SNEAKING IN A SMARER SUMMER

Are your kids looking forward to summer vacation? Great! But don’t toss out those books and pencils yet—summer fun doesn’t have to mean dumber fun! Exercising kids’ brain muscles all summer brings big benefits in the fall. And not exercising them can mean a loss of hard-earned skills.

A wise parent or caregiver can sneak a lot of learning into those lazy, hazy days. The good news is you don’t need a lot of extra time or cash to give your kids a smarter summer. The trick is to make a game out of learning every day. Here are a few ideas:

• Challenge younger children to find letters of the alphabet on everyday items like street signs, cereal boxes, or newspapers. By asking “How many A’s can you find?” you also exercise counting skills.

• Have an older child practice math by using grocery coupons to calculate the final price of items on your list. Challenge the child to guess the weight of produce before reading the scale, and to compute the correct change at the checkout.

• Any daily reading—yes, even comic books—is good for your child’s brain. A librarian can help continued on page 3.

Using Emotional Intelligence to Boost “Customer” Satisfaction

“There’s an old saying in sales that people buy people, and it essentially means that no matter how much value you offer to your customers, what tends to make the sale is whether or not they like the person doing the selling.”

The same holds true for customer satisfaction, whether our customer is a user of our service, a co-worker or even a family member. Marketing and advertising may get customers in the door, but repeat business is almost wholly dependent on how your customers feel about the service you’ve provided. So if likability is the key to customer satisfaction, then how do you establish it? Researchers believe that the answer may lie in something called emotional intelligence.

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

Popularized by author Daniel Goleman, emotional intelligence is a modern extension of the concept of social intelligence, a field developed in the 1920s through observation of social interactions between animals. Although definitions shift as research advances, emotional intelligence basically describes the ability to recognize, describe, understand, manage, influence, and utilize emotion.

Confusing? If the term “people person” comes to mind, then you’re on the right track. Here are four factors that make up emotional intelligence:

Perceiving Emotions—the ability to detect emotions of others by reading their facial expressions, tone of voice, mannerisms, and body language.

If you’ve ever watched a poker player detect an opponent’s bluff simply by looking at him, then you’re seeing this trait in action.

Using Emotions—the ability to match tasks to one’s shifting emotions and capitalize on the advantages offered by each.

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People who are artistic tend to have this ability and are capable of utilizing strong emotion to inspire their creativity.

Understanding Emotions—the ability to comprehend emotional language and develop insight into how emotions are formed and how they motivate.

Good salespeople and politicians almost always carry this trait. Pay attention to the kind of advertising or political speech that spurs you to positive action. Chances are that it’s not logic, but an appeal to emotion that’s motivating you.

Managing Emotions—the ability to regulate and control emotions in ourselves and others.

Leaders of all types share this ability. People who are good at managing emotions tend to be self-starters who are able to rally others to their causes.

Using Your Emotional Intelligence With Customers

While it’s true that some people have a higher innate potential than others, anyone can improve his emotional intelligence to a point.

In order to maximize customer satisfaction, you need to tune in your customers’ shifting emotional needs and respond to them effectively. Here are some tips to get you started:

Focus on your customer’s emotions, not your own. The more you practice observing and analyzing customers’ changing emotions, the better you’ll become at it. Soon you’ll be able to actually anticipate and shift undesirable emotions into positive territory.

Validate your customer’s feelings by using empathetic language. Respond to dissatisfaction with affirming statements like, “I can certainly understand your concern about these compatibility issues.”

Use emotional language when addressing performance goals. Ask questions like, “How can I make sure that you’re happy with this project?”

Anticipate your customer’s concerns and address them proactively. This reassures your customer that you understand her and are looking out for her best interests.

Be aware of the signals you send through your body language. Some habits, like frowning while concentrating, can unintentionally communicate rudeness.

Tailor your service to individual customer needs. Some customers like to be involved with everything you’re doing. Others may want you to just get it done and report back when finished. The more you understand your customers’ idiosyncrasies, the more they’ll feel like you understand them.

These techniques can also be useful in dealing with co-workers. In fact, you can improve all your relationships—both professional and personal—by developing your emotional intelligence, so why not get started today?
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your child select books on any topic—baseball or butterflies, horses or hurricanes. The secret is for the child to choose the subject, so that it doesn’t feel like homework and he or she is truly reading for pleasure.

• Writing weekly letters to a pen pal or distant friend won’t feel like schoolwork, especially if the contents are strictly private! And older kids won’t care that crossword puzzles boost spelling and vocabulary, if you make it a game while traveling or cooking dinner.

• Have kids paint their names with water on a hot sidewalk, then watch the letters disappear! To sneak in some science, have kids guess how long it takes for wet footprints to evaporate, then time it. Challenge them to guess the melting time of ice cubes. Drop items in a pail of water to see if they sink or float. Have children record all guesses and results, and reward the players with frozen treats.

• For more sly science fun, find two similar, healthy plants. Have your child water one, but not the other, for a week or two, and observe daily. Make a leaf tattoo by gently clipping a small paper shape onto a large leaf. Remove the shape after a week. Discuss the results and have the child write it up to share the experiment with family members.

• Help your child make his or her own storybook. Make funny drawings, or glue photos of family members onto silly magazine pictures. A younger child can dictate the story; older children can write it themselves. Let creativity rule!

Once you banish the boredom of dumber summers, you’ll be sneaking in the most valuable lesson of all: Never take a vacation from learning!


SUMMER IS MOVING SEASON

There are so many things to do when you are moving. In addition to collecting newspaper to wrap grandmother’s china, you need to let everyone know your new address, gather boxes, get rid of items you don’t care enough about to pack and move - just to name a few. The Federal Information Center (FCIC) has lots of helpful tips to make your move easier.

FILING A CHANGE OF ADDRESS

• You can have your mail sent to your new home by filing a change of address with the U.S. Postal Service. You can do this online, or in person by picking up a change of address card at any post office.

• You should also file a change of address with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), using IRS Form 8822.

• Businesses that you have a relationship with, such as your credit card companies, also need to know that you have moved.

PACKING AND MOVING

• Make a list of packing supplies you will need. Visit the Postal Service’s Web site at http://www.usps.com for its list, which can help get you started.

• Planning to put some of your items in storage? When inspecting a storage facility you may want to use, adequate security is just one factor you need to consider.

• Consider having a yard sale to get rid of unwanted items and save money on storage. To make your sale more successful, clearly mark clothing sizes and provide shopping bags for your customers.

• There are some “packing principles” you should know in advance, such as don’t fill large boxes with books. If you are moving yourself, they can very quickly become too heavy to lift. Visit the Postal Service’s Web site at http://www.usps.com for more information about these principles. continued on page 4
TRAVEL TIPS: When You Want to Go on a Trip, Don’t Get Taken for a Ride

Whether you’re reserving a hotel room, buying plane tickets, or making other travel arrangements, these tips will help you get a deal that delivers what you are promised.

• Plan as far ahead as you can. Special deals on hotel rooms and airline seats often sell out very quickly.
• Be flexible in your travel plans. Hotels usually offer better rates on days when they expect fewer guests. Once you get a fare quote from an airline, ask if you could save money by leaving a day earlier or later, taking a different flight on the same day, or using a different airport. Changing planes during your trip is sometimes cheaper than a nonstop flight.
• Check out the seller. Ask tour operators and travel agents whether they belong to a professional association, then check to see if they are members in good standing. Contact your state or local consumer protection agency and the Better Business Bureau to find their complaint history.
• Comparison shop. Determine the complete cost of the trip in dollars, including all service charges, taxes, processing fees, and any other possible costs.
• Beware of unusually cheap prices and freebies. It could be a scam, and you could end up paying more than the cost of a regular package tour.
• Make sure you understand the terms of the deal. If you’re told that you’ve won a free vacation, ask if you have to buy something else in order to get it. If the destination is a beach resort, ask the seller how far the hotel is from the beach. Then ask the hotel.
• Ask about cancellation policies. You may want to look into trip insurance for added protection. The Travel Insurance Comparison Site® (http://www.insuremytrip.com/) offers pricing and policy information on plans from different companies and describes the different forms of policies available.
• Insist on written confirmations. Ask for written proof of reservations and dates.
• Pay by credit card. It’s not unusual to make a deposit or even pay in full for travel services before the trip. A credit card gives you the right to dispute charges for services that were misrepresented or never delivered. If a travel agent or service provider tells you that you can’t leave for at least two months, be very cautious—the deadline for disputing a credit card charge is 60 days, and most scam artists know this.

In some states, travel sellers have to be registered and insured. Advance payments for travel must be placed in an escrow account until the services are provided. Prizes or “free gifts” may also be regulated. Contact your state or local consumer protection agency to find out about your rights and how to file complaints. The American Society of Travel Agents will also help resolve disputes with member agents.
