

RECRUITING FOR YOUR CAREER AND TECHNICAL STUDENT ORGANIZATION

By Richard Faulkner

THE ACADEMIC YEAR IS BARELY HALF OVER AND IT IS TIME TO RECRUIT FOR NEXT YEAR.

The good and bad about career and technical education (CTE) is the aspect of choice. Many students choose to study subjects such as marketing, while others are placed there as a result of indecision. Regardless of circumstances the time has arrived to think of next

year and how you will get students enrolled in CTE.

"But I still have so much to do!" This time of year, most educators are busy with lesson plans, curriculum development and classroom management, but recruitment for your career and technical student organization (CTSO) and enrollment in your classes is an important to-do list item just

as well. Here, a few tips that may help you with these efforts.

Like politics, all recruiting is local.

Don't let yourself be discouraged by other programs that have more than 600 students. Success is measured by the needs of your school and community. And remember, current and prospective students

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are buying into you as much as they are buying into your program. You can't hide in your corner of the school and expect them to find you. They need the help and direction, and you know the students you want; go out and get them!

Establish a presence in your school that makes students want to know and learn more about what you do. Recruit staff who support the development of your program and CTSO as well as students. Invite your peers in for discussion and a demonstration. A fellow teacher who is familiar with what you do will steer students your way. Students who are successful products of your program will be strong “word of mouth” advertising for you. Remember that people tell those close to them all about the positives, and they tell everyone about the negatives.

Now for a few specific ideas to help you recruit. It is important to understand that what works for one program may flop with another. Always be open to trying a new technique, something different from or in addition to what you've always done. In my role as a marketing teacher and advisor for the DECA organization at Albuquerque Public Schools, I have found success using an approach that combines several tactics.

Letters to Students and Parents

We composed a letter that is sent to specific students. Program enrollment and membership in the CTSO are open to everyone, but we know those students we want and target them with old-fashioned correspondence. We will also send one home to communicate with prospective

students' parents. They like to know that their child is being recruited; in the letter we highlight the benefits of the program (e.g., certifications, dual credit, competition, internships or mentorships); elaborate on the opportunities for travel and cultural, as well as professional development; and discuss the benefit CTE presents for college and career readiness.

Positive Reviews from Former Students

Words from former students also help in our recruiting efforts. We ask for testimonials that are often included in marketing letters sent to students and their parents, for a sense of real-world perspective. Positioned well, quotes from well-known students and alumni can have a positive influence on anyone considering a future in CTE. I have even used quotes from students who weren't in the program but regretted not making the choice. Parents definitely pay attention to positive reviews.

Community Outreach

Sometimes we deliver letters to students during the homeroom period, accompanied by freshly baked cookies. You know how the old saying goes: The way to a student's heart is through their stomach. Current CTSO members will invite their friends to specific events throughout the year. And, of course, we do maintain a presence at elective fairs, parent or back-to-school nights, and other promotional events and activities.

We reach out to other programs to initiate cooperative support where appropriate. A successful CTSO will give back by participating in community events

and activities. Many of our students are leaders on campus and we always support those efforts and highlight their successes. It should not be an either/or situation for students; they should have the flexibility to explore their interests, and to take advantage of as many opportunities as they can to be active and engaged in their communities. Sometimes they have to choose, but we do what we can to keep those conflicts to a minimum.

Social Media

Be where the students are — on social media. Facebook is not enough. Have a presence on Twitter, Instagram and even Snapchat. You don't have to do it all, but it is important to discover where your students are hanging out and reach out to them. If you don't know, ask them.

We have tried mystery campaigns (which didn't work so well) and bribing our current students to recruit their friends (a moderate success), but the only time we really failed was when we did nothing. Talk to your peers and don't be afraid to “borrow” the good ideas. I have learned in my career that there is no idea too good to steal.

Good luck with your efforts and good hunting! ■

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