



December 2007

Catholic School Enrollment Talk

ISPD is your Catholic School Enrollment Solution for maintaining and/or increasing the quantity, quality, or diversity of your elementary or secondary Catholic school enrollment.

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9 Enrollment Management Resolutions for the New Year

By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist

After working with well over a 1000 Catholic schools on their enrollment management efforts this past year, here are some suggested resolutions principals, presidents, staff, faculty, parents, and volunteers should consider for 2008.

1. **Attitude - Freedom to Choose**

Steven Covey in this best selling book *"The 8th Habit"* says that helping people understand that they have freedom to choose is one of the most important ingredients when moving from being simply effective to being great. Catholic schools can no longer just be effective, they have to be great in order to attract and retain a healthy, vibrant enrollment. Principals, pastors, faculty, staff, and volunteers are quick to point out the limited amount of time they have for enrollment related work.

2008 Resolution: Resolve to see enrollment management as your school's #1 priority. If understood and embraced, enrollment management is the springboard for your school to become great. There can't be anything more important than inviting new people into your school and taking care of those who are already part of your school community.

2. **Collecting Enrollment Data - Getting a Handle on the Numbers**

There should be ongoing discussion and/or review of how many inquiries (phone, email, walk-in) have come into the school. How many inquiries do we need to surface in order to maintain our enrollment? Far too many inquiries are coming into schools (elementary and high school) and are not being properly recorded. Just because you answer a question or direct someone to the right person does not mean that your job is complete. It has only just begun.

2008 Resolution: Give particular attention to traffic coming into your school (via email, phone, and walk-in) and make sure that information is being recorded related to that activity. Celebrate when you receive contact from those interested in your school and be concerned when things are too quiet. Make sure everyone including secretaries, teachers, custodial workers, and parish staff is on-board with collecting good information from each and every interaction.

3. **Work from the Inside Out Rather than the Outside In**

Solutions to enrollment begin inside each pastor, president, principal, staff member, teacher, school parent, and volunteer. Recently a school that I am working with decided to have teachers contact every inquiry that comes into the school. The school secretary coordinates this by collecting good inquiry information and placing it in the appropriate faculty member's mailbox. Each faculty member in that school has agreed to personally phone call those interested on an ongoing basis. This extra activity is not in any of their job descriptions. The secretary and the faculty decided to act from the inside out.

2008 Resolution: Embrace the idea that every action you make, however small, can have an impact on recruiting and retaining a student into your school. Focus on actions that you have control over within your school.

4. **Tuition and Financial Assistance**

Far too many schools are not asking the tough questions regarding tuition and financial assistance. Pick up the typical school brochure or visit school web sites and you will find very little information regarding tuition and financial assistance. At most, you will learn in one or two sentences that schools have payment plans and financial assistance available. Helping people to afford a Catholic education is possible, but schools can't avoid researching and developing a cure for this silent killer of Catholic school enrollment.

2008 Resolution: Pull together your financial data in a way that it can be analyzed by the best business minds in your school or parish community. Spend quality time reviewing what has worked and what has not worked in relation to tuition payment and financial assistance in your school. Use those best business minds to brainstorm new approaches.

5. **Eliminate the Office of Enrollment Prevention**

What systems, processes, or actions are set in place at your school that deter enrollment? Within every school, the Office of Enrollment Prevention rears its debilitating head (in most cases sub-consciously). When I was working in college admissions, I discovered that the business office placed a hold on a student's re-registration because of an outstanding balance of \$1.38. To drive home the point of how ridiculous it was to place a hold based on such a small amount of money, I gathered up 138 pennies and sent them to the business office to pay the student's bill. An effective organization places a hold on registration for \$1.38 whereas a great organization works to avoid such bureaucratic silliness.

2008 Resolution: Create an atmosphere in your school where people question and correct practices that stand in the way of enrollment.

6. **Customer Service**

A satisfied customer tells 3 others to purchase.

A dissatisfied customer tells 9 others not to purchase.

It takes 12 attempts to win back a dissatisfied customer.

Customer service even reaches beyond the obvious players - principal, staff, faculty, or pastor. For instance, look at your current school families. How well

do your current school families reach out and welcome new families to your school?

2008 Resolution: Create and post signs throughout your school that read:
We are here to serve.
We serve you best when ---
We have fun with you.
We are there for you.
We make your day.
We choose a positive attitude.

7. **Build an Enrollment Management Core Team**

A successful enrollment management program involves more than one or two people. The principal can't do it alone. A couple of committed volunteers can't run the enrollment program by themselves.

2008 Resolution: Solidify and grow a core team of individuals who will move your school's enrollment management program to the next level. It starts with inviting the right individuals to be part of your team.

8. **What You Don't Know Will Hurt You**

Schools that worked with ISPD's Enrollment Division this year have embraced the idea of asking school parents the ultimate question which is "On a scale of 0-10, how likely is it that you would recommend our school to a family member, friend or colleague?" The response and feedback has been phenomenal. The purpose of asking this highly researched question is to get some quick feedback that will allow the school to improve right now.

2008 Resolution: Continue to ask this question and commit yourself to following up on ways that families indicate that you can do better, improve and otherwise move them to want to give you a score of 10. Remember: It is what you don't know that will most hurt you!

9. **Change is the Only Constant**

Enrollment management is a new concept for Catholic schools to embrace. It replaces the idea that we need to simply sprinkle a little marketing dust on our Catholic school and everything will be fine. Enrollment management is all-inclusive and touches every aspect of a school. Enrollment management gives meaning and rationale for the changes our schools must make today and in the future.

2008 Resolution: Take the broad view of recruiting and retaining students in your school by helping your school community better understand and accept enrollment management as the impetus for positive change.

Spiritual Thought

When Jesus our God became human in the womb of Mary, He assumed the problems and challenges associated with being human. We are accepting an uphill challenge when we choose to work at, send our children to, or otherwise support a Catholic school.

I recently read a homily by Father James Heft, SM that included the following reference to human beings and the challenges they face. I think it has applicability

for Catholic schools.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel was asked this question in an NBC interview shortly before his death in 1972. "What is the essence of being human? What does it mean to live a human life?" He replied,

"Actually, the greatness of man is that he faces problems. I would judge a person by how many deep problems he's concerned with. A person who has no problems is an idiot. Because a man has problems. And the more complicated he is, the deeper are his problems. I'm not against pleasure, but the greatness of life is the experience of facing a challenge. In a very deep sense, religion is two things. It's an answer to the ultimate problems of human existence, and it is a challenge to all answers. This is a deep ingredient of existence - problems. And the tragedy of our education today is that we are giving easy solutions: be complacent, have peace of mind, everything is fine. No! Wrestling is the issue. Facing the challenge is the issue."

As we end 2007 and begin 2008, let us pray for the strength and courage to face the problems and challenges that come with keeping Catholic school education alive and well. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

Spring 2008 Workshops for Schools

Dynamic presenters share proven strategies and discuss Catholic school enrollment issues during one and two day seminars. These workshops are conveniently held across the country at an affordable price of \$69-\$250 .

We hope you'll join us soon!

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TOPICS INCLUDE:

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- Best First Steps to Take in Beginning Your Catholic Development Efforts
- Best First Steps / The Annual Fund
- Capital Campaigns That Produce Results
- Long Range Planning
- Customer Service in Your Catholic School
- Catholic School Enrollment Solutions - Strategies for Catholic School Enrollment Growth

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