month.** Most small businesses fall down at this point. You must have both qualitative and quantitative tools to help your people improve on a consistent basis. This can be done in a very objective, honest, and friendly manner if set up correctly.



**What I Know For Sure by  
Laura Mikszan  
Atlanta, GA**

**1. Always follow your personal/professional vision.** These are one in the same. Every decision should be based on your original vision, philosophy and values for your

company... and life. Stay consistent even when you are tempted by the requests of customers, staff, or what the competition is doing. Believe in your Vision and Mission!

**2. Hire, train and develop staff to take proprietorship and carry the mission.** Empower your key people. Give them the tools. Let go and watch them grow. Include your staff in decisions and strategic planning. "People participate in a world they help create."

**3. Develop and implement efficient systems.** Provide a GPS system for your staff to utilize to reach the goals you have created together.

**4. Numbers and trends are vital.** Constantly monitor, analyze, and react quickly when necessary. Keep your finger on the pulse of your business at all times!

**5. Trust your gut... initial instinct.** Due diligence is essential. However, often people drag their feet and lose the prize. Go for it when it feels right! Just as important--make the tough decisions when necessary. Do not procrastinate no matter how difficult. Cut non-profitable programs and fire the problem staff member. Make sure you reward the great staff members and customers simultaneously.

"Always surround yourself with great mentors and friends. Remember that we are blessed to have the

opportunity to be in the business of touching so many lives."



**What I Know For Sure by  
Diane Barron  
St. Louis, MO**

**1. Have an effective hiring, training, and evaluation system to ensure quality staff.** Expect the best.

**2. You will never be successful enough to eliminate problems,** but you can change how they will affect you and how quickly you move through them.

**3. First impressions are key.** Clean facility and friendly knowledgeable office staff will get clients in the front door. A fun qualified teaching staff will keep them there.

**4. If all your procedures and policies reflect your mission and values,** you will be able to follow and enforce them with confidence.

**5. Provide excellent special activities for additional staff hours and income.**

**6. What I really know for sure is that there are a million things we must know to have a successful business.** That is what makes it so interesting and challenging. I believe I have the best job in the world and I'm thankful for the opportunity. ✨

**STAY TUNED** for Section 3 of this article that will be published in APRIL 2009 *Technique*.