

Better than a Mission Statement



The Little Dogs Strategic Vision

Almost every business has a mission statement. Unfortunately, once those mission statements are created and shared, they are almost always forgotten, and have little if anything to do with everyone's day-to-day work.

Thankfully, this isn't a "mission statement." It's a strategic vision - meaning it can actually be followed into the future. The main difference is that we can all relate to a Strategic Vision and act on it with our daily work. It's designed to let us all know how each of us fits into the Little Dogs story in a meaningful way. It will be used on a regular basis - by everyone - as a guide for:

1. for who we serve best
2. how we serve them best
3. and why it is truly worthwhile to work here.

Probably the most important part of this Strategic Vision is that all of us must clearly understand not just our work, but exactly how that work impacts our customer's lives. We need to know how our actions will improve the happiness and quality of life of our customers (both human and K9). Not only do we need to know it, we need to clearly communicate it with our actions.

I'm excited about this vision and I hope you will be too. Thanks for taking the time to read it, and I hope you find your place in it.

Who We Should Serve Best

The type of customer that we should serve best is just like Jeanie. She lives about 10 miles from our facility and dearly loves her dogs BeeBee and Gonzo. In fact, she loves them so much that she considers them part of her family! And because Jeanie is a conscientious owner, she is willing to be picky regarding who helps her take care of them. She doesn't know it yet but she is hoping to find care as good or better than home. Our best clients, like Jeanie, are willing to be educated, and really want two main things from us: 1) Peace of Mind and 2) Outstanding Service.

Peace of Mind

When we say "peace of mind" that means something very specific. Peace of mind means the ability to relax - to really relax. Our clients want to know that their babies are in the best hands, getting the best treatment, having a blast and truly being loved. They want to know that as a dog parent they are doing the best they can for their baby dog. It means knowing they can trust us.

In building that trust, we really get to know our customers and their pets. We know what they do, what they like and especially what they worry about. We congratulate them on personal and professional victories, and we care about their setbacks. We make sure they know that no matter the reason for the stay, their babies in the best hands when they can't be with them.

In getting to know customers like Jeanie on this level, we can better anticipate their needs and be ready to serve those needs...even before they ask. We make sure they know all about what we can do for them so their expectations are realistic. We even recommend care and services for her dogs that Jeanie might not be aware of. This keeps her pets in peak health and happiness.

The other aspect of peace of mind is that we listen - carefully. And we answer questions with professionalism and courtesy. We take our customers concerns to heart, and want to let them know that we are interested in understanding and solving those concerns more than looking good. If something can be made better, we're on it! Little Dogs is always growing and learning.

Outstanding service can sound like a marketing term but at Little Dogs we mean it. The Jeanie's of the world have a certain expectation - thoughts about how things should go, and the results they really want to see. And it's our job to deliver consistently and professionally.

How We Serve Them Best

Now let's talk service. This means that our customer's dog is happy. They think to themselves, "My babies are having as good a time or better than when they are with me" while they are at Little Dogs. Our goal is to have everything our customers need. But it doesn't end there. Having several local pet care options available is good, but it only becomes excellent when the way those services are provided and priced, exceeds expectations.

In doing that, we must have excellent service, products, and professionals that are truly able to communicate this to every client. But we also have to have a culture that inspires our staff to think ahead, and to consider what might be important to any particular client. Perhaps it's just a reassuring phone call or an unexpected story at checkout...whatever it is, it's found by paying attention to our customers' needs and acting in meaningful ways.

Jeanie's Vacation

It wasn't too long ago that Jeanie and several of her friends decided to go on a vacation to the Caribbean. Jeanie had been there as a college student and always wanted to go back. But the busyness of life had always gotten in the way. Now, she decided it was finally time.

As she was happily planning her dream vacation, 10 days in the Caribbean, choosing the right hotels, organizing the activities, deciding which restaurants, she was suddenly struck with an overwhelming feeling of guilt, panic and helplessness.

Why? She was supposed to be excited and happy - but suddenly that all seemed to disappear. It was the thought of BeeBee and Gonzo. Would they have as good a time as Jeanie? Would they be happy and well cared for? What kind of owner would she be if she left this to chance?

At this point Jeanie had not heard of Little Dogs and in the past, just tried to make do with what she could find in the way of dog care. She was not very happy. And with this trip in the planning stages, she promised herself that this time would be different - very different.

How She Found Us

After speaking with friends and her vet, Jeanie found us through our state of the art customer care system. We pride ourselves with being in communication with our customers. And it turns out that a twice per month communication is just what our customers want. Our automated system helps keep them up on events and specials, in addition to the facts of their dog's most recent visits and other account information they want to know.

In our system, we will occasionally send out a request for referrals where we offer a great discount on the services our customers most use and value. In fact, we send them an

email perfectly designed so that they can just forward it to a few friends while they are thinking about it. We found that if a referral system is not easy and convenient, it will likely not work. And since referrals are the #1 way we grow, we had to get this right.

Our customers' friends get a great looking email, and if the friend uses the offer, then the referring customer gets a discount as well. Customers with the most referrals get special end of year rewards and accolades. We call it the "Pack Leader Contest" where our top 10 referring clients of the year get priority booking and discounts off services. Yes, they love it!

That's how we first met Jeanie. Her neighbor had been a long-time customer of ours and upon getting the email, she forwarded it to Jeanie.

That email took Jeanie to a special, private web page that told the story, our story, a short version of this strategic vision, of how we do what we do. As Jeanie read the page and saw the heartwarming images, she thought to herself, "This is exactly what I need for BeeBee and Gonzo - cageless boarding...now how do I get started?"

The page, anticipating her desire, ended with a specific call to action and a complimentary article of interest to Jeanie regarding safe cageless dog play.

She was so excited about the expertise and professionalism that she used the page to register for a free tour. And shortly thereafter she got a call from us to confirm and to gather a few more details - making sure she knew what the visit would be like and how to find us easily.

Lifelong Relationships

As you can see, we want to start all of our client relationships on the right foot, so that long term trust can be established. Our best clients become a part of our family, and we become a part of theirs. We're not just another stop on the to-do list. We care and we know them and their baby dogs, and they value us for that. We want them to continue being customers through generations of family dogs - customers for life is our goal. Because Jeanie's travel plans were coming up soon, she needed to take the tour soon. On the day of her unscheduled tour, she pulled up in the parking lot, and we were ready.

The Tour

Jeanie arrived anxiously, but soon was put at ease by the view of the baby dogs playing all around her. As she arrived in our front entrance, we were there and ready to go. Jeanie was greeted like family by a staff member. She was welcomed with a smile and offered some literature while she waited for the tour to begin. She even thought to herself about how great the place smelled due to our Sentsy that creates a uniquely clean, fresh smell that doesn't smell like animals. In fact, she said, "Oh wow! It smells so clean in here!"

The manager was welcoming and spent a few minutes getting to know Jeanie and hearing about BeeBee and Gonzo. The tour began with a quick stop in the front room, so Jeanie could hear the history of Little Dogs and why we do what we do. Our boarding areas looked great and smelled clean, our yards were clean, our dogs were comfortable, monitored

and having fun. Every aspect of the tour showed our attention to detail. Jeanie could tell by the condition of the building and the play areas that her dogs would be safe and secure.

After visiting each area of the facility, Jeanie was very impressed with the cleanliness and professionalism we showed. And she was thinking in the back of her mind, “This is THE place!” As a courtesy, we informed Jeanie about a complimentary trial night. She agreed and set the date and left happy and excited.

The day before BeeBee and Gonzo’s trial stay, Jeanie automatically received an email that gave her a breakdown of what to expect, service explanations, costs, and policy reminders. These are written in plain language so that everyone can easily understand them. Jeanie really liked this upfront, clear information about costs and services. And the bond of trust took another step forward.

BeeBee and Gonzo’s First Stay

A Little Dogs associate happily greeted Jeanie and the babies. Well, since BeeBee and Gonzo had several belongings still in the car, a tech volunteered to go outside and carry their luggage in. Jeanie was glad for the help. Much to Jeanie’s relief, we helped to safely get both dogs inside where they were greeted by our staff where we do a quick assessment of each dogs’ demeanor. Based on our experience we recognize what will best help BeeBee and Gonzo feel at home. Jeanie got to check in peaceably and felt a weight lift off her shoulders. “Wow” she thought, “this is great!” Our staff also explained to Jeanie what we were doing and how it puts her dogs at ease. Our understanding of the signals BeeBee and Gonzo giving was amazing to Jeanie.

She and the manager went over again what the stay would entail and confirmed any grooming wishes or special requests Jeanie had. She left for work excited about what the tomorrow would bring.

Back at the office, she was so curious, and called to check in just to make sure they were okay. Our staff checked on the pups and came back to the phone with a quick report that all was well and that we looked forward to seeing her tomorrow. In fact, just about 3hrs later, she got an email with a photo of her dogs happily playing! “Unbelievable!” she thought to herself.

When Jeanie came back to pick up the dogs the next day, she was greeted by our staff, and asked was told all about how BeeBee and Gonzo did. She already felt like she was getting to know Little Dogs, and so far, she really liked everyone she had encountered.

At this point our manager presented Jeanie with her personalized welcome binder (which includes the pricing, policies, services, and other useful information). These binders look great with our logo and colors and have easy to use tabs so that the clients can easily find what they need. This binder also has a list of questions that get Jeanie thinking about BeeBee and Gonzo’s diet, behavior and overall care the Little Dogs Way.

Our staff gave her a warm greeting and a total rundown of BeeBee and Gonzo's stay. Jeanie and the manager opened to the first page of the welcome binder where a list of recommendations were provided based on the information gathered from Jeanie's online responses, as well as a report card for Jeanie to take home. We noticed during the stay that BeeBee had a favorite toy. We asked her to be sure to pack it for the big vacation. She gratefully promised she would. She was asked if a particular package or service worked best for her. She enthusiastically said, "Yes" and the arrangements were made for BeeBee and Gonzo to spend their vacation with us!

Two days later, Jeanie received a thank you note in the mail, thanking her for being a new client of Little Dogs and for the opportunity to get to know BeeBee and Gonzo. It even mentioned how sweet both dogs were, and that we noticed how Gonzo likes his belly rubs. She couldn't believe how thoughtful we were, and how genuinely we seemed to care for her pups.

Jeanie's Time to Travel

Well, the big day finally came and Jeanie dropped off the kids, said a heartfelt goodbye and was reassured by our staff that the dogs would be fine, happy, and well taken care of. With a few tears and some smiles, Jeanie drove off towards the airport.

On her way, Jeanie got really excited about her adventure ahead. She was also thinking how amazing BeeBee and Gonzo's vacation was going to be too! She took a deep breath and let out a sigh of relief. Now to the Caribbean in peace! When she arrived, she had already received an email from us with happy pictures of her babies getting snuggles from the staff and making new dog friends!

During BeeBee and Gonzo's stay we weighed them every two days to monitor proper health. We hand fed them if they felt scared or alone. We made sure they had all their own individual belongings and toys from home to feel comfortable. We also worked hard to find each dog's personality traits - to learn what they love.

We have a system to be certain their feeding and medication requirements are met. And we have a great documentation system about dog behavior and habits so everyone on staff knows. Our playgroups are closely monitored so there's no intimidation or anxiety.

Our Services

Just like Jeanie's experience on vacation, all our clients get the same quality care and services too! Our clients can log on to our website to check on their pups. A simple phone call gives them a quick but thorough report as well. Depending on if it's winter or summer we have special seasonal treats, treatments, and services that make it a wonderful experience for everyone.

One of our services that many don't expect but truly value is the great education we give our clients. We help them understand the healthy food choices which we can offer, good nutrition, the best toys, and treats. We help them become better dog parents and help them feel great about how well they can take care of their kids.

In fact, after Jeanie returned from the Caribbean to pick up her happy, healthy, tired dogs, she was hooked. Gonzo even sat for her to put his leash on! BeeBee couldn't stop wagging her tail, and was insistent on saying goodbye to every staffer on her way out. Jeanie is now part of the Little Dogs family, and we are part of hers. As a regular, she now takes advantage of many of our services each week.

The Benefits Keep Coming

In line with our desire to provide the “above and beyond” experience for Jeanie, a few days after her first training appointment, we followed up with a call. In this call, we want to hear first-hand how her experience is going and if there's anything we can do better.

This call data is recorded in our customer system so that we can follow up as needed. We also let her know to look for our member's email and what it will contain (offers, discounts, and education). And she gladly posts a glowing review of our services online.

A few months into this new relationship, she is informed about our other services and incentivized to try it out. With our combination discount (a discount for multiple services) she decides to try it out. Of course, she loves it!

We want to make sure every need is handled and anticipated with excellence and professionalism in a systematic way that builds a long-term relationship.

Our Team

To serve our best clients in this way, our team has to be the best. Our staff is upbeat and happy, professionally dressed, and knows what's expected of them. We are all doing continuing education to keep our skill set fresh and up to date and consistently supporting and encouraging each other to improve.

We all use the proper terminology for our services and are well versed in communicating them to prospect and current clients alike. In fact, every job function is documented and fully systemized. There's a special “way” we do everything. And we reward our staff for the great work they do. We all take ownership of our responsibilities and feel great about knowing that our efforts are rewarded.

Why We Do It

We enjoy seeing pet parents feel good about taking care of their 4-legged family members. The services we provide for them goes far beyond just taking care of the dogs. It involves developing a meaningful, purpose filled relationship with each and every one of them, a relationship that will grow and prosper through many generations of dogs in their family. It's so great to be able to educate pet parents and share the knowledge we have, in order for them to make the best decisions for their dog(s) on a daily basis. We truly want their dog(s) to be healthier and live longer happier lives.

Nothing makes us happier than to hear a pet owner say; “When my dog knows he’s going to Little Dogs he/she gets so excited!!” That to us is true success!!

A Short History

When Jennifer, our founder, was young, her parents travelled a lot for work and they had to put the family dog Katie in a cage...it was heartbreaking! Jennifer thought, “How can I have fun while Katie is in a box??” Often when they arrived home Katie was dirty and smelly and frankly traumatized - Yes the trip was fun for Jennifer, but it was no fun for Katie.

Fast forward a few decades and Jennifer found herself hating her work as a financial advisor. So, one day she said to her mother, “Let’s do something together and fun. Let’s go into business for ourselves.” Everyone thought we were crazy! It was 1998 and no one ever heard of doggie daycare!

We Are Their Advocates

We believe our customers’ dogs are family members. We view them as deserving of respect and loving care.

At Little Dogs our goal is to improve the lives of dogs and their owners in all situations. Dogs are full of unconditional love. And it’s our duty to give some of that back.

When you see in a customer’s eyes the look they get when they really understand that we care about their dogs just the way they do - when they really know that it’s true - well that’s a feeling that’s hard to describe. It’s fulfilling, it’s heartwarming. It’s the combination of immense trust and honorable service that makes us so proud of what we do. And it drives us to constantly be looking for ways to improve.

And that’s why we do it. This is our story and this is Little Dogs!