

School Fundraising Dos and Don'ts

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### Abstract

School fundraising has always been necessary as a way to provide for school extras such as computers, field trips, musical instruments, and school renovations, to name a few. Today we are experiencing more and more school funding issues. Where we used to try to fundraise for the extras, we are now trying to fundraise for teacher's salaries, textbooks, science equipment, and other necessary budgetary items. Today's administrator needs to be savvy and smart as a fundraiser just to keep their school going and growing. While the need for fundraising is paramount in today's world, the need be careful is equally important. There are many fundraising opportunities available. Unfortunately, most fundraising opportunities come with strings attached. Companies will provide funds for the school, but it often comes with the dangers of manipulating students through advertisements. I will be looking at different ways of fundraising, how they can be used to meet classroom wants and needs such as field trips, computers, curriculum support; budgetary needs and wants such as staff salaries, school maintenance, capital funds; and big ticket items such as renovation projects, new playgrounds, new buildings. I will also be looking at fundraising concerns and considerations such as the over commercialization of our youth.

### School Fundraising Dos and Don'ts

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### **School Funding Issues**

In today's economy political entities are controlling funding. What this means for my school is that we are losing \$400 per student. It represents a significant loss. Fortunately the Alberta conference is willing to give us \$300 per student to help cover the loss. In addition to this loss, Higher Ground Christian School has experienced a loss of enrollment. We are funding two teachers with only 11 students. On top of this, we are a tuition-free school, so we don't have this funding stream to count on. After one year on the job, I have realized that fundraising is an

incredibly important part of my job. My school receives the majority of its funding from the a very generous church, and we only have one constituent church. Our bank account is dwindling as we fund each school year. How can my school meet its funding needs?

School funding issues are prevalent across all schools. In a recent study, problems in funding were found for small school districts. Some of the problems being reported are that there is limited funding resources available from local districts and unequal government funding available. "When the participants were asked about the unique financial backgrounds of their districts, two distinct themes emerged. One factor consistently pointed out was the absence of business or industry within their district. The second, common perception among these participants was that the state's funding system was not equitable." (Abshier, Harris, & Hopson, 2011, p. 4) We are recovering from a worldwide recession, so tax money has been significantly impacted. (Calvey, 2008) This recession has negatively impacted educational funding. "While the federal government attempted to do what it could to bail out the financial industry and some sectors of the manufacturing industry, the recent economic downturn has threatened the progress and stability of our nation's education system." (Abshier et al., 2011, p. 2) This has contributed to increased tensions in how administrators fund school programs.

It is not just public schools that are experiencing funding issues. Private schools have always had funding challenges. In Alberta we are lucky to be able to access government funding. Most schools cannot access government funding for independent schools. The question during recession is how do we keep our funding streams solvent. "In order to stay steady through the economic ups and downs, we need to look at entrepreneurial development of profitable activities based on the expertise and business infrastructure of a school's core activities - and use those

profits to sustain our key missions." (Campbell, 2012) The next section of this paper will look at fundraising options.

### **Fundraising Options**

There are many sources of funding which can be accessed. With the school funding issues that we currently have it is important to choose your fundraising projects wisely. When a classroom teacher is looking to fundraise for classroom purchases many of the traditional school fundraiser opportunities are used. There is, of course, the ubiquitous candy sales. However, many schools are resisting candy sales because of health issues. In some schools this may not be an issue. Most schools are looking for different types fundraising sources that can still help them raise money. Fortunately there are information sources out there. Many of the ideas involve being creative and tailoring the fundraiser for your community. Some of the ideas are: "Sled-a-thon; 3-on-3 basketball tournament; Car wash; Spring yard work to local community members; Pre-kindergarten walk-a-thon; Chuck a Puck at the Rink; Talent show; Administrative fun; Dinner fund-raiser with live or silent auction; G.S.T. auction (goods, services, and talents); Gift baskets; Community job fair; Engraved bricks; School event planners; Temporary tattoos; "Halloween Insurance"; Sell seat cushions at sporting events; Plant sales; School rummage or clothing sale." (Steer, n.d.) There is of course all the sale items available as well. Child safety issues make this a sketchy choice. A better choice would be to have a parent group take over class sales. The good news is that fundraising opportunities are available and can help cover classroom costs no longer being covered by the school.

Schools are now needing to fundraise to cover basic costs like staffing and textbooks. In the past budget shortfalls were often covered by cost cutting measures. With much practice private schools have gotten very good at cutting costs. "The good news is that many schools have

already been successful in reducing their expenses as much as possible." (Campbell, 2012, para. 3) The problem is that private schools are having to cut staff. We need to get our local businesses involved with funding education. Why should they do this? They should do this because it is in their own best interests to have well educated workers and consumers. "The application of prudential principles in resource utilization in the practice of education ensures that investment in education produces a labour force that is relevant to the economy in terms of quality and quantity." (Agabi, 2012, p. 4) To engage the local business community will involve educating business owners about your education program. What do you have to offer to the community? "The provision of education as an investment requires the investor to have a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of education as well as the various education investment options." (Agabi, 2012, p. 10)

One of the ways private schools raise money is through the parents of their students. The obvious way is, of course, through tuition. One of the challenges with tuition is that more and more families are having difficulties affording it. While this is particularly noticeable during recession, the chances of this continuing are great. If we are going to fund our Adventist schools we will need to locate alternate sources of tuition relief. "And if the trend of increasing tuition continues, and we do not come up with commensurate financial resources, we may not only price ourselves out of the market, we may also eliminate all but the very well-heeled." (Anderson, 2009) We need to set up accounts to help students cover the cost of tuition, especially as tuition costs rise in the future.

Another way schools get money from parents is through local fundraising initiatives. Often parents are approached to help fund parts of the program, such as a music program, in addition to tuition. One of the ways this can be done is through donation appeals or school

auctions. It is important to make sure that whatever you do fits with your school philosophy and can be afforded by your parents. Some schools try to pressure their parents into paying exorbitant amounts. This will backfire as your stakeholders will not appreciate being forced to give money. In order to make sure that you are asking for the appropriate amount of money you will need to know how much your stakeholders can afford. To do this schools need to become experts at collecting data. Once you have the data you can then tailor your fundraising program more effectively. "It's not just that we know how to ask for money, but we can figure out more precisely what you can reasonably expect to raise." (Anderson, 2012) Data collection and fundraising are going to continue being important parts of an administrators job. "School heads say that raising money is an increasingly important part of the job. Tuition, more than \$40,000 at some schools, typically covers only 80 percent of the cost of educating a student. So schools need additional fund-raising to cover financial aid, maintain and expand facilities and broaden offerings." (Anderson, 2012)

Commercial activities directed at to students and schools is a way for schools to raise significant fundraising dollars but it comes with its own set of problems. Researchers have identified four areas of commercial activities in schools. "Commercial activities include (1) the sale of products, (2) direct advertising - for example, advertisements in school corridors or on school buildings, (3) indirect advertising - example, corporate-sponsored educational materials or teacher training, and (4) market research." (Shaul, 2000, p. 3) The sale of products would be likened to candy sales, bulb sales, Christmas wreath sales, etc. This also includes vending machines and sale of soda pop. "On the national level, exclusive soft drink contracts were the fastest growing activity of all product sales, but traditional fundraisers remained popular." (Shaul, 2000, p. 16) Direct advertising is often seen on floors of gyms, scoreboards, vending

machines, sign boards. This form of fundraising is being suggested to help school districts meet their financial obligations. Toronto mayor Rob Ford has even suggested selling gym floors to raise advertising dollars for Toronto schools, although this suggestion has many deterrents. (Bird & Metzger, 2011)

Indirect advertising is becoming more and more prevalent in schools. The reality is that schools do not have the money they need to provide the desired curriculum materials. Marketers have realized that this is an untapped niche. They provide curriculum materials such as books, DVDs, health materials, environmental materials, and science materials. Teachers use these materials to help supplement meager classrooms. "In many schools teachers make up the difference by dipping into their own pocketbooks, applying for grants, holding fund raisers, or keeping a sharp eye out for 'freebies.'" (Berreth et al., 1995, para. 17) Marketers realizing this need have developed "Sponsored Educational Materials (SEMS)." (Berreth et al., 1995) The problem with these materials is that they are not all created equal. Some marketers have created materials that are unbiased and balanced in how they treat materials. This is not always true. Often these materials show serious bias and sometimes untruths. "Nearly 80 percent contained biased or incomplete information, promoting a viewpoint that favors consumption of the sponsor's product or service or a position that favors the company or its economic agenda. A few contained significant inaccuracies." (Berreth et al., 1995)

Another way schools are raising money is through corporate gifts and grants. Big money is available if you know how to access these funds. These funds can be used for large ticket items such as playgrounds, building programs, outdoor tracks, computer labs, and renovation projects. Critics worry about corporate gifts because they feel that it will unduly pressure kids and families to favor these establishments. In the United States there are two companies that are



featured in this category Channel One and Zap Me. Channel One promises networked TVs and satellite dishes to schools who promise to show its 12 minutes of programming on at least 90 percent of the days a school is in session. (Shaul, 2000) "The company Zap Me offers middle schools and high schools fifteen computers plus Internet connections, printers, and access to educational websites in exchange for using the equipment for a minimum of four hours daily." (Calvert, 2008) With dwindling funding streams available the attractiveness of these types of programs is undeniable.

### **Fundraising Concerns**

Many critics of marketing in schools point out that we are over commercializing kids by providing the advertising in our schools. Critics of Channel One claim that watching 12 minutes of programming, which includes 2 minutes of focused advertising takes away 6 days of accumulated time from teaching curriculum. (Berreth et al., 1995) Because of the advertising some school districts are not allowing Channel One in their schools. Many schools cannot resist the free equipment, which they could otherwise not afford. "The study found that the program is disproportionately shown in schools located in high-poverty communities, where money for educational programs and materials is most lacking, and communities of color; schools in wealthy communities are least likely to subscribe." (Berreth et al., 1995) A school needs to ask itself if the free equipment is worth the required programming. "The requirement that schools air Channel One most days to most students means that teachers don't decide whether it fits their curriculum - they must air it, regardless of whether or not it relates to what they're teaching." (Berreth et al., 1995) Adventist schools should be concerned with the loss of control of what comes into the classroom.

Critics of Zap Me, and programs like it, are concerned with the advertisements that come with the internet access, you are required to use their programming. There is also privacy concerns. Many marketing programs ask for students information and often their parents information such as addresses. Zap Me tracks this information on its programming. "As soon as students log into the computer, the system knows the user's age, sex, and zip code."(Calvert, 2008) The question that the school needs to answer is allowing corporations access to students' private information. There is also the question of giving up control of what is delivered to students to an outside entity. Can schools really afford to do this?

Individual schools often make the decisions of what types of fundraising is allowed. "Often the values of school board members, district officials, and parents determine whether a certain type of activity is controversial or not, rather than the nature of the activity itself." (Shaul, 2000, p. 34) School districts need to get more involved helping set policy to guide schools. Administrators need to ensure that education is the focus of the school. It has been said that to have a school you need students and a teacher. You also need a strong curriculum. The focus of the school needs to be educating children. It does take money to do this. Administrators need to make sure that funding is available. This funding needs to be aligned with the school's mission. If you have a health focus in your community, then signing up for soft drink money would not be advisable.

Finances are a present reality in education. Financial challenges will continue to be a problem in education. There is information available on fundraising. The lesson I learned is that you need to be aware of what is involved in fundraising. If you need to raise a large amounts of money there are grants and corporate money available. You need to collect data which will help you focus your fundraiser to maximize your fundraising. Understanding your parents and

stakeholders will help you reach your fundraising goals. Going to your local businesses is another way to find more funding. Educating your local businesses on why supporting your school is good for business is important if you hope to open up this funding stream. For Adventist schools the need to make sure fundraising aligns with school and church standards is important. This may limit some types of funding available. Combat this with creative solutions that capitalize on your communities uniqueness. Finally, pray to God and look for His direction as you seek to fund His school.

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