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Transforming Children’s Lives by Cracking the Code on Math Instruction



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“We look for people who are excited by the possibility of making a great change in their own lives by making a great change in the lives of children.”- Peter Markovitz

CEOCFO: *Mr. Markovitz, what is the concept behind Mathnasium Learning Centers?*

Mr. Markovitz: Mathnasium teaches children math after school in neighborhood learning centers across the globe. We specialize in math — it’s the only subject we teach. Some children attend Mathnasium to catch up. Others to accelerate their learning. Our mission is to teach children so they understand it, master it, and love it.

CEOCFO: *Are many people today taking advantage of Mathnasium or a similar service, rather than an individual tutor or perhaps something the school might offer?*

Mr. Markovitz: The market for tutoring is exploding, in the U.S., and even more so internationally. Parents everywhere are concerned that their children may not be able to compete academically and achieve the grades necessary to get into good universities.

The area of after-school tutoring instruction consists of neighborhood tutors as well as institutional solutions like ours. A majority of the business landscape is driven still by mom and pop operators — neighborhood tutors — whether they teach in their own homes, a child’s home or at the child’s school. All segments of the tutoring industry are experiencing growth, but only Mathnasium offers a personalized approach married with a proprietary method of learning math, with the added benefit of being fun! We believe our proven learning solution will

continue to draw more and more parents from traditional mom and pop tutoring environments.

CEO CFO: *What is the Mathnasium Method™?*

Mr. Markovitz: The Mathnasium Method™ focuses on helping children understand math, as opposed to the legacy approach of “drill and practice.” I think we’ve all been down that frustrating road of learning rules without really understanding them, and then mindlessly practicing equations over and over to get the right answers without knowing why!

Mathnasium’s approach allows the latent learning possibilities of a child to come alive when they interact with their tutor. Our process includes finding an instructor with the right personality and sensibilities, then training that instructor to deliver the best quality instruction. We want to provide the best explanations — answers — to the child’s questions. We want to provide children with emotional support.

When they begin at Mathnasium centers, new students go through a comprehensive assessment so we can identify each child’s knowledge gaps and needs — and also their strengths. Based on that assessment, we create their individual lesson plan. We want each child to work from appropriate materials that suit their specific needs — a sophisticated lesson plan that builds on a growing foundation.

CEO CFO: *It is a very personalized approach!*

Mr. Markovitz: Yes, exactly. It is a very personalized approach, but what truly differentiates us is the degree to which we focus resources on executing instruction.

True personalization doesn’t only mean working face-to-face with a student. The Mathnasium approach is individualized and multi-faceted, designed to accommodate each child’s unique needs. For example, a neighborhood tutor usually uses a school textbook. This assumes that a child has no knowledge gaps — or particular strengths. By contrast, Mathnasium has spent millions of dollars developing an approach that enables us to create a customized “textbook” for each child.

Another tremendous advantage we offer students is our exclusive focus on math. Other after-school centers that offer multiple subjects — some as many as 10 subjects at varying levels — become a master of none. At Mathnasium, we are able to realize the full potential of the tutor/child relationship, and we do so with greater efficiencies. The result is higher quality, at the same or a lower price, than most local tutors.

So, you see, all the components of Mathnasium’s instruction are at a much higher level: We have better instructors, better assessments, better materials, and our centers offer a better environment where children can focus on learning and enjoy the process.

CEO CFO: *You offer franchises. Is that worldwide?*

Mr. Markovitz: Yes, we understand that the struggle children have with math is a universal condition, and children wanting to accelerate their performance in math is a universal aspiration.

We have more than 1,000 locations in the United States, but room for many more. In addition, we operate in 12 additional countries. You'll find us in diverse markets, from Canada, Myanmar, Hong Kong and Egypt, to the United Arab Emirates, Australia and Vietnam. We are entering new markets all the time — and looking for master franchise partners in countries across the globe.

CEO CFO: *How do you vet an instructor to know they understand not just the math part of it, but the people part of it as well?*

Mr. Markovitz: We look for people who are excited by the possibility of making a great change in their own lives by making a great change in the lives of children; people who are exhilarated by the thought of waking up in the morning to help children. They want to relieve the anguish of children who feel humiliated, embarrassed or stupid because they struggle with math. They strive to help those children become excellent in math, improve their confidence, and potentially widen the landscape of opportunities available to them as they grow older.

We provide extensive training, but we want people who can provide the emotional support I spoke of earlier. Children need attention and encouragement. They need someone to celebrate their successes with them. Above all, they need someone who believes in them and cares about them.

CEO CFO: *Why is math so hard, or is it really that it is just not taught well?*

Mr. Markovitz: That is exactly the right question! The reason math is hard to learn is, as you suspect, because it is not taught properly. With the right instruction, 29 of out 30 children can become excellent in math.

It is a widely held belief that math is hard because children need to be wired for it. Talent matters enormously for many endeavors, like music or art or even sports, where physiology can provide an advantage. When it comes to math, however, success depends on the quality of instruction. The belief that math depends on talent is a tremendous myth. The myth is universally held and patently false.

CEO CFO: *Why is the myth so strongly believed?*

Mr. Markovitz: Those who love and care about children the most — parents and schoolteachers — often have a narrative that reinforces this myth. A mother may say to her son, "You know, you are not good at math because you are like Daddy." A teacher might say, "She is good at languages; she is not good at math. Math is not her thing."

The myth has greatly benefited our organization. In building a company, one wants to meet or exceed customer expectations. In our case, customer expectations are very, very low. They suspect that it can't be done — their child can't learn math because their child lacks the talent. Parents are later shocked and amazed, and often emotional, when they see their child make great strides in confidence and capability.

CEO CFO: *What has changed in your approach over time as you open more and more centers and work with more and more children? What have you learned as an organization?*

Mr. Markovitz: We have been able to realize greater efficiencies as we've grown. If you have only one learning center, there are limited resources to deploy for curriculum, a marketing campaign, or a technology system to help manage a center. When you operate more than 1,000 centers, as Mathnasium now does, there is tremendous economy of scale. We've become more efficient and we have the resources to invest in continuous improvement — a better, more effective experience for our students.

CEO CFO: *Why pay attention to Mathnasium Learning Centers, both from a business perspective, from a franchisee perspective and from a parent's perspective? Why is Mathnasium important?*

Mr. Markovitz: Mathnasium has revolutionized the tutoring business. To really understand how, let's look at world history for a moment. There are very few areas that remain in the world economy — in consumer spending — that have been untouched by the industrial revolution. Uber is an example of a new solution to another very old business — the taxi business — that had remained largely unchanged for a thousand years. Tutoring, too, is an old business, and it is very big business. You can look at classic novels that are set in Germany hundreds of years ago, and you will find a child being tutored. Aristotle tutored the young Alexander, who became Alexander the Great.

Tutoring is a massive, fragmented market still in the hands of local tutors. Until Mathnasium, no business solution has provided a better value equation. By teaching a single subject — by focusing resources — we have achieved efficiencies that result in outstanding instruction for a very reasonable price. And we can do this with a business vehicle that provides an exceptional revenue opportunity for our franchisees.

CEO CFO: *Other companies haven't provided an alternative that consumers prefer markedly to local tutors?*

Mr. Markovitz: Mathnasium offers the first model that can take market share from local tutors. It explains how we grew from one center in 2002 to more than 1,000.

This is a revolution in education. But I think the real revolution is that we are destroying the myth that excellent mathematicians are born and not made. This is what parents care about. As for their children, parents are discovering that they *are* wired for at least one thing: solving problems. Who doesn't like solving a puzzle, a riddle, or a crossword ... or a math problem you never dreamed possible? It is exhilarating — *and it is fun.*