

Reward referrals, not recruiting

Thanking people for referring friends

“One of the dumbest and most expensive referral ideas... was that the dear people who made successful referrals should receive big cash payments, such as a month or two of free tuition.”

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Marketing Christian Schools

In December I talked about not providing financial incentives to parents for successfully recruiting new families to your school.

Here are ideas for what is more constructive to do. These ideas are based on the premise that current families, constituents, alumni, alumni parents and many others can become effective referrers to your school. But the school, not referral sources, is responsible for helping potential families decide if the school is a good match for their family.

Thank every referrer for each referral immediately

A personal thank you from you should go out the same day that you hear about the referral. It should:

- Be hand-written from you
- Be sent via snail mail -- How happy are you to get something other than bills and junk mail in your mailbox?
- Be mailed the same day you learn of the referral
- Be encouraging of more referrals For example: " Thank you so much for referring [use actual name here] to us. Our school thrives when wonderful people like you let others know about us. We look forward to meeting more people that you send our way. In case it's helpful to you, I've included one of my business cards for sharing. Let me know if there is anything else we can do to help you in spreading the good word about our school.)
- Include one (or more) of your business cards

It is wonderful to also call the referrer or thank them in person. But this needs to be in addition to, not instead of, the handwritten thank you note.

Include a small thank you item in the card

My best idea for this is a gift card or certificate for a locally owned and operated business. For example: certificate for a loaf of bread from a local bakery, or gift card for a local deli/sandwich shop, etc.

There are several benefits of working with local businesses.

- Going in to purchase gift cards/certificates gives you a chance to meet the owner and start creating connections in your community.
- By handing out gift cards/certificates you are offering the business an opportunity to increase their visibility in the community.
- New or additional traffic to their business gives them a chance to make more sales. If your certificate is for a small item, for example a loaf of bread, there's a good chance other items will be purchased as well.
- If you've established a relationship with them, they may be willing to donate all or part of future thank you items.

Thank frequent referrers more generously

Because you are using a system to track all inquiries to your school which also includes asking who referred them (ahem, ahem), you will know who is referring and how frequently.

Find a way to occasionally thank frequent referrers more generously. For example, offer childcare for a night out to a young couple with small children who refer often. Or find a thank you gift that aligns with his/her hobbies. But still keep the monetary value relatively small (\$25-50).

Thank referrers annually as a group

Invite all referrers to an annual thank you breakfast (or lunch or dinner or whatever is a nice event in your community). Gathering them together has these advantages.

- You have an excuse to share all the great things happening at your school--so you are encouraging them to make even more referrals.
- You can increase enthusiasm amongst referrers by including a time when they can share stories.
- You can provide them with tools for making referrals (business cards, postcard invitations for upcoming events, brochures, etc.)
- You can remind them that a great referral happens when they get permission to share the name and contact information with the school, so you can contact the referred family rather than waiting for them to contact the school.

Delegating:

Gathering thank you items and organizing an annual event for referrers can be delegated. The actual thank yous need to come from you.

Binder tab: Ongoing

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?