

Let me share with you a startling statistic:

Research has shown that 99.87% of people have NO idea what the Development Office actually does.

VIDEO

Core Message

Now, WE all know that regardless of whether we are managing the school's enrolments, marketing, communications, alumni, events, publications, fundraising, archives etc etc ... we are engaging with the school's community on every level ... all day, every day.

Background

I have been fortunate to have worked in all these areas of Development for almost 15 years now, and like many of you here today, I have seen the relevance and importance of what we do increase significantly during this time.

Overview

Today, I have been invited to address the five senses of community engagement:

NEW SLIDE

I had to have a good think at first ... how DO our five senses - sight, hearing, smell, speech and touch - relate to community engagement? Some are obvious, others not so much:

- **Sight:** Have you ever met someone for the first time who hardly looked you in the eye, said the standard nice to meet you greeting without any authenticity behind their words and then couldn't remember your name five seconds later? What impression did this person leave with you? It's understandable though - when we meet someone, we have a lot to take in ... from their appearance, to the conversation, to other distractions happening around us.

In Dale Carnegie's timeless book 'How to Win Friends and Influence People' he wrote, "If you want to win friends, make it a point to remember them." And I agree - those with the stellar skills in recognising people always appear thoughtful and intelligent.

Also from the sense of sight, our written material and publications are perfect for our visual enthusiasts. Most schools understand the power of sharing information about their educational offerings. By extending that writing beyond your immediate community, your written wisdom will not only go to those who already know you, but to those who don't know you yet ... such as prospective families.

- **Sound:** Sound is another powerful sensory experience. We need to be fine tuned to 'listen' to what our community is saying and seek their feedback. Listening helps us to stay informed and allows us to HEAR different points of view on a variety of topics. If there is one communication skill we should all aim to master then listening is it ... and I'll talk more on this a little later.
- **Smell:** Now this may sound like a strange sense to inject into our community engagement strategy, but smell communicates powerful messages to our noses. Without even realising it ... we engage with our sense of smell when we provide hospitality ... as one of SHC's values, 'hospitality' is very important, and the smell of coffee brewing certainly goes a long way to creating an inviting atmosphere.
- **Taste:** From a vocal perspective, we have the capacity to use our voice to promote the school and endorse its educational offerings, but how do we leave a pleasurable taste in the mouth of our community ... literally or figuratively? But maybe taste doesn't always have to do with food ... maybe taste has to do with the experience itself.

What overall experience are you leaving your community to remember?

- **Touch:** Networking is one of the most cost effective ways to grow a business. As a school, when we actively engage in live conversations with our community, we get to shake hands with contacts and feel the energy that they bring to the school. A hand shake and a friendly conversation with the principal can do more for our school than any blog post.

If you want to stand out as accessible, plan to attend as many events as possible and set up networking opportunities so you can connect with your parents and alumni on a personal level.

So the big question is ...

NEXT SLIDE

How does connecting with all five senses of your school community:

- Make your educational offerings more appealing
- Increase enrolments
- Improve parent relationships
- Deepen alumni bonds, and
- Strengthen fundraising efforts?

In schools, we need to make sure that we are tapping into as many of the five senses as possible so that we can really connect with our community. The more pleasurable the experience is for our audience, the better.

I also believe that for each of these senses to be working to their full potential, they need to align with the five pillars of community engagement:

1. Inform
2. Consult
3. Involve
4. Collaborate
5. Empower

Today, I will look at these five pillars in relation to how we can provide the partnership or relationship our families, alumni and supporters are seeking.

Firstly, it is important to acknowledge that not all stakeholders will need to be engaged at the same level, so you will need to identify their needs to determine the level of engagement that might be required and at which stage they are seeking this.

1. Inform

In considering the first pillar, it is important that we provide a balance of information to increase understanding, and improve the relationship and level of trust between the community and the school by ensuring people are informed about school activities.

So how can we inform more people, more effectively, for less money?

Through online communication ...

In 1998, home-based internet access was only 18%, by 2008 it was 84%, now in 2016 the rate remains steady at 89%.

Today's parents are always connected and they expect the same of us. They're looking for real-time, personalised communications about their child through:

- Email
- eNews
- Parent Portal
- Blogs

They also want to know that their child's school can reach them with critical information when it counts.

- SMS

On the other hand, face-to-face community engagement can be resource expensive and whilst online engagement is far from free if you want to do it well, it is far more scalable than traditional methods. This doesn't mean you should stop doing face-to-face engagement but it does mean you should use a mixed methodology to get the best results, be that:

- Website
- Social media
- Prospectus
- Publications

2. Consult

When we actively consult and engage with our communities, we raise awareness and increase participation in decision making processes. We also tap into community views, and one of the best tools is social listening:

- Annual Giving

So how do we move from social listening or consulting to INVOLVING?

3. Involve

Theory and practice suggests that large groups of ordinary people are better at problem solving and making decisions than small groups of experts.

When we work with parents and alumni genuine opportunities are created for the community to participate in issues of significance.

Again, a very powerful tool here is online community engagement as it allows you to involve and enable more people, with divergent views, to speak up. Researching customer needs and satisfaction through online surveys is a powerful medium and we now have the ability to draw on data-driven insights about which programs actually lead to better results.

- Open Day survey

The survey provided great DATA and informed our new prospectus ...

- What information are prospective parents seeking?
- Why are they considering our school?
- Who are our competitors?
- How did they hear about our Open Day?

**** STAY TRUE TO YOUR SCHOOL**

4. Collaborate

Wise leaders know that collaborative practices like participatory planning and decision-making are not only respectful but they provide an opportunity to create communities that thrive.

This pillar acknowledges the importance of including your community in both defining problems and searching for solutions. When we reach out to school stakeholders, we are prepared to ask the hard questions and work collaboratively and cooperatively to co-discover community informed solutions.

- Focus groups: strategic planning

Importantly, the members of these community groups were allowed to make decisions independently before we aggregated their individual thoughts into collective decisions.

Collaborative leaders understand that leading from behind is not giving up control ... rather, it's about empowering those around you.

5. Empower

To the final pillar ... Empowerment is a core principle of community development. It strengthens the school's connectedness by creating opportunities for the community to get involved with, and have their say on matters that are important to them.

Wise decision-making is the result of good quality data (like the Open Day data) and better quality dialogue (like the strategic planning workshops).

Participation and empowerment are mutually reinforcing. When our families and alumni participate, they learn new skills, gain confidence and develop their own voice. And when they feel empowered, they are more likely to participate and become the best possible ambassadors for your school.

Summary

NEW SLIDE

So, in closing ... community engagement can take many forms and covers a broad range of activities.

Today I've touched on the the five senses and how they can align with the five pillars of community engagement.

What is important to remember, is that you have a range of levels for engagement, from **INFORM** through to **EMPOWER**, and a toolkit at your disposal ... you just have to determine which level and what tool/s are appropriate for the task you are undertaking ... and apply one or all of the five senses to enhance the power of community engagement.

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