Kevin’s Tips for Effective Parent Recruitment

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Parent recruitment should be viewed as a community effort drawing upon as many members as possible to spread the word that parent training is available and encouraged in the community. There are no secrets... we have to work really hard!

Utilize a normative and multi-level marketing approach to recruitment

Normative marketing includes efforts to establish a norm for healthy behavior in a given population. These efforts can focus on promoting prevention (or 'health promotion') as “something we do” in the community. Individual programs fit into this larger scheme and should be promoted as part of the larger picture of community prevention and healthy development.

Normative marketing efforts can take place at many different levels and venues in a community.

1. Use individual relationships to recruit participants. Recruitment can be most persuasive when it is done through personal relationships. Use the Community Board members to ‘deliver’ parents to training classes. Members’ connections, personal role modeling, and efforts in the community are important.
   a. Hold information sessions, perhaps including a single session of the parent training program, for all those people who will provide referrals to the class. Recruitment can be even more effective if recruiters have attended the full program themselves.
   b. Create easy-to-understand materials about the programs that recruiters can distribute to a broad audience.
   c. Don’t forget about having children recruit their parents into parenting sessions; when students invite parents it’s hard for parents to say no!

2. Encourage Community Leaders to model behavior by attending parent training sessions. Their participation will send the message that training is desirable and important. For example: “Parent training is a hallmark of this school; we all do parent training. The principal and his/her family attended the first series of classes and other staff are enrolled currently.”

3. Political marketing:
   a. Have local leaders proclaim a ‘Parent Awareness Week’
   b. Establish parent training (or other program) as a standard part of operations of a given service provider (e.g. Children’s Services staff all attend a parent training class as part of their orientation; clients of Children’s Services also attend a parent training class as part of the standard services offered to families). Start by offering the parent training curricula onsite, then expand to other locations.
4. Media blitzes. “Passive recruitment,” such as using advertising alone, is not enough to encourage parents to attend sessions. However, media campaigns can be a core component of normative marketing.

5. Endorsements from celebrities (e.g., a pro basketball player) sent home in a letter to all parents.

6. Community Family Fairs that promote healthy youth development. It is often effective to schedule more than one Fair per year according to seasonal themes (e.g., Amazing Autumn Extravaganza). Make these events fun, have prizes, and set up resource booths to enroll parents in programs. Sometimes single sessions of parenting classes can be offered at this kind of event as a ‘teaser’ to encourage parents to sign up for the full course. These events should be used to highlight all prevention efforts taking place in the community.

7. One-session ‘teaser’ sessions at special events or parent nights.

8. Recruitment through other systems in the community that address youth issues such as youth sports programs, other community services, and physicians. Think creatively! For example, ask your local physician(s) to include a referral to a parent training class as part of the annual check up for all students entering middle school. Physicians can offer information about the class and strongly recommend the parent attend the class for ‘more information about up and coming drug and alcohol issues for your teenager.’ This approach will be most effective if the doctor has attended or is planning to attend the class him/herself.

Understand any barriers to parents attending classes and address them.

1. Perception issue (e.g., this kind of program is only for ‘bad’ parents): make it normative in your community for parents to attend parenting classes, as described above.

2. Physical barriers: provide transportation and offer sessions in a variety of locations.

3. Financial: offer incentives, provide child care, and/or provide dinner.

4. Time: find times that don’t interfere with other important activities in town.
   a. Fall and Winter are best times to offer parenting programs.
   b. Winter programs can be scheduled through December 16th, but after this date full attendance will be very difficult to obtain.
   c. Programs that begin after Spring break will also be difficult to ensure full attendance and will require even more rigorous recruitment and incentives.
   d. Avoid Mondays in Fall (Monday night football!)
   e. Avoid Wednesdays (many churches have activities on Wednesday evenings).
   f. Saturday mornings and daytimes can be successful.
   g. Don’t forget about daytime sessions. Surprisingly, they can be quite good!

Incentives

1. Most important incentive: consumer satisfaction! People come to a training because it’s relevant to them, it makes sense and they enjoy it. Feedback from parents overwhelmingly shows that parents especially appreciate time in parent trainings devoted to sharing and talking with other parents;
there has to be time scheduled into each session so that parents can talk with one another. Also ensure that your trainer is a highly trained and highly skilled workshop leader. Parents want to learn something they didn’t know; it needs to be delivered by someone who is credible.

2. Raffle off a big prize for all parents who complete the series (or complete 80% of sessions). For example, place a nice shiny new bike in a conspicuous location with notices that all parents receive a token for each parent training session they attend.

3. Offer incentives at each session — fun activities like a coupon at a local restaurant, basket of goodies, or prizes that encourage parent/child activities, such as books they can read together, movie tickets, etc are good choices. Have the participants fold their name tags in half at the end of each session, place them in a hat and draw for the prize.

4. Provide child care...2 options
   a. Provide an allowance to participants to arrange their own child care. This option assumes that parents have a network of child care providers to draw from. However, this may not be the case, so you will want to recruit a cadre of qualified child care providers available to provide such services.
   b. Provide childcare at the parent training sessions. This is more difficult and requires a number of different resources (e.g., games and other toys; snacks; diapers and baby wipes for infants; even magicians or other entertainers). Be sure to use adults as primary child care providers (teacher aides are often a good choice). Teens can be helpers but, for liability reasons, you don’t want to have them in the primary role.