

# Walk the Walk, Talk the Talk

By Mark C. Perna

Be prepared, so that you can deliver an effective marketing message for your school anytime and anywhere.

Imagine you are standing in an elevator with one shot at making a great first impression. What would you say when asked, “What do you do?”

I was recently speaking at a conference and traveling in an elevator with several people, when I heard one person ask the other that magic question, “What do you do?”

It was a natural inquiry to make because the person on the receiving end wore a conference badge creating the open door. I listened intently to hear the reply, because I was speaking later in the day on innovative career and technical education enrollment marketing strategies, and I was intrigued to hear the well-crafted marketing message that was about to spew forth.

The answer: “I work at ABC school.”

The questioning continued, “How is it going?”

“Not bad.”

“What do you do there?”

“I teach.”

Not a glowing endorsement. Now I understand that we are not all Donald Trump with the outgoing personality and self-promotion expertise to deliver an impromptu commercial anywhere, anytime—but what if we could? What if this exchange between two strangers in an elevator could have been altered slightly to deliver a powerful and concise marketing message that positively affects public awareness in your community? What if it simply *connected*?

How you tell the story behind your school’s success means the difference between making a connection with your community and positively shaping awareness, or leaving a negative impression and losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the very public you are trying to serve. And if you have competitors who get their

point across in a more clear, concise and compelling way—even if they’re pitching mediocre programs—they could steal your prospective students because you failed to capture attention right out of the gate.

## Marketing is Everyone’s Job

Who is responsible for marketing at your school? Is it you, or is that someone else’s job?

The truth is that marketing is everyone’s job. Sure, most schools have someone whose job is specifically that of marketing, but it is the rest of the team that truly makes or breaks the success of every enrollment campaign. Marketing your school is the job of everyone in your organization . . . and that means you too!

So, how do you create the ideal impression for your school? The secret is to choose your words carefully and get right to the point. Whether you are an administrator, teacher, marketer, or serve in a critical support function, it is crucial that you learn to walk the walk and talk the talk as an ambassador of your school.





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### Perception is Reality

Simply answer the following four questions:

- What is your school's function?
- What problem do you solve (or what demand do you meet)?
- How are you different?
- Why should anyone care?

Craft these answers into a 30-second elevator speech or commercial that you and your organization can deliver throughout your community when an opportunity arises. In my elevator ride, perception became reality, and that reality was less than positive.

As the inquisitive stranger departed, he said with a negative spin, "Well, good luck with that."

My thought: he was less than impressed.

### Transfer of Enthusiasm

I learned early in my career that impressions are formed because of a transfer of enthusiasm. If people are passionate about what they do or what their organizations have achieved, they transfer that

enthusiasm via their communication, and typically a positive impression is formed—the transfer is complete.

Perhaps my elevator experience would have ended positively if the benefits of that teacher's school or program came through in that 30-second exchange.

What if, when confronted with that magic question, the teacher simply had said, "I teach [name of program] at ABC school. We provide a full range of challenging career and technical education programs that engage students and help them make the most out of their high school experience. We prepare them for college, careers or whatever their future holds."

The rest of the exchange might have gone like this:

"How is it going?"

"Great! It's rewarding making a difference in students' lives and seeing them energized about going to school."

This leaves a much different impression. What you say is as important as how you say it, but how often you say it makes the difference.

### Make a Difference

Imagine that conversation taking place throughout your community multiplied by the number of people in your organization over years of delivering the message—powerful!

Walking the walk and talking the talk as individuals and as an organization are a critical part of shaping community awareness and impressions over time. Levies, funding, legislative impact and enrollment are all connected to impressions that are formed at the most basic level.

How well you tell the story, transfer the enthusiasm, and perpetuate the flourishing reality of your school, as well as career and technical education, will determine your long-term success in making a difference.

### Call to Action

Regardless of your title, I challenge you to create your own 30-second elevator speech that tells the story of your program, your school, or career and technical education. Share it often, and engage people in the many benefits and significant value that is delivered to students every day.

By walking the walk and talking the talk, you will improve your organization and significantly accelerate your journey on the road to being enrollment rich.

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