

Banding Together with Your Community

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Scientists have often questioned why fire ants can survive floods because fire ants' bodies are denser than water. After research, it was discovered that they actually link their legs together building an "ant raft." Additionally, they have tiny hairs on their bodies that trap air bubbles. Interestingly, the ants would die if a flood impacted them individually, but as an insect group, they cling to each other and can endure a flood. As we begin to come out of the pandemic experience, it is the perfect time to proactively and intentionally link your parent boosters together with your community to reinforce the success of your programs.

In a similar manner, booster organizations can band together with friendships forged through events and programs to be stronger as a group than they would be individually. That revelation is what makes booster organizations thrive and do exceptional things for students. In addition to direct friendship, there is a fascinating phenomenon that Mark Granovetter discovered in research called "weak-tie acquaintances"; these friendships can be leveraged in booster organizations to expand the influence and impact of the booster community (Duhigg, 2012).

The concept of weak-tie acquaintances has deep ramifications for a booster organization, particularly regarding fund raisers. For instance, if your organization plans a fruit sale fundraiser, often students ask close family, friends or neighbors to buy the fruit. Once those people groups have been solicited, the potential "buyers" are tapped. How can the fundraiser continue to grow and offer profit for your booster organization? The answer is found in weak-tie friendships.

Weak-tie friendships are those friends of friends with whom we connect. These people aren't close friends, but you do know them. They might be part of a civic or service organization (i.e., Kiwanis, Lions Club, Rotary club, Scouting); these acquaintances might be at your church, synagogue, or mosque. These contacts might be part of your fraternity, sorority, or neighborhood facebook page. Granovetter posits that these groups or organizations "represent the links that connect people who have acquaintances in common, who share membership in social networks, but aren't directly connected by the strong ties of friendship themselves." (Duhigg, 2012, p. 223-224) These weak-tie friendships are "gold" for a booster organization as these people can be influenced to participate in your fundraiser not because they know you well personally but because of social currency - they want to be a part of something because others in the community are joining in.

Granovetter learned that weak-tie acquaintances were frequently more important than close friends in discovering job opportunities because casual acquaintances offer a wider access to people. These contacts that we might relate to several times a year are the people who might know about a job that we haven't heard about as opposed to the family and friends that we have already mined for information (Duhigg, 2012). The same premise is true of booster fundraisers, special events, corporate sponsorship programs and donations. To expand these markets, more "buyers" need to be harnessed. Your weak-tie connections are a strong source of possible revenue.

People want to be a part of a winning team; they want to join in a project bigger than themselves. When explanation that others in an organization are participating in a project, a common response is that people to want to be a part of the project because of social belonging. If others in an organization are helping, others want to participate. Importantly, social belonging is part of everyday life and it's free; therefore, harness it to your advantage.

Consider creating events to which weak-tie friends can be invited, for instance:

Veteran's Day and other parade performances

Outdoor pops concerts

Chamber groups performing for monthly historic society, arts & humanities organizations, or VFW chapters

Mini pep rallies for assisted living residents

Drumline performances at a local shopping center for local community or event day

Let your weak-tie friends know of specific events and fundraisers by:

Sharing calendar events via facebook

Liking and commenting on your weak-tie friends social media accounts

Posting stories through personal and community social networks

Reporting face-to-face program information in civic groups, service organizations, etc.

Placing event flyers on community or workplace bulletin boards (print and virtual)

Positioning event flyers on community store windows

Think about creating weak-tie connection partnerships:

Small business owners to offer fundraiser items as client gifts

Business owners to offer fundraiser items as employee gifts

Partnerships offering in kind services (e.g., marching contest advertisement for water bottle donations, jazz band performs live, at a local bistro, in exchange for providing box lunches at an away game meal)

With the use of weak-tie connections, information about your booster activities can spread faster and have more impact on your organization and community. When weak-tie acquaintances are leveraged, it's often difficult to not be a part of what your booster club is doing because of the need social belonging in the community. Just as the ants, at the beginning of this article, linked together to literally save their lives, your organization can unleash fundraising, special events, and corporate sponsorship programs potential by banding together using strong and weak-tie relationships.

References:

Duhigg, Charles. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. New York: Random House. 2012

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