



YOU SAY WHAT? | DON'T LET A MASK CHANGE THE EXPERIENCE



COVID-19 has presented many challenges for centers from new procedures to sanitizing to complying with social distancing. Did you realize that face masks also present a challenge? The world doesn't seem as friendly when it is filled with people wearing masks. When the nose, mouth and chin disappear behind a mask, many clues vanish to infer intentions.

Research shows the majority of the way people communicate is through non-verbal signals that include facial expressions, vocal intonations, gestures and other cues. Therefore, when we have a large part of our face covered, we should amplify these other modes of expression. Think about showing excitement through your tone of voice or speech patterns. Amplify these signals to show more emotions in their interactions with customers. Customers can "hear" when someone smiles

because it changes the shape of the mouth causing the voice to become more cheerful and brighter. In fact, your mask will actually move upwards when smiling and downward when frowning.

Speak up! Don't create a frustrating situation for customers by not speaking loud enough for them to understand what you are saying, especially through masks, plastic dividers and social distancing.

Smile, even though the mouth is covered. A lot of information is given in the eyes and eyebrows. A "true" smile, as opposed to a "fake" smile shows in the "crow's feet" or laugh lines area of the face, with the eyes narrowing and crinkling. A genuine smile also engages the orbicularis oculi muscle around the eye. We've all heard Bing Crosby's "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" make sure your staff exhibits this trait.

The eyes are the window to the soul. Establish eye contact with each guest as a way of letting them know they have your attention and you are speaking to them. Eyebrows can also be used to show emotion which can range from enthusiasm and surprise to displeasure and cynicism.

Hand gestures and posture can also help communicate with others while wearing a face mask. Slouching over the customer desk can tell customers you're tired or would rather be elsewhere, while fast hand movements can show that you're excited.

Make sure your staff is engaged and enthusiastic. Don't let employees use face masks as an excuse to not smile and be friendly. Perhaps hanging a mirror on the wall of the break room would be a good way to bring awareness to the non-verbal signals employees are exhibiting that they probably do not even realize. Get employees into the habit of glancing

at themselves in the mirror before they start their shift. Have a poster near the mirror reminding employees that a smile is visible, even behind the mask.

Let's remain courteous and friendly, in spite of face masks and social distancing.

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