

Don't recruit. Meet and connect

Meeting parents without being a salesperson

"I don't recruit."

Karen Kanas, Director of Community Outreach
Lodi Academy
(20 more students this year, 92% retention)

"I try to make a personal connection with a family first."

Matthew Jakobsons, Principal
Sacramento Adventist Academy
(25 more students this year, 94% retention)

I've been trying to talk with schools whose enrollment is up this year. That's 20 schools this year, praise the Lord! (As compared to nine schools with increased enrollment last year.)

Today's recommendations come from Karen and Matt sharing what has worked for them when they meet with interested parents. In separate conversations, they each outlined essentially the same key points in how they work with interested parents.

1. Connect with parents

Getting to know a family helps Matt and Karen create an environment where they are seen as helpers, not salespeople.

My note: Notice that this is very similar to the "situation" questions recommended in the SPIN approach I outlined in "Handle leads effectively, part 7."

2. Learn their issues

Matt talks about this in two phases: learning what they are interested in and finding out what concerns they have from prior experience. Karen sometimes asks, "Why haven't you considered us in the past?"

My note: This one step is essentially the same as the "problem" and "implication" questions in SPIN.

3. Provide accurate information

Both Karen and Matt work to ensure parents understand which of their concerns the school can and can't address. If this can be done while emphasizing the school's strengths and mission, that is even better.

Example from Lodi—Karen talks about Lodi's focus on educating the whole child. When parents' interest is sports she says: If you want your child to go into professional sports we probably aren't the school for you. We have sports but our program is designed to give kids exercise, teach teamwork, be fun, and be part of a well-balanced life with academics, music, etc.

Example from Sacramento—Matt highlights Sacramento's focus on community. He talks about how the school and area churches work together to provide activities and programs for families and the whole community.

My note: In SPIN this is called the "need."

4. Take notes

Matt and Karen emphasize the importance of taking notes so they remember the details of their conversation and can show a personal interest when it is time for the next step...

5. Follow up

This is a huge point for both Karen and Matt. **You have to follow up.** Matt re-engages a week later. Karen says that none of their new enrollments came from a one-time contact—all were multiple, long-term interactions. Both, in essence, ask parents if there is any additional information they can provide so the parents can make a good (i.e. fully informed) decision. And they keep following up until a decision is made—and even after (but that is a topic for another day).

Please notice that these ideas fit perfectly with offering an Education Success Consult. You can call it that or call it something else, as long as you focus on listening to parents' needs and concerns, then openly sharing how your school can or can not meet those needs.

Delegating:

Unless you have a full-time person doing community outreach, marketing or recruiting, you should **not** delegate meeting with potential parents.

Credits:

Matthew Jakobsons, Principal, Sacramento Adventist Academy

Karen Kanas, Director of Community Outreach, Lodi Academy

Tim Kubrock, Principal, Lodi Academy

Many thanks to each of you for sharing what is working at your schools and creative ideas.

Binder tab: Put this in front of the January tab and behind "Handle leads effectively, part 7: Talking to potential parents in an Education Success Consult" (since this expands on that topic).

School size: All

Marketing process step:

- 1) Who are we?
- 2) What do families want?
- 3) What needs to change?
- 4) How do we tell our community?
- 5) How do we track results?