

# “WHAT WE KNOW FOR SURE”

## PART 3

GET THE RIGHT STAFF.

DO NOT SIMPLY TRY TO MIMIC OR FOLLOW THE SUCCESS OF OTHERS.

HIRE ONLY THE BEST PEOPLE.

NUMBERS AND TRENDS ARE VITAL.

KEEP TAKING THE NEXT STEP.

RUN CLASSES WITH EXCITING, AND UP-TO-DATE CURRICULUM BY TEACHERS WHO CARE THEIR STUDENTS LEARN.

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!



**What I Know For Sure by Lynn Ledford**  
Rancho Santa Margarita, CA

**1. Truly know and understand your customers and what they want – so that you can continually develop and deliver the best programs and products at the best time and in the**

**best manner.** There is some truth to the adage that if it’s not broken don’t fix it. My lime green polyester pantsuit is not broken nor is my 1992 V8 Suburban, which has primer on the rear panel and gets 9 miles to the gallon. Most of my customers might see it a little differently. The Tupperware Bowl Registration system might not be broken, but that plastic bowl is not going to tell you that your competitor in zip code B is drawing away an average of 12 customers a month nor will it be able to tell you that teacher Lucy has successfully converted 92% of her leads over the last 6 months and that teacher John does well with initial conversions but has the weakest retention rate in the gym when it comes to students enrolled for more than two sessions. If you are offering the same programs, same curriculum, same billing system, same schedules, same themes, same staff wear, same music, same a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g, you were offering 5, 3 or even 2 years ago, you are probably not truly in touch with the ever growing needs and ever changing expectations of your customers.

**2. Do not simply try to mimic or follow the success of others.** You must know what worked and why it worked

and how it worked. Definitely study and observe, but then take the best of the best and make it your own.

**3. You must be able to anticipate all the multiple factors (economic, social, parental, trendy, ancillary, local, etc.) that affect your business and you have to be able to develop and maintain a calculated, careful vision for your company that leads the industry, and the community of child/family based businesses.**

Don’t just talk about staying ahead of the game. Read, study, think, go see, ask, figure it out, anticipate, then resolve, act and evolve.

**4. Keep it simple. At Cal Elite, we often employ relatively complex systems to assess and drive our business. But the end results should be revered for their simplicity.**

**5. Be willing and able to lead.** In good times and bad, a common denominator to sound leadership is the ability to foster respect by doing what needs to be done in an honest, timely and forthright manner. When an employee is succeeding, be honest and generous about that success. When an employee is not succeeding, be honest and forthright about the resolution. One of the greatest strengths you can provide as leaders is the ability to make the tough calls and act on them without wasting time, resources or the good efforts of others.

**6. Keep taking the next step.** One of the best things we did (and continue to do) was to lay out a 1 year, 3 year, 5 year and 10 year Business Plan. We listed goals which at the time seemed aggressive, even lofty. Step by step those goals steadfastly became realistic, and are now our reality. Keep taking the next step. When others fail to plan, Plan. When others do not follow through with the small, seemingly insignificant tasks, follow through. When others back away from the riskier or more challenging step... step into it. Success is not built on any staggering single decision or huge risky

transaction. Success comes from methodically outlining your goals and the many steps it takes to achieve those goals and then, most importantly, developing the discipline and desire to keep taking the next step.



**What I Know For Sure by  
David Klein  
Tigard, OR**

**1. Love of Children** – I assume that we all like children, but what I am talking about here is having a genuine interest in the care and well being of every child that walks in your door. You can't teach this to your staff like you can class management, spotting or progressions. When you hire staff either they love children or they don't. I believe that Metro would be successful at anything that involved children because we hire staff that has a "Love of Children." Gymnastics just happens to be the vehicle we use to get into the hearts of children and really make a difference in their lives. This culture of the "Love of Children" has to seep out of everyone from the front office manager to the cleaning crew. Remember that children are very good at reading body language and they can tell if you are faking your interest in them or if you truly care. So, if you think that children are obnoxious and should be seen and not heard, then you are headed for failure.

**2. Location** – I know we have all heard this one before, but it is so true. "Can someone run a successful gymnastics school without having a great location?" Certainly the answer is "yes," but undoubtedly it makes things easier with a great location. It is no accident that Metro Gymnastics Center was established at its current location over 18 years ago. Location is not only important in regards to the physical location of your building, but also where your building is located demographically. Having great demographics can take the edge off during today's economic uncertainty. Educated, professional families that have discretionary income understand the importance of investing in their children's development. Having a facility that is tucked back in the corner of some industrial park and is hard to find is at a disadvantage from one that has lots of drive-by exposure.

**3. Professional approach** – This goes for all aspects of your business. If you indeed have a great location and have professional customers, they will expect a professional approach to the way you run your business. This not only goes for how you interact with your customers but also the professional appearance of your facility. A fresh coat of paint every year, new carpet when needed, investing in updated equipment will all show your level of commitment to your business and it will certainly be noticed by your customers. How would you feel if you walked into a doctor's office and the carpet had stains everywhere, the paint was yellowing and the furniture had tears in it? Would you think that business was successful or would you wonder

if they were going to be around in the near future? It is hard at times, but you must commit to investing a percentage of your revenue back into your business for improvements. Having a professional approach to the way you train and interact with your staff is equally as important. Remember that even your beginning level teachers will need to be able to interact with customers with a certain level of professionalism. Having a professional set of business systems instead of "flying by the seat of your pants" is also crucial for having a successful business.

**4. Honesty and Integrity** – I can say with confidence that Metro has never charged a customer for a service that was not rendered. This is not to say that there have never been disagreements with customers, but the outcome of these disagreements were never with the intent of trying to take advantage of a customer. Being an honest business owner with a high level of integrity can create a solid foundation for which to build your business. By doing this you can also expect the same in return from your staff and yes, your customers. I once learned that people only treat you the way that you let them treat you. You will find that having honesty and integrity will also let your staff and customers know that you can be relied upon.

**5. Diversity** – The more diverse you are in what you offer your customers, the more difficult it becomes for a competitor to move in on your turf. Solidifying your business into the community will not only help to ward off competitors, but will also provide your customers with a sense of security. Diversity also provides the business owner with the confidence and flexibility to add new programs that are trends and get rid of programs that turn out to be fads.



**A Funny Retort  
Randy Sikora  
Boca Raton, FL**

I love the newsletter and insightful input from the best in our industry. Thanks a bunch. I do feel that a few things were missed. Here are some unsolicited additions:

**1. Be a plumbing expert** - Kids (and mommies) put everything and anything in the toilet, thus clogging it up. If you don't know how to rectify this situation, then you will be up to your ankles in problems.

**2. Copy Machine Repair** - Your copier will only jam/break when you need to use it in a hurry. You must know how to disassemble/reassemble a copier in less than 60 seconds without burning yourself or getting black toner everywhere.

**3. Listen to me and shut up** - This is for the guys. Sometimes the best thing you can do is listen to someone and just shut up. Don't try to "fix" everything (except of course items 1 or 2 above).

**4. Talk about it less and just do it** - Often it is best to just rip off the Band-Aid and move forward. The more time invested analyzing a problem reduces your potential for return. There is usually a quick, simple solution and your only regret will be not doing what you know needs to be done sooner.

**5. Go bowling with your staff** - Most staff issues will be resolved during bowling. It is critical that the boss pays the tab and provides fun prizes.



**What I Know For Sure**  
**Jeff Lulla**  
**Burbank, CA**

**1. Location** - The best staff in the perfect facility loaded with great equipment and a terrific curriculum will struggle or fail if located in a small community with no kids. I suggest you check the demographics research easily available from most local school districts (many are required to update their census data annually) to determine if your desired location has enough families with sufficient income, education, and young children to make your business viable.

**2. Well Trained and Enthusiastic Staff** - High energy, enthusiastic and entertaining staff are a must. Experienced and knowledgeable instructors are fine, but if they are boring and lack patience, they will lose students. I have found that patient, fun and exciting instructors (even if they have less experience or gymnastics knowledge than former gymnasts) will have an easier time keeping students enrolled. Hire people with enthusiastic personalities and train them well.

**3. Success-Focused Philosophy** - Creating success for kids keeps them enrolled. Competition can limit success to the most talented few. Defining success as 'personal best' instead of better than others and removing contests that compare one student to another will help keep more students enrolled and feeling successful (even your team kids).

**4. Progressive Teaching System** - Setting and achieving goals helps keep motivation high and everyone happy. When you provide your clients with lists of skills they will learn, and then show them that they have learned, you fulfill expectations.

**5. Quality Everywhere** - Customer service, cleanliness, printing, uniforms, fresh paint and equipment - it all creates an impression and image of quality. People will always prefer greater quality for the same or often even higher price. Of specific concern - make sure the person answering the phone is well trained. Remember, the first impression a caller who has never visited your gym gets is over the phone and you have got to come across as professional, skilled and caring.



**What I Know For Sure**  
**Patti Komara**  
**Dyer, IN**

**1. Surround yourself with good people who share your passion.** Every staff member needs to understand his/her importance of the bottom line and how what they do daily contributes to that all-important number. Trust your employees, pay them well, and always expect and demand their best!

**2. Clean your bright, colorful facility daily and make sure it smells good.** Your business also has to be in a prime location.

**3. Run classes with exciting, progressive, and up-to-date curriculum by teachers who care their students learn.**

**4. Continue to learn something new every day by educating yourself with information from those who have been successful.** Read business books, listen to business CDs, go to seminars, buy others' curriculum and build your business on what you know to be true in your heart, gut, and what is right for your demographics.

**5. Keep an attention to detail and a laser beam on what your unique selling proposition is.** This is what really makes a business different than others.

**6. I have to agree completely with the others - location.** I celebrate my 40th anniversary in this business this year. I've been in 12 different locations during that time. I have always been behind a lumber yard, behind a grocery store, behind a restaurant - you get the picture. You should sacrifice space and not go into an industrial park if you can get on a main street. You can save a lot of money on advertising if your building is in view of the public. That amount of savings could easily over the years pay off in bigger enrollment and higher profits and offset the bigger rent or mortgage payment.

What I do know for sure in a recession or not, is that parents will do anything for a child if that child wants it badly enough. In 1982 the county we live in had 14% unemployment. I didn't have kids of my own at the time and when a Mom came in who was late paying tuition and said to me, "Oh, please don't drop Michelle from class. I will pay you as soon as I get my unemployment check." It just struck me and I've remembered that incident to this day. I remember thinking how important those gymnastics lessons must be to her daughter. Wow! Our industry may not be recession-proof, but we are recession-resistant! I hope you print out this list from our industry leaders. Study and learn from the best. Review it often. Certain advice may not apply today but can make the world of difference in a few months. That's why going to USA Gymnastics Regional and National Congress time and again makes sense. We need to keep learning and growing. Good luck! ✨