OCTANE

ACTIONABLE INSIGHT
REMARKABLE TOPICS

BROUGHT TO YOU BY
enrollmentFUEL

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INSIDE

LETTER FROM

OUR PRESIDENT

I know we will be called upon to be tough-minded, resilient, and innovative in a world where challenges keep coming.

Dear Octane Booster:

My years working in enrollment management have taught me that we are tough-minded, resilient, and innovative. As we head into the 2022-2023 cycle, I know we will be called upon to display those qualities once more in a world where challenges keep coming.

Dr. Laralee F. Harkleroad serves as enrollmentFUEL's Associate Vice President of Marketing & Learning, overseeing REV: FUEL's Learning Series. Her article, "Teaching Organizations, Learning Organizations: Why You Need to Be Both," leads this issue. It's followed by pages packed with practical advice for updating success strategies, succession planning, cultivating a winning attitude for your team, financial aid strategies, and improving your communication flow.

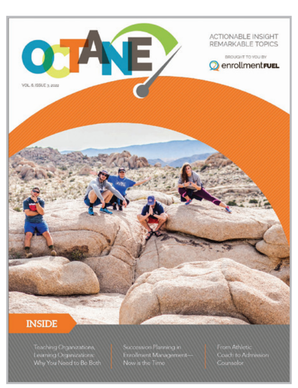
Kimberley Buster-Williams, Ed.S., provides expertise on succession planning in "Succession Planning in Enrollment Management—Now is the Time." William Monts, M.Ed., the Associate Vice President, Dean of Traditional Admission at Anderson University in South Carolina, shares eight amazing tips from his basketball coaching years that shape his approach to managing his admission team. enrollmentFUEL's Vice President of Client Relations, Lisa Branson, M.Ed., taps into her financial aid expertise to prepare you for rising interest rates, and Mike Wesner, enrollmentFUEL's founder, taps into his knowledge of omnichannel communications to contribute an article on improving communication flows.

The work you do as a member of *Octane's* community is vital. While there are challenges, there are also opportunities. We are here to support you. If I can help you in any way, please reach out to me at jacqui.elliott@enrollmentfuel.com.

Best wishes,

Jacquelyn D. Elliott, Ed.D.
President

Octane the Magazine: **A publication of enrollmentFUEL**
A collection of innovative thoughts and ideas from leadership in all areas dedicated to improving your Strategic Enrollment Management and Student Search strategies. Our goal is to fuel creativity and release positive energy among enrollment professionals.



enrollmentFUEL would like to extend our gratitude to Hope International University in Fullerton, California, for allowing this photo to be featured on the cover of our magazine.

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IN MEMORIAM

ALISON MARIE WALLS (1982-2022)

Alison Walls was the first employee hired by Mike Wesner, enrollmentFUEL's founder, and Jacqui Elliott, enrollmentFUEL's president. No doubt about it—we got lucky.

Alison was always willing to do whatever it took to support our client-partners and, as we hired other associates, her co-workers. She had a positive attitude, a willingness to learn, and a kind and humble heart.

Over the years, Alison embraced all kinds of tasks, and loved helping our client-partners behind the scenes and in person. She managed projects like our brainstorming kit, learned to use design software, managed events and tradeshows, and helped launch REV, enrollmentFUEL's learning series.

On June 5, 2022, Alison stunned us when she announced she had been diagnosed with a brain tumor and was scheduled for immediate surgery. When her mother shared the terrible news that Alison had passed, our hearts broke.

Alison was such a big part of enrollmentFUEL, not just because she was our first hire but because of who she was as a person. We are so grateful she took a chance and took the job. She made friends, made a real difference, and left behind a legacy built on her kindness and deep faith in God.

Bless you, Alison.

QUICK TAKES

***FAST** reads and **INNOVATIVE** ideas to **BOOST** positive results*

The Importance of Using Names

As we start another cycle, there is no better time to talk to your Admission Counselors about the importance of using a recruit's name in conversations, in person, and on the phone.

Studies have shown that using a person's name can activate particular regions of the brain, alerting an individual to listen, pay attention, and think. According to one study by the Institute for the Study of Child Development, "There is unique brain activation specific to one's own name in relation to the names of others."[1] Hearing one's name is among a category of self-representational behaviors; in other words, it activates the brain in similar ways to behaviors and thoughts connected to one's innate sense of identity and personality.

Like any communication technique, don't overdo it! It's one thing to use brain science to subconsciously get attention, but overusing names in conversation to the point where it feels unnatural could have a negative effect.

1 Carmody, D. P., and Lewis, M. (2006, October 20). Brain Activation When Hearing One's Own and Others' Names. *Brain Res, 1116*(1): 153–158.

Favour Nerrise is On a Mission to Graduate 10,000 Black Engineers by 2025

Favour Nerrise is the Chairperson for the National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), a doctoral student at Stanford University, and the only black woman in her 160-person electrical engineering Ph.D. cohort.

According to Nerrise, about 6,000 Black engineers graduate every year. Her goal is to increase that number to 10,000 by 2025. To accomplish this goal, NSBE is expanding awareness about STEM education to pre-collegiate students.[1]

1 Horch, AJ. (2022, February 23). The Stanford PhD student with a mission to graduate 10,000 Black engineers by 2025. *CNBC*.

Does Your Institution Need a Hollywood-Style Pitch?

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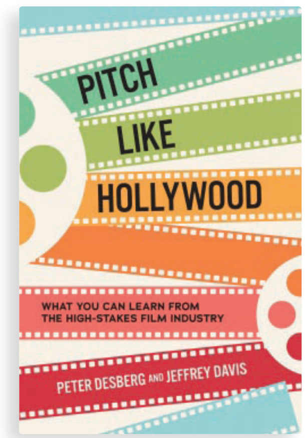
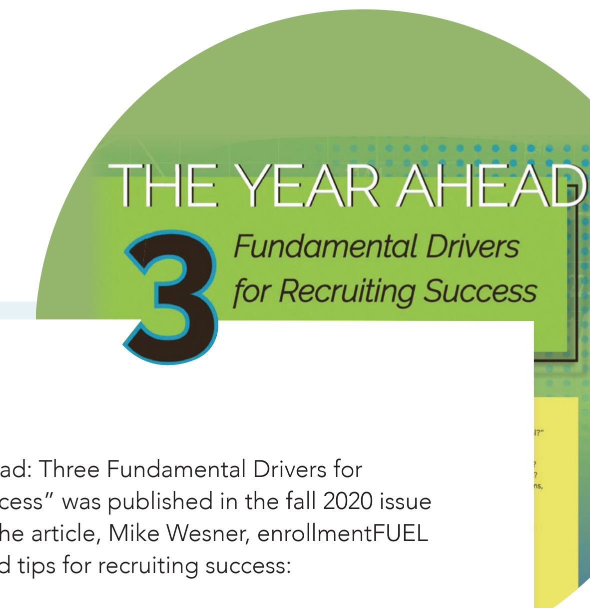
It might not hurt, according to Peter Desberg, a clinical psychologist and professor emeritus at California State University, Dominguez Hills, and Jeffrey Davis, a screenwriter and professor at Loyola Marymount University School of Film and Television.



In their book, *Pitch Like Hollywood*, they see pitching as an interactive event with back-and-forth dialogue. To succeed, you must understand what is important to the person you're pitching. What opinions do they have? What is important to them?

What happens in Hollywood also happens in college recruiting. If you want to "sell" your institution, be prepared to explain your passion and why you believe in your pitch.[1]

1 Kinni, T. (2022, May 23). Persuasion, Hollywood style. *Strategy + Business*.



What are Students Looking for in a College?

Jae Denson answers this question in Episode 32 of *Enrollment Edge*, enrollmentFUEL's podcast. Denson is a college counselor, coach, and the founder of JD Educates, a company helping students find the right college. He describes his advising philosophy in a conversation with podcast host Jay Fedje, enrollmentFUEL's Vice President of University Partnerships (Midwest, Rockies, & West).

Denson helps students see there are multiple pathways to a career, and multiple careers students should consider. His insights into student needs and concerns can help enrollment managers craft better recruitment messages for prospective students and their families.

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CHECK OUT ALL EPISODES ONLINE Available on Apple Podcasts, Google Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app.

Still True

"The Year Ahead: Three Fundamental Drivers for Recruiting Success" was published in the fall 2020 issue of *Octane*. In the article, Mike Wesner, enrollmentFUEL founder, shared tips for recruiting success:

1. When people are searching for what you offer, be found.
2. When faced with big changes to old lead generation methods, restructure thinking and processes to find new sources of opportunity.
3. Focus on fundamentals, starting with right-fit leads. Use look-alike modeling, display ads, and social media influencers to start new relationships. Stay top-of-mind with digital advertising and invest in your team so they are effective at selling your school.

Find the article in VOL. 4. ISSUE 4 2020 in the *Octane* online library.

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TEACHING ORGANIZATIONS, LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS: Why You Need to Be Both

By Laralee F. Harkleroad Ed.D.

> The key is building a system of listening, learning, implementing, reflecting, and recalibrating.

When it comes to teaching and learning, higher education institutions have more to consider than just the experiences of their students. Being a learning organization—or a teaching organization, or both—can be critical in helping to set individual institutions apart from the crowd. When it comes to building a positive reputation and attracting talent both in the office and in the classroom, learning and teaching must go hand in hand.

What Are Teaching-Learning Organizations?

Let's start things off with a couple of fundamental definitions. A *learning organization*, just like it sounds, is one where learning remains a focus—transformative, continuous learning and improvement over the course of its existence. A *teaching organization*, on the other hand, is one that first learns, then develops ways to pass that knowledge on to others. Their focus is on becoming a thought leader through educating others in the field.

It is important to establish your organization's expertise, both as a matter of fact and as a matter of reputation. The true experts in any field aren't the ones who reach a certain point and decide that they've learned everything there is to learn. On the contrary, they're the ones who keep up with the latest developments and innovations, always striving to learn more and to innovate.

When you become a teacher, you're also further establishing your credentials. It helps your organization develop the reputation that, not only do you have enough expertise to teach, but you're confident enough to pass that knowledge along, even to potential competitors.

At enrollmentFUEL, we aspire to be both. We learn from our clients, and we openly and generously share knowledge with them. We believe in the value of partnership, and in partnership, ongoing give and take is the best way to broaden the base of knowledge and expand choices and possibilities.

A Commitment to Ongoing Learning

A growth mindset gives an institution an edge. Why is that? It's because the first step in making something happen is *believing* it can happen. Think of all the great inventions and innovations that have changed our world in big ways and small. In centuries and decades past, no one thought humans could achieve flight, or that cars would replace horse-drawn buggies, or that we could communicate in real time across the entire globe. The first step in all those paradigm-shifting innovations was *believing* they could happen. The second was *acting* on those beliefs.

Organizations that fail to keep pace with new developments will falter, sooner or later. One such famous failure that many of us are familiar with is the decline of Kodak: once the dominant name in photography, brought down to earth by the "digital revolution." By failing to pivot to the parts of its business that could survive the digital onslaught, the company instead lost ground when the traditional, retail, film-based industry became obsolete.

Having a growth mindset requires holding a complex set of values, simultaneously. In 2020, Tapaswee Chandele of The Coca-Cola Company suggested Coca-Cola's "learning" values serve organizations as a potential template: curious, empowered, agile, and inclusive.[1] These values can be a great starting point for any organization looking to revamp their culture and focus more on learning. In turn, that learning and growth mindset fosters better adaptability—an asset in today's marketplace in particular.

The key is building a system of listening, learning, implementing, reflecting, and recalibrating. A learning organization must not be afraid to try something new or, conversely, to stop doing something that isn't working, even if you've invested in it already. It's important to embrace failure as simply a part of the *process*, and, just as importantly, to invite employees into the room as these processes are developed. After all, on-the-ground employees are the ones who have to live with them, and your strategy's success rides on those employees. Empower your people to help build the system and make a system that focuses on empowering them as well.

Ultimately, a learning organization is one that doesn't just take learning opportunities when they come, but actively pursues them. At FUEL, we recognize that problem-solving, experimentation, synthesizing from past experiences, and communicating knowledge are all critical skills that make us a true learning organization. Start with these, and you'll have a much better chance of success.

1 Chandele, T. (2020). The journey to become a learning organization. *Society for Human Resource Management*. https://www.shrm.org/executive/resources/people-strategy-journal/fall2020/pages/feature-chandele.aspx.

When the Students Become the Teachers

Becoming a teaching organization requires a different level of investment and engagement. The idea of the teaching organization has been around for a while, although not always in the mainstream consciousness. Consider what Noel M. Tichy, formerly General Electric's management education leader, said "way back" in 2003:

"Self-absorbed learning is different from taking my learning and feeling a sense of responsibility to bring it to you. You talk to a Navy Seal, one of the first things he does is teach his buddy because it will save his own life. I want that mentality. If I learn something about a customer, do I run back and teach people? Then can I do that on a large scale? That's the trick."[2]

What a teaching organization needs, first and foremost, is a point of view. Whether that point of view is developed at the very top and communicated down, or it's created with more of a bottom-up mentality, it must exist and be clear. It's more than just a set of phrases that sound nice on a brochure or a website; it's a set of ideas about what to value, how to teach, what to measure, and so on. A point of view sets an organization apart from others in the same field. It's what makes its approach distinctive, and it reflects what that organization believes in and values the most.

Regardless of how that point of view originates and develops, once it becomes something "teachable," the process cannot be one-sided. Conveying a set of values and strategies to other people and organizations requires a specific set of skills. Teaching isn't just about establishing authority—it's about perpetuating the cycle of learning and growing.

The best teaching organizations don't behave like a teacher dictating what to think. Instead, they get engagement and buy-in—and they learn from their students, too. This results in a continuous, interactive cycle that benefits everyone. It also keeps those organizations connected to reality, as they're able to learn from the people with real experiences, apply it to their own work, and continue honing both their learning and teaching functions.

Teaching encourages us to keep learning and improving too. We've seen this firsthand at enrollmentFUEL many times, and it's how we developed our REV series.

For instance, our Forensic Lead Generation lesson grew out of lessons we ourselves learned. The publication of *Demographics and the Demand for Higher Education*, by Nathan D. Grawe, made a big splash at conferences. Suddenly, the higher education community found itself considering a new concept—the "demographic cliff," or the impending shrinking of the pool of potential college applicants due to lower birth rates and increased willingness to delay college or take alternate paths.

These conversations led to recognition at enrollmentFUEL that the traditional sources for leads (purchased lists) would shrink. Add the pandemic and the growing number of schools deciding to go test optional, and the enrollmentFUEL team knew we had to find new solutions. So, we talked to client-partners, vendor partners, and outside experts. We soon recognized that every school was getting a certain amount of organic traffic to their website, but few had a method of capturing or converting it.

That research led to the development of one of our most successful product launches—Forensic Lead Generation. We could not have done it without learning first, and we have now spread the word, both among clients and the *Octane* community, through teaching.

2 Rothenberg, R. (2003, February 14). Noel M. Tichy: The thought leader interview. Strategy + Business. https://www.strategy-business.com/article/8458.

Learning, Teaching, and Student Search

Student Search is constantly changing, and the way to stay ahead of the game is to be both a teaching and learning organization. Continually learning and continually improving means that your institution has the edge in recruitment. At the same time, teaching creates a different kind of reputation and presence in the marketplace: it establishes authority, confidence, trust, and even loyalty.

enrollmentFUEL is all about applying the learning model to Student Search. We're always continuing to improve and stay on top of the latest developments. We keep a finger on the pulse of trends, shifts, and new challenges, then bring in the best experts to train your teams.

At enrollmentFUEL, we believe people recruit people. Better skills lead to better results for your team. enrollmentFUEL's President, Dr. Jacquelyn D. "Jacqui" Elliott, consults and is passionate about development. She recognized a need for a resource for training Admission Counselors that supported and enhanced the training provided by institutions to new hires. That's when we developed our REV: FUEL LEARNING SERIES.

The first course was "The Admission Counselor's Guide to Achieving Recruiting Goals," and it was a huge success, with over 650 participants. We followed that course with the launch of five others: "Higher Education Influencer Marketing: A Step-By-Step Guide," "Emerging Leaders: A Training Course for Your Leadership Journey," "Engineering A Great Campus Visit Experience," and "How to Build a Successful Student Ambassador Program." One additional new course is in development and scheduled to launch this year, "Storytelling Meets Data: Optimizing Your Communication Flow to Increase Enrollment."

Octane is also a tool for learning, right here in these pages you're reading right now. We have covered all sorts of Student Search topics—everything from digital and SEO to leadership development and much more. We have offered case studies and tips from our team. We're here to teach—and to learn! We love it when you read these articles and tell us we are right, wrong, or share something that expands our view of the world.

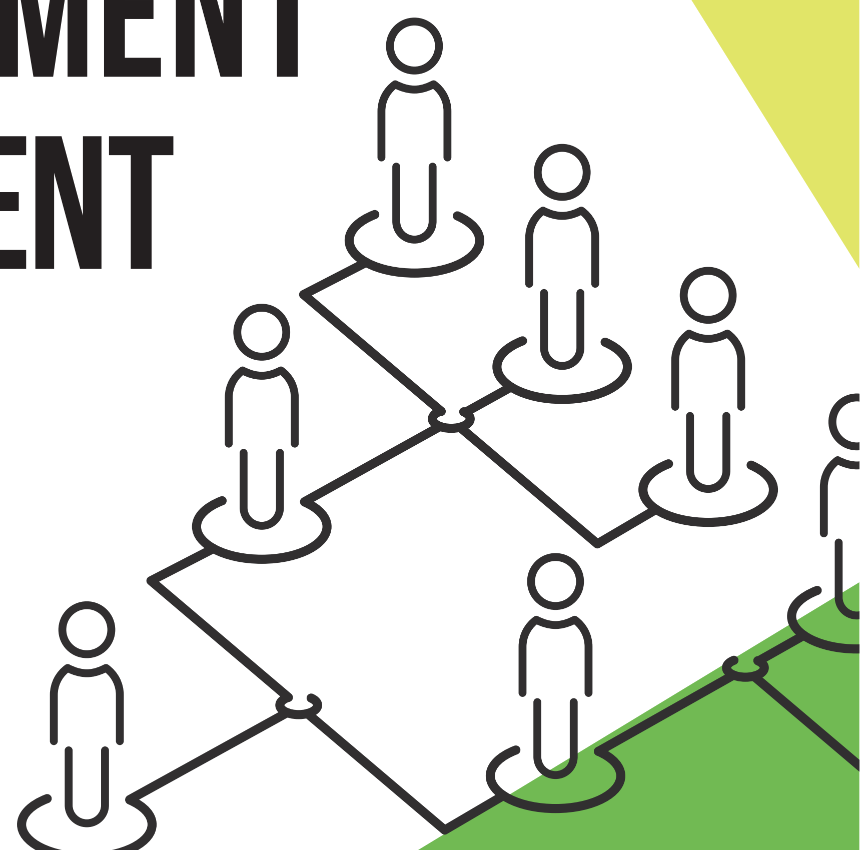
In higher education, we know the value of both teaching and learning—better than most, probably! For organizations to succeed, there must be a real commitment to continuous growth and learning, as well as establishing expertise and revisiting those lessons through teaching others. By embracing both sides of the learning experience, we can continue to grow and find new ways to meet the needs of our teams and, most importantly, our students.

Dr. Laralee F. Harkleroad serves as enrollmentFUEL's Associate Vice President of Marketing & Learning, overseeing REV: FUEL's Learning Series and FUEL's marketing strategy and execution. Her career spans enrollment management, strategic planning, marketing, advancement, and programmatic design. Dr. Harkleroad enjoys working with tomorrow's leaders in the classroom, and has served at various universities as an adjunct professor and guest lecturer. She holds a Doctor of Education degree in leadership and learning in organizations from Vanderbilt University's Peabody College. Contact Laralee at laralee.harkleroad@enrollmentfuel.com.

STRATEGIES

SUCCESSION PLANNING IN ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

—Now is the Time



By Kimberley Buster-Williams, Ed.S.

College recruitment is dynamic and ever-changing in the era of technology and big data. Critical staff are hired to manage data, which is then used to make day-to-day decisions, from how many search names to purchase to vendor selection. Admission staff can have technical expertise in the university's Student Information System (SIS), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), predictive modeling, and more. Finding a candidate with both admissions and technical experience, within a particular salary range, can be extremely difficult.

Following the arrival of the COVID-19 vaccination, the American "Big Quit," "Great Reshuffle," or "Great Resignation" is a phenomenon that is touching every industry, including higher education. Increasingly, employees are demanding remote work options and are willing to leave the workforce altogether if that is not an option. The aging workforce, referred to as the "gray tsunami," coupled with the "Great Resignation" presses leaders to address enrollment management pipeline challenges, and to recognize that succession planning is more important than ever.

While there is ample research on succession planning and presidential leadership, there are few studies on succession planning in enrollment management. As Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) leaders, now is the time to think more strategically about succession planning in the context of the gray tsunami, the Great Resignation, burnout, mentoring, and fit.

Succession Planning Defined

According to the *Encyclopedia of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, succession planning is the process by which an organization makes sure that it will have the right leaders in place at the right time.[1] The encyclopedia places the origins of formal succession planning processes in the post-World War II need for "replacement planning"—finding people to step into key roles that had been vacated due to the promotion or death of the previous incumbents. Inherent in this approach is the notion of a shortage of candidates for these roles.[2]

Replacement planning gave way in the 1970s and 1980s to the concept of succession management. Today, succession planning is a practice that has gone from important to routine in corporate and government sectors, but it remains problematic in higher education. North American and European firms have been taking the lead on succession planning for decades. Fortune 500 companies are well-known for their emphasis on succession planning. These companies include McKesson, Caterpillar, General Electric, IBM, and Proctor & Gamble. Leaders of these companies understand that succession planning is the straightforward process of:

- **Identifying who would or could step into the shoes of junior and/or senior leaders;**
- **Training over a period of time; and**
- **Supporting the transition into new leadership roles**[3]

Gray Tsunami—DISRUPTION #1

About one-fifth of the U.S. population will be 65 or older by the year 2030. As boomers enter their senior years, we are witnessing what some call a "gray tsunami." Born after WWII, from 1946 to 1964, the oldest boomers will turn 74 next year. At an estimated 73 million, this generation is the second-largest age group after their children, the millennials, born between 1982 and 2000(US Census, 2020, para. 1).[4]

As boomers age through their 60s, 70s, 80s, and beyond, the 'big bulge' of the boomer generation will contribute to the overall aging of the U.S. population in coming decades.[5] While baby boomer retirements have been anticipated for a while, the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic was unplanned.

The Great Resignation—DISRUPTION #2

A national labor phenomenon where workers have left their jobs in record numbers is known as "The Great Resignation," "The Great Reshuffle," or "The Big Quit." This mass exodus gained national attention beginning in January 2021. Millions of workers in the United States have turned the turmoil caused by the coronavirus pandemic into opportunities to rethink their professions and reframe their lives.[6]

By fall 2021, the quitting mood had become something closer to a movement, with many workers leaving their jobs in a conscious rejection of stagnant wages and inadequate workplace protections during the pandemic. Online, people flooded a Reddit forum called "r/antiwork" for commiseration and solidarity; by year's end, the page had reached 1.5 million members.[7] In the streets, thousands of unionized workers in manufacturing, health care, and higher

1 Clutterbuck, D. (2017). Encyclopedia of industrial and organizational psychology. Sage Publishing.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Armstrong, D. M., Medina, L., and Vespa, J. (2020, February). Demographic turning points for the United States:Ppopulation projections for 2020 to 2060. U.S. Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/demo/p25-1144.pdf.
5 Ibid.
6 Herman, A. (2022, February 15). "The Big Quit." The Progressive Magazine. https://progressive.org/magazine/the-big-quit-herman/.
7 Ibid.

education went on strike last fall for fair pay and protections.[8]

The Great Resignation is affecting wage earners of all stripes with equal force. In "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Workforce: From Psychological Distress to the Great Resignation," the author wrote, "Of course, the Great Resignation may be just a short-lived trend amplified by media. We simply do not have enough data at this moment to make any conclusions on this matter."[9] For now, this market phenomenon must be factored in as leaders think about succession planning and continuity of work.

Succession (Not) as Disaster Contingency

As shared by David Clutterbuck in his book *The Talent Wave: Why Succession Planning Fails and What to Do About It*, succession can no longer be simply a "disaster contingency" in the event that a leadership role suddenly becomes available. The following questions are critical to ask as a SEM leader:[10]

- ***Forecasting:* How many people will we need in critical roles, with what experience and capabilities, and what will our selection criteria be? Can the candidate work remotely?**
- ***Talent Inventory:* How deep is our bench? Who do we have? At what stage of development are they in terms of slotting into key leadership roles? What potential do they have to grow into bigger roles? What kind of roles could they contribute most to in the organization?**
- ***Talent review:* What plans do we have to develop individuals and talent pools in line with the evolving business need?**
- ***Assessment:* Are the succession and development plans being implemented, and are they delivering results?**

While most institutions do some level of planning (i.e., strategic plans, crisis management plans, etc.) this planning does not always include succession planning. True succession planning involves a deliberate process of identifying and developing future leaders among individuals who are already part of the organization.[11]

The goal is to create a talent pool from which to select leaders at various levels when a vacancy occurs. Fundamental to successful succession planning is a philosophy of recruiting the best talent possible, and subsequent management approaches that ensure opportunities for professional development with specific emphasis on leadership skills.[12]

Burnout

One downside in identifying an internal candidate with potential and then grooming that person for higher level work responsibility is the increased likelihood of burnout. According to Casserley and Megginson, authors of *Learning from Burnout*, when progress depends on perceived performance and performance is defined by how hard (and long) someone works, the foundation is laid for a destructive spiral.[13]

They explain that: "More often than not, those who burn out collude with dysfunctional working environments. They choose to make work and career central to their lives. Highflyers' addiction to action and adrenalized work styles often hides an identity that is strongly externally referenced—on work and career—rather than anything from within."[14] The Japanese term for this is karoshi, which literally translates to "overwork death."

In the context of succession planning, Clutterbuck encourages leaders to take preemptive steps regarding burnout. In particular:[15]

- **Meet with staff often and spend time really listening.**
- **Recognize the symptoms of potential burnout early and intervene through coaching.**
- **Break the association between working long hours and performance.**
- **Create an environment of psychological safety where people can challenge excessive work demands without fear of career derailment.**

Mentoring

Levinson, Darrow, Levinson, Klein, and McKee conducted one of the first major studies on the topic of mentoring in the early 1970s. This study focused on the human development of adult men. The authors of this study found that men learned and fostered relationships that helped the expansion of their careers.[16]

8 Ibid.
9 Jiskova, G. (2022). Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the workforce: from psychological distress to the Great Resignation. Journal of Epidemiol Community Health. https://jech.bmj.com/content/jech/early/2022/03/15/jech-2022-218826.full.pdf.
10 Clutterbuck, D. (2012).
11 Cavanaugh, J. (2017). Who will lead? The success of succession planning. Journal of Management Policy and Practice. (18)2, 22-27.

12 Ibid.
13 Casserly, T. and Megginson, D. (2009). Learning from burnout. Routledge.
14 Ibid.
15 Clutterbuck, D. (2012).
16 Brisco, K., & Freeman, S. (2019) The role of mentorship in the preparation and success of university presidents. Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 27(4), 418.

Additionally, there has been substantial research in higher education on the role and importance of mentoring across genders. Twenty years of social science research has confirmed that mentoring is helpful for executive women in advancing to leadership positions.[17] Providing a talented person time and attention (i.e., mentoring) is noted in the literature as making a critical difference in employee satisfaction and retention.

Lastly, mentoring is viewed by human resource professionals in higher education as interrelated to one's achievement in organizational advancement, career development, and career satisfaction.[18] The literature indicates that those who have been successfully hired in key administrative positions have used mentorship and networking to create a consistency and coherency between what they believe and how they navigate their work environment.

Lollie's Leadership Quips

My grandmother, Lollie, would often say, "You knew this day was coming" when something happened that everyone knew was about to happen. In some cases, leaders are aware of retirements on the horizon and have time to plan. There are other instances where they don't have that luxury.

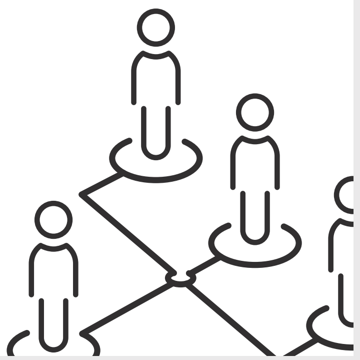
Research into employee retention tells us that people who stay tend to be those who are embedded in their organization. These employees are often seen as cherished members of the organization—part of the established culture and campus community. Embeddedness means to be connected and is related to three kinds of connectivity: link, fit, and sacrifice. The greater the connectivity, the more likely people are to stay at their job, even when more lucrative opportunities present themselves.

Cross-training helps connect employees, and it is a vital component of succession planning. Cross-training several team members in key areas of enrollment management (Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar, etc.) is critical to reduce "enterprise risk." Additionally, cross-training ensures that there are multiple people capable of running critical functions, even if someone is sick or leaves the institution.

While it is important to have contingency plans (i.e., staff who are cross-trained, networks of consultants, etc.), now is the time to focus on succession planning. When a departure is announced (planned or unexpected), you will beam with pride because you are prepared—you knew that day was coming!

My grandmother had another famous saying: "To be forewarned is to be forearmed." When you have thought about something before if happens, you can prepare for it. As a leader, it is critically important to expertly balance all the knowns, probabilities, and unknowns. Succession planning is one way to increase your odds of enrollment success no matter the season or disruption.

Kimberley Buster-Williams, Ed.S., currently serves as Vice President for Enrollment Management at Northeastern Illinois University and as Assistant Director of AACRAO's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) endorsement program. She is a nationally respected enrollment management practitioner, and author of the History of American Higher Education A to Z - A Primer for Enrollment Managers, *and* Lollie's Leadership Quips. *Kimberley earned an Ed.S. degree in Higher Education Administration, an M.A. in Education Administration, and a B.A. in English, all from Old Dominion University, and a postmaster's certificate in leadership from the University of Michigan's Center for the Education of Women. Her areas of expertise include enrollment management, adaptive and inclusive leadership, data analytics, marketing, recruitment, diversity and inclusion, and the history of higher education. Please contact her at K-BusterWilliams@neiu.edu.*



17 Hill, L. and Wheat, C. (2017). The influence of mentorship and role models on university women leaders' career paths to university presidency. The Qualitative Report, 22(8), 2090-2111. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol22/iss8/2/.
18 Brisco, K., & Freeman, S. (2019).

FROM ATHLETIC COACH TO ADMISSION COUNSELOR

By William Monts, M.Ed.

Eight Lessons Learned from Coaching Men's College Basketball

To understand how I ended up in the enrollment management world of higher education, I must explain my career background. Before my role in admission, I coached men's college basketball for ten years at various levels and institutions. It may surprise people that the transition from collegiate athletic coaching to college admission is seamless. As I have settled into my role in admission at Anderson University in South Carolina, I have found the similarities are uncanny. And the lessons I learned in coaching have paved the way for working with the best team I have ever coached.

I always tell students that working in admission is the most freeing recruiting position I have ever had. I don't have to worry if you can shoot a basketball, though the same skills I used for connection-building in athletic recruitment are now used to recruit all students, athletes or not. The role is made even easier because of how firmly I believe in my school's mission and the students we recruit.

Our current admission team would tell you that I am "a coach to my core." Coaching has given me a better sense of what it means to be part of a team and how to create a team culture. In my role, I am always using coaching and player analogies, and guess what? They work because we all want to be part of a team. From motivating team members to move toward the same goal, working to achieve our highest level of performance, and traveling from place to place, to having a proactive "figure it out" mindset and serving others—all these attributes of collegiate coaching have carried over into my recruitment of students.

Here are eight lessons I learned from coaching that have been game-changers for working in the world of college admission.

1. LEARN THE IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING A TEAM.

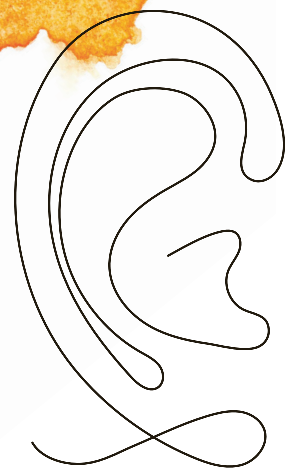
As someone who grew up with his dad as his basketball coach, I will never forget how Dad built teams when I was younger. Dad was constantly assessing and looking for what the team needed to improve. He knew he couldn't have a team full of point guards or post players, regardless of who the best players were, because you needed both to win.

Like forming a basketball team, I have found it beneficial to have multiple personality types, backgrounds, and strengths on an admission team. We have a variety of life experiences in our office—married and single individuals, people with and without children, and a mix of older and younger people. After building your team, you must position individuals where you know they will feel most comfortable and maximize their gifts.

2. KNOW YOUR TEAM. EVERY INDIVIDUAL RESPONDS DIFFERENTLY.

I've coached many student-athletes and learned there is a fine balance between ensuring everyone is treated equally and recognizing every individual responds differently to how you address them. Coaching everyone on a team is important, but learning and understanding how each member responds to certain types of coaching is just as important.

I had to get out of my own way to adjust to this concept. I've told my team many times that if a coach or leader stops coaching you, they have stopped caring about you. Know your team, have high expectations, and ensure these expectations are made clear. A good leader recognizes the unique values of everyone on the team while also communicating the organization's values.

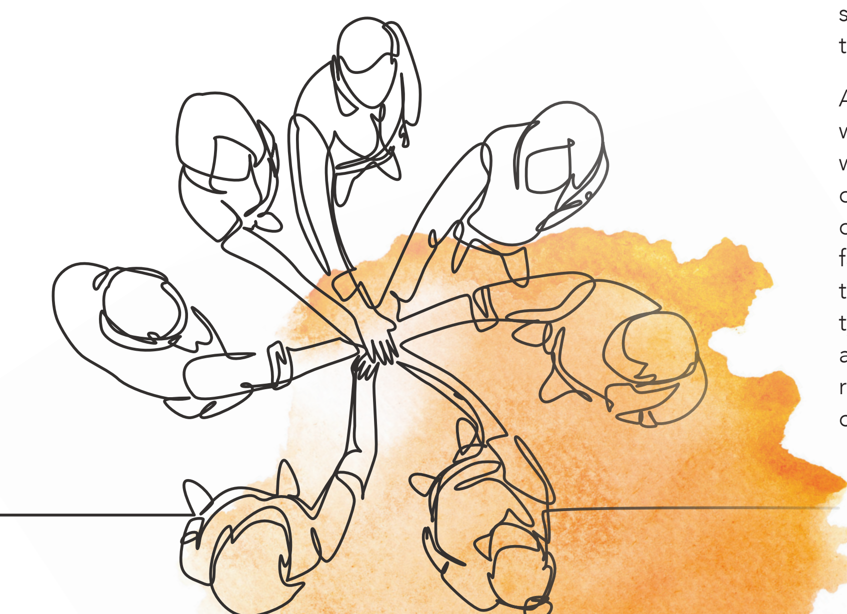


3. BE COMMITTED TO SOMETHING BIGGER THAN YOURSELF.

You may be interested to learn that during my 10-year coaching career, I was only paid a salary in five of them. During the other five, I was paid in camp stipends, a meal plan, and housing on campus. But I was okay with this because the work I was doing was bigger than me.

Similar to coaching, there are many extra asks in enrollment management—it's part of the job. Have you ever been asked to attend a recruiting event with only a week's notice? And then you find out the event is on a Saturday? We've all been there.

When you hire individuals who are committed to something bigger than themselves, they often have a better attitude and more willingness than those who aren't. Two essential qualities enrollment staff members bring to the table are their availability and flexibility. A leader's job is to communicate that their team's work is purpose-driven.



4. LEARN TO LISTEN FOR THE DETAILS.

Have you ever explained a task you wanted to ensure was executed perfectly? You thought you gave specific directions, but when you ask the employee about it later, you find out they completed the task—just not exactly how you asked (or thought you had asked)?

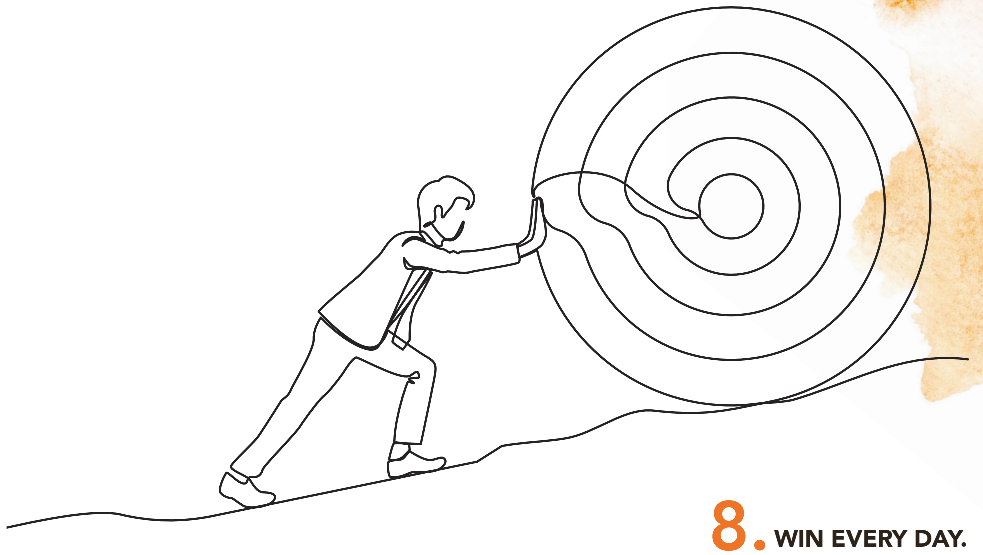
A coaching friend of mine tells the story of a time when he wanted his assistant to distribute socks to the players. After the assistant coach passed out the socks, some players complained to the head coach because their socks did not fit. When the head coach asked the assistant about the sock distribution, the assistant said, "They're just socks. I passed them out without caring about size."

The sock-size problem is a small example of how details matter, and leaders must listen to ensure team members understand instructions and are aware of possible pitfalls. As leaders, we have experiences guiding our understanding of the necessary steps to ensure the best possible outcomes.

5. MAKE CONNECTIONS.

I've learned that you slowly form a relationship when you make enough connections with someone to grow trust. Recruiting student-athletes for ten years helped me understand how important making connections is if you want to recruit students. As they converse with families, recruiters should seek out topics that show why a student differs from the rest.

A trick that has helped me for years is to search for a one-word association or one-event association. For example, I wrote in my notes about a student with a relative competing on *America's Got Talent*. Although most of our conversations did not center on this topic, connecting the student to that fact helped me remember who the student was. It also triggered other information about the student that I wouldn't typically recall. You'd be surprised how one phrase will help a student stand out in your memory and make it easier to recall other facts about that student! Having numerous connections also helps you form relationships.



6. DEVELOP A "FIGURE IT OUT" MENTALITY AND AN "IT CAN BE DONE" ATTITUDE.

I've coached my team to have this mindset and expect it from them. Coaching taught me to "just figure it out." Problem-solving only happens if you have an "it can be done" attitude. Many times, during my coaching career, the head coach gave me responsibility with little direction. Giving excuses about why something could not be accomplished was never okay. Instead, I had to figure it out.

It is always a pleasant surprise when one of my employees takes it upon themselves to figure out a complicated situation where they must go out of their way to serve a family because the original plan isn't working. Having a "figure it out" mentality isn't easy because the easy route comes from simply saying, "No, it can't be done." But if we are going to be good at our job and serve with excellence, sometimes we must figure it out and find ways to respond with "Yes."

7. VALUE COMPETITION AND THE DESIRE FOR THE BALL.

As an ex-coach, it goes without saying that I value competition. It's equally crucial for our admission employees to have a healthy competitive spirit, too. Admission is similar to athletics in that we all believe our institution is the best and want students to choose us. When hiring new employees, a running joke in our office is to ask one another, "Do they want the ball?"

This concept comes from the art of rebounding a basketball, and what I have learned in my coaching career is that a good rebounder has an endless desire to "want the ball" and pursue it. This internal drive matters for careers in enrollment. With this endless pursuit mentality, no job is too big or too small. This foundation has helped my work ethic grow because I understand and expect to be asked to do many things, and my team expects the same.

8. WIN EVERY DAY.

One of the primary ideas motivating my team to rally together as a cohesive unit is creating and sticking to a "win the day" mindset. Folks in admission tend to be future-focused on reaching year-end goals. As a result, they often miss the opportunity to celebrate day-to-day wins.

One of my favorite coaches of all time is John Wooden, former coach of the UCLA Bruins. John Wooden holds the record for the most NCAA championship titles in the history of men's basketball, with 10 titles. Like every team, Wooden's teams had to lace up their shoes and play to win the game. But the interesting fact about John Wooden is that he never talked about winning. In fact, he never used the "W" word. Instead, he focused on doing the next right thing and what his teams could control: their energy, effort, and enthusiasm.

Winning the day tasks could be anything from call goals, the number of applications a counselor needs to review, private visits to schedule throughout the semester—the list is endless. But it's important to create opportunities for celebrations every day. Try setting a daily goal for a month, and if the team reaches the goal at the end of the month, reward them with a team dinner.

Although I haven't taken the "W" word out of our equation at Anderson, we do focus on the day-to-day wins for our team. That, along with all the other joys and satisfactions of coaching, has made the first five years a win for a guy who went from coach to counselor.

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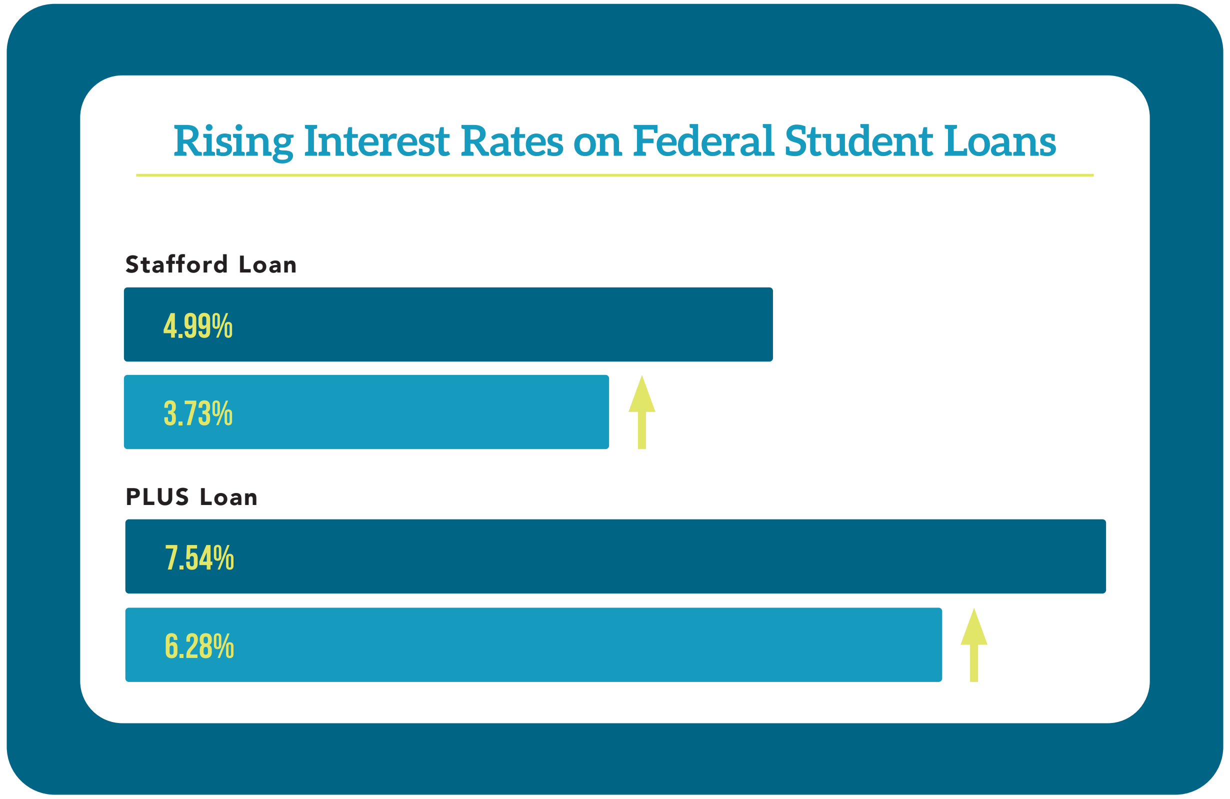
FINANCIAL AID

What's Your Strategy for 2022-2023?

By Lisa Branson, M.Ed.

In today's higher education landscape, financial concerns are ever-present and ever-changing. One of the biggest concerns for students and families, as well as institutions, is the increase in interest rates on federal student loans. This shift, among others, has created new challenges for enrollment teams. How can your team prepare and continue to meet your goals?



The Current State of Financial Aid

Financial aid is set for a major shift in the new cycle driven by rising interest rates. Interest rates on federal student loans will rise more than a percentage point for the 2022-2023 school year—the biggest single-year increase in nearly a decade.[1] Undergraduate students taking out new Stafford loans will pay 4.99% interest rates, up from 3.73%, while grad students and parents taking out PLUS loans will now pay 7.54% interest, up from 6.28%.

At the same time, discount rate concerns are exacerbating the financial situation for many institutions. During the 2020-2021 school year, discount rates for first-time undergraduates hit an all-time high of 53.9%, with the average discount rate for all

1 Douglas-Gabriel, D. (2022, May 12). It will soon cost more to borrow money for college. *The Washington Post.* https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/05/12/student-loan-interest-rates-rise/.

undergraduates increasing to 48.1%.[2] These numbers take into account all institutionally-funded financial aid, but not federal aid or grants from outside organizations.

As one might expect, finances remain one of the biggest decision-making factors for students—which makes them one of the top issues for enrollment teams looking to meet their goals. A 2021 CNBC report revealed that 74% of college and university representatives said that the most significant challenge facing their school is financial constraints. The smaller the institution, the bigger the concern: 79% of schools with under 5,000 students said that financial issues are their top challenge, compared to 52% of schools that have over 30,000 students enrolled. Meanwhile, 60% of respondents across the board reported feeling "very concerned" about the overall financial stability of their institutions.[3]

Even with these challenges, you can still win—you just need the right tools and strategies.

Develop Your Three-Step Training Program

How can your team help leads overcome those concerns and enroll at your institution? Consider a three-step training program to cover the most important topics:

1. TEACH THE BASICS

Before diving into the details, it's important for your team to be ready to address the basic aspects of financial aid that the majority of families will have questions about. At this stage, the program should include training on FAFSA filing, with topics such as the most common FAFSA errors, filing dates, using the IRS Data Retrieval Tool (DRT), whose job it is to file what, and so on. For many students and families, simply navigating the FAFSA is an important but challenging step that can stand between them and financial aid. Removing that barrier is step one to helping students get enrolled.

In addition to understanding the ins and outs of the FAFSA filing, enrollment teams need to be aware of some basics. Your staff should learn about the difference between need-based and non-need-based aid, and must be well-trained on topics like cost of attendance, direct and indirect costs, annual and aggregate limits, and gift vs. self-help aid.

2 Whitford, E. (2021, May 21). Tuition discount rates reach new high. *Inside Higher Ed.* https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/05/20/private-colleges-cut-539-tuition-sticker-price-freshmen-average.

3 Johson Hess, A. (2021, August 25). 74% of colleges are facing financial challenges, according to a new survey of higher ed professionals. *CNBC.* https://www.cnbc.com/2021/08/25/74percent-of-colleges-face-financial-challenges-according-to-survey-of-higher-ed-workers.html.

Finally, it's important to have resources that will provide people with additional help, including websites like studentaid.gov or nasfaa.org.

2. REVIEW OR ROLE-PLAY FINANCIAL AID NOTIFICATION DISCUSSIONS

Having the basic information is one thing, but being able to put it into practice is another. Train your teams to have important conversations with a classic tool: practice and role-play conversations.

Use examples from other institutions as well as your own when developing training on financial aid notifications. For example, aid offer models and comparison worksheets from NASFAA can give team members practice understanding different types of offers and notifications, both from an institutional perspective and from the perspective of students and families.[4]

To really make the training effective, have your staff role-play in groups to demonstrate how they would discuss the different financial aid elements, what they mean, and next steps. It's also important to observe staff when they are actually talking with students and families. After these practices and observations, spend time coaching and fine-tuning the discussions to be as effective as possible.

4 National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. (2022, April 26). *Financial aid offer examples.* https://www.nasfaa.org/offer_examples.

3. LEARN COUNSELING TECHNIQUES FOR OVERCOMING OBJECTIONS

Counseling prospective students and families is one of the most important parts of an enrollment team's job. In order to help prospective students and their families better understand their options, enrollment teams should be well-trained on answering common questions and parsing award details. This training can include looking at sample awards letters and evaluating them closely, keeping in mind the questions that prospective students may raise.

Some common questions to include could be:

- What percentage of students at the institution receive some kind of financial aid?
- What is the direct cost to students?
- What are the advantages of taking subsidized loans vs. unsubsidized loans?
- What costs will the average student incur outside of tuition (room and board, fees, etc.)?
- How does work-study get paid?
- What is the average debt of a typical graduate?

Remember, objections aren't necessarily roadblocks—they're opportunities. Consider five general approaches to overcoming objections, which counselors can mix and match in individual conversations:

- **Build a relationship:** Acknowledge concerns, build rapport and connect, make a positive and welcoming impression
- **Understand needs:** Listen to what they have to say, ask questions, fact-find, and consult
- **Demonstrate value:** Help the potential objectors understand the value of what you're offering; explain, describe, and help them see how you can meet their needs
- **Summarize:** Recap what you've heard. Suggest ways to satisfy their needs, and deliver strong and relevant advice
- **Close:** After moving them through the process above, finish strong by asking for a commitment and implementing whatever was discussed

Other Developments to Keep in Mind

Enrollment teams also should be aware of ongoing issues of inequality that impact college decisions and financial aid.

One major source of inequality comes through a popular program: Parent PLUS Loans, which are federal loans that parents (rather than the students themselves) take out to help cover their children's college costs. According to a recent study by the Century Foundation, 42% of Black Parent PLUS borrowers are low income and low wealth (in contrast to 26% of Latino and 8% of white borrowers of the same loans), meaning that they are more likely to struggle to repay the loans—thus perpetuating the racial wealth gap.[5]

When students and families have questions about their financial aid options and what those choices will mean in reality, they'll be turning to enrollment professionals. That's what your in-depth training is for: preparing your team to answer these all-important queries.

For instance, one major question many families may have in the current cycle is what the FAFSA verification waiver means for them. For the time being, the US Department of Education is continuing its relatively new policy of relaxing its audits of students who submit the FAFSA. Instead, the department will focus more on identity theft and fraud. By relieving students of the pressures of this potentially drawn-out process, the hope is to achieve a turnaround when it comes to low FAFSA completion rates and enrollment rates at colleges that serve a high number of low-income students. Enrollment teams should be aware of what this means, both from a "sales" enrollment perspective and from a "student assistance" perspective.

For enrollment teams, these conversations are ramping up. As your institution navigates these new waters, they'll be relying on your team more than ever. With a flexible strategy and up-to-date information, your team can stay on top of changes and continue to meet the needs of your institution and your students alike.

5 Granville, P. (2022, May 31). *Parent PLUS borrowers: The hidden casualties of the student debt crisis.* The Century Foundation. https://tcf.org/content/report/parent-plus-borrowers-the-hidden-casualties-of-the-student-debt-crisis/.

Lisa Branson, M.Ed., is FUEL's Vice President for Client Relations, and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program. She is an expert in recruiting, Strategic Enrollment Management, Student Search, and financial aid, and collaborates with client-partners throughout the country to help them achieve their goals. If you would like to discuss financial aid training or strategies at your institution, please contact Lisa at lisa.branson@enrollmentfuel.com.

BEST IN CLASS Commflow

By Mike Wesner, M.ED.

Meet Alex, a typical high school student getting ready to make his decisions about college applications. He has done his due diligence and looked at many different schools, eventually narrowing it down to a top ten list.

One of those schools has the degree he wants, is affordable, and checks all the boxes. Still, it's not his first pick. Even so, he requests information. That's where the commflow journey begins.

From Runner-Up to Final Choice

This "contender" college is about to move into first place on Alex's list, thanks to the magic of an effective communication flow (commflow). Alex starts receiving marketing emails from his top choice and the contender school. The emails from his number one choice are pretty—well, to be honest,—*boring*! There is a lot of information, but it isn't presented in an interesting way. It seems like it was written by technical academics; it lacks personality. There isn't anything that gives a sense of the people behind the school.

On the other hand, the contender sends emails that are as compelling as they are informative. They communicate personality in their writing and use videos to give a more well-rounded sense of the institution as a dynamic place. He keeps opening the emails because they're interesting to read, and he even begins to click through to explore other things about the college. Perhaps he even receives personalized text messages or phone calls from the school, connecting him on a human level to the people who represent this school.

Then, the contender sends Alex a mailing. It's different from the simple postcards he's been getting from many other colleges. You can tell it cost something, and it's even personalized. The contender school's extra effort pays off, and Alex's impression of them continues to improve.

It is campus visit time, and both schools invite Alex to visit. Once again, the emails from the contender school are sharper and more personal, making their campus look more appealing than the formal, stuffy emails from Alex's original first choice. Even though he still hasn't made up his mind about where to go, Alex decides to at least look at the contender's campus. The visit goes great. Alex meets with his admissions counselor, and they connect.

Now he's beginning to think about this school more seriously.

The commflow continues, mixing direct physical mail with emails, texts, and even a few phone calls. Application season arrives, and Alex applies to several schools and gets accepted. Then the day comes when his mom tells him he needs to make his decision so they can send in a deposit. He goes upstairs and pulls out two piles of information: materials from his original first choice, and materials from the contender. He thinks about everything he has received from the contender: thoughtful, clever, even fun, with stories that made him feel like he would fit right in.

He sits down at his computer—and he picks the contender.

Rocky Balboa said, "Every champion was a contender who refused to give up."[1] To be a commflow champion, follow these enrollmentFUEL best practices:

1 Goodreads. (n.d.). *Rocky Balboa quotes*. Goodreads. Retrieved June 25, 2022, from https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/6542990.Rocky_balboa.

Make the Buyer's Journey Inspirational

The "buyer's journey" is the process by which a customer decides on a product or service to buy. In general, it consists of three stages:

1. Awareness of the need or problem
2. Consideration of the possible options that are available to solve the problem
3. Deciding on which option to purchase

Choosing a college follows the same path, meaning enrollment teams can use similar techniques to attract prospective students. Start by aligning communications with the stage where the student is at so they don't feel overwhelmed or pressured. You can guide students along the journey and evoke emotions with graphics and messaging.

More than anything, it comes down to having a clear voice and personality. Prospective students don't want a formal presentation—they want to feel like your college is where they can learn, have fun, and truly belong.

Use Video

You've heard the saying, "Show, don't tell." That's true of any form of storytelling, including telling the story of your college to potential students. Integrate videos into your marketing materials to truly bring the story of your college to life.

According to one study, 80% of prospective students who planned to attend an online university said watching an online video influenced their application. They also were significantly more likely to say they felt confident, excited, or enthusiastic after watching program-specific or brand videos.[2] The proof is out there: today's students often turn to video to help them get a better picture of their college options. Using video wisely can make a big difference in enrollment for your school.

Monitor Engagement

How do you know if your strategy is working? Check out your engagement rates. There are three central angles to look at when it comes to engagement:

- Who is opening your emails?
- Who is clicking on links within the emails?
- Who is visiting your website and exploring further?

You're looking to invest in the people who are invested in

2 Google. (n.d.). *Online university application statistics.* Think with Google. Retrieved June 25, 2022 from https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-strategies/video/online-university-application-statistics/.

you. **People recruit people.** Get an admission counselor involved: when someone responds to your emails, have them reach out.

The more engaged someone is with early outreach, the more likely you will see a return on further investment. If a lead becomes non-responsive, you'll need a different strategy to convince them to engage, or you could choose to move on to more promising leads.

Invest in Digital Advertising

The most successful marketing strategies take a multi-pronged approach, pairing email and digital marketing with direct mail to create multiple and repeated associations. Digital advertising helps create a positive association that makes prospects more likely to choose that brand or organization when the decision-making part of their buyer's journey arrives.

The link between repeated exposures and buyer choices has been examined for decades. Robert Zajonc, Ph.D., conducted experiments in the 1960s to discover if there was a link between test subjects' repeated exposure to a given stimulus and a positive perception of that stimulus. That study, published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, found a direct correlation between repeated exposure and "liking."[3] Thus, digital marketing—exposing prospective students to a steady but non-intrusive stream of positive information about your institution—could help nudge them towards your school when they make their final decision.

Use Psychology

Psychology doesn't have to be super complicated to be effective in marketing. Something as simple as choosing colors with "happy" associations, like a calm, friendly shade of blue, or images of lush, tree-lined campus walkways can induce positive emotions in your audience.

In general, you can use common psychological marketing techniques to smooth the way for prospective students to develop a positive impression of your college. Consider possibilities like:

- Including testimonials or reviews from former students to provide social proof of benefits
- Emphasizing authority like awards, recognitions, and best-of lists
- Using short, snappy content instead of content that demands a long attention span
- Starting with a small "ask" like signing up for informational emails, and building from there

Include Mail and Printed Materials

The first issue of *Octane*, published in 2017, included an article titled, "Does Direct Mail Make Sense?" I thought it was a necessary element for successful Student Search campaigns then, and I still take that stance now.

When you develop a commflow, don't write off direct mail and physical print pieces because of cost. Printed items are still relevant, and often make a more lasting impression than digital strategies. The majority of marketers (60%) say combining direct mail and digital strategy increases ROI.[4] And printed pieces have a longer "life" than emails, as proven by a USPS survey which determined direct mail pieces are kept an average of 17 days after they are received.[5]

Resources are limited at every institution. When choosing where to insert printed communications, enrollmentFUEL recommends being selective. For example, if you want to send postcards early in a recruiting stage, but are watching print and postage budgets, send out two or three emails first and remove those who unsubscribed from your mailing list.

Print can also tip the scales in your favor when you ask highly engaged inquiries to take action, like applying or depositing. Imagine you are an inquiry who opens an envelope to find a high-end viewbook with soft-touch coating and a debossed element on the front cover. Touching the cover generates a haptic response and a surge of interest, so you open the brochure. Large, colorful pictures combined with compelling copy greet you inside. As you look at the pictures, your imagination kicks into gear. Flipping through the viewbook, it is easy to picture life on campus and understand what makes this college special. Over the next week, you thumb through the viewbook multiple times and finally decide to take the next step.

Ink on paper can help you win the race to recruit. If you would like to discuss the best place in a recruiting cycle to include a printed touch, please reach out to me at mike.wesner@enrollmentfuel.com.

Audit

If you are actively looking for a way to improve, do an audit or hire a consultant to do one for you. It's always a good idea to check in from time to time on what's working and what could be improved.

Audits identify:

- Gaps in your practices
- Operational inefficiencies and wasted efforts
- Ways to efficiently use resources

Ultimately, an audit can help determine if your messaging and brand are aligned, and whether you are resonating with your audience.

Students like Alex are out there, waiting for the right college to come along and make a memorable impression. With an intelligent strategy, relatable messaging, and commflow expertise, your institution can recruit and win.

Mike Wesner, M.Ed., is the founder of enrollmentFUEL. He is always working behind the scenes with both enrollment and marketing leaders to help clients find innovative new solutions to improve Student Search outcomes. If you would like to share thoughts on what lies ahead for Strategic Enrollment Management leaders, Mike would welcome the conversation. Please get in touch with him at mike.wesner@enrollmentfuel.com.

ADULT LEARNERS AND CONTINUING EDUCATION

For adult, returning, and graduate students, a successful commflow will look a little different.

- You still need an omnichannel approach, including ads, texting, and phone calls
- Focus on a "speed to lead" process, contacting each lead who reaches out to your institution within 24 hours. The buyer's journey is often considerably shorter for adult learners. Once they decide to continue their education, they tend to move quickly into institution decision-making
- Develop a strategy—and a separate commflow—for "non-responsive" leads, including who fits into this category and what criteria should be met before you move them into this category

Leads in these categories have different needs. They are at a different place in life than traditional, first-time undergraduates. This audience seeks more personalized information on programs, up-front information about costs and financial aid, speed to a degree, and flexibility within course offerings.

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3 Zajonc, R. B. (1966, June). Attitudinal effects of mere exposure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology Monograph Supplement*, 9(2) Part 2, 1-27.

4 United States Postal Service. (n.d.). The future of direct mail. United States Postal Service. Retrieved June 25, 2022 from https://www.uspsdelivers.com/wp-content/uploads/The_Future_of_Direct_Mail_White_Paper.pdf.

5 Ryan, T. (2019, March 25). Does direct mail or email deliver greater results for retailers?. *RetailWire*. https://retailwire.com/discussion/does-direct-mail-or-email-deliver-greater-results-for-retailers/.

DECISION FATIGUE AND ITS IMPACT ON RECRUITING

By Jacquelyn D. Elliott, Ed.D.

Picture this: it's 3:00 p.m. on an ordinary workday in the admission office. You have been talking to people all day, guiding them as they make life-defining choices. You're feeling tired and drained, but there are still 2 hours to go before the day ends. You feel yourself starting to lose focus as you stare at your CRM and find it hard to determine what to do next.

This could be decision fatigue.

Decision fatigue is a condition recognized by the American Medical Association (AMA). AMA member Lisa MacLean, MD, defines the condition as "the idea that after making many decisions, your ability to make more and more decisions over the course of a day becomes worse. The more decisions you must make, the more fatigue you develop and the more difficult it can become."[1] Although it's not a new condition, the decision-making process (and life in general) has gotten more complex in recent years, leading to a significant rise in people experiencing decision fatigue.

Clinical studies have worked to understand the toll we pay for decision-making. In one study, one group was asked to merely think about choices and another group was asked to make choices. Researchers found that the group who *made choices* later exhibited lower overall performance, reduced physical stamina, and other signs of all-around fatigue.[2]

Decision fatigue can wind up having a significant impact on recruiting, too. As studies have shown, this condition leads to issues such as decreased concentration, procrastination, avoidance, and indecision. For recruiting professionals, whose jobs focus heavily on making decisions that have a significant impact on people other than themselves, the pressure to make good decisions is greater—and the consequences of working with fatigue can be greater, too. Recruiting professionals suffering from decision fatigue might struggle to evaluate prospects, lose track of critical information that needs to be passed along to those in the process chain to include the student or family, or procrastinate on time-sensitive tasks.

Fortunately, there are several techniques you can use to reduce stress, give your brain a break, and refresh yourself to combat the condition. The next time you feel your mind drifting or fatigue setting in, try one of these activities:

1. **Take a break.** Get up from your desk and go for a walk, whether that's around your block or just around your office. Hydrate or grab a snack if you need it. Close your eyes and meditate, or focus on just breathing for a few minutes to reset.
2. **Do hard tasks early in the day.** Take care of the tasks that need the most energy earlier in the day when you have enough get-up-and-go. That way, if you find yourself fatigued as the day winds down, you have some "easy" work to end the day.
3. **Keep a list of tasks.** A to-do list may seem old-fashioned, but it's an effective way to ensure you can stop thinking about *what* to do, and just focus on *doing* one thing at a time.
4. **Learn to say no and delegate.** You can't do everything. Instead, get comfortable saying no and delegating tasks that use up mental energy but don't help you achieve your goals. The trick here is that we often assign tasks to our top performers who get things done. Try spreading tasks equitably to create a division of labor that doesn't create decision-fatigue for your top performers.

In the admission department, decision fatigue is going to happen—it's a natural reaction to the many, many recruiting decisions you're asked to make daily. By being aware of the symptoms, and the ways to mitigate them, you can minimize their physical, mental, and emotional effects. Above all, be kind to yourself: no one can be 100% productive, 100% of the time. When you manage stress, it is better for everyone, from students and families, to colleagues, to, most importantly, *you*.

1 Berg, S. (2021, November 19). What doctors wish patients knew about decision fatigue. *American Medical Association*. https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-doctors-wish-patients-knew-about-decision-fatigue.

2 Colino, S. (2021, September 23). Decision fatigue: Why it's so hard to make up your mind these days, and how to make it easier. *The Seattle Times*. https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/decision-fatigue-why-its-so-hard-to-make-up-your-mind-these-days-and-how-to-make-it-easier/.

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