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HOLD AN OPEN HOUSE THAT SAYS, “WE ARE ALIVE IN CHRIST!”

Why “Open House?”

Open houses are different than parties. Open Houses allow guests to come anytime between the announced hours and not worry about being late, or having to stay until the end! Open Houses are free in form—more un-structured than a formal party. Guests can move around the entire house/school at will, and talk to whomever they choose—and not talk to whomever they choose! Refreshments may be available all during the event—not a particular sit-down meal—and guests are free to partake—or not.



So, what’s the big deal, right? Just unlock the doors and let people walk through, right? WRONG!!! Do THAT, and I can guarantee your “guests” will never come back! Worse—they’ll have plenty to say about you to everyone they meet the next week or month—and it won’t be good! (Research tells us that people will repeat a positive story they hear three times, but a negative one as many as nine times!) Yikes! We need to triple our efforts to get out our Good News!!

Let’s start by how to plan an Open House that brings you new students, instills pride in your current school families, and energizes the entire school community!

Make a Plan—

Forming a committee of teachers, parents and students with a strong chairperson is critical. Choose well! Review past events for clues as to what “works,” and what doesn’t. Create an action plan and assign all duties to the minutest detail.



Who will order the cookies? How will they be presented—on a table with napkins—or passed on platters by Student Ambassadors? (I like the latter!) Who will pay for them? Maybe a local bakery will donate them in exchange for the exposure! Let them place a sign and thank them for their support!

STUDENT AMBASSADORS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE



*"Next to doing the right thing,
the most important thing is to let
people know you are
doing the right thing."
—John D. Rockefeller*



*"Our success is a direct result of
knowing how to market a brand
and having the right people
representing the brand."
—Greg Norman, Pro Golfer*



***"The fact is, everyone is in sales.
Whatever area you work in, you do have
clients and you do need to sell."***

—Jay Abraham, Marketing Expert

Think about conflicts—open house at the same time as the Super Bowl probably will not draw your desired audience!

Keep the time manageable--best length for open house—2-3 hours.

Decide whether or not you will offer entertainment and/or a presentation. If you decide to have one, plan it in the middle of the O.H. This might be a student performance and short welcome by the principal, for example.

Develop a theme. Many open houses in St. Louis are held to celebrate Catholic Schools Week in January-February. Maybe the purpose of your open house is to celebrate the acquisition of new technology or to bless the addition of new classrooms! Name it!



The Guest List—

If enrollment is the goal—invite new parish families, families with pre-school aged children, families of children in local independent pre-schools or daycare facilities, etc. and show them why your school is the right place for their child!

If advancement is the goal—invite alumni, parishioners, community leaders, (Mayor Slay visits his alma mater, St. Mary's High School, at right!) benefactors, etc. and showcase your strengths and your GOALS (NEEDS!)

The Invitation—

The more personal, the better! Phone calls—personal and computer-generated; the school website, Facebook, Twitter, yard signs (be careful to stay in parish boundaries!); e-mail blasts; radio spots; door flyers (not on homes in another Catholic school's boundaries!) billboards; formal invitations to local community officials, donors, key alumni, board members, benefactors, and local pastors of parishes/churches without schools.



Spend your marketing dollars wisely!) If you spend the money on a direct mailing, invite your guests to bring the postcard back for something—a ticket for your raffle, or some inexpensive "gift."

Maybe someone would dress up in a costume, or invite "Clifford the Big Red Dog," or some such celebrity, and offer photo ops for visiting children!

MAKE THE SCHOOL SHINE!



Tip...

If you have a hard time describing what you want a classroom, hallway, meeting room, foyer, or any space to look like, find one you like, take a picture and say, "Make it look like this!"

—Sue Brown



Place your brochures, flyers, etc. in local businesses—hair and nail salons, daycare centers, pre-schools, libraries, donut shops, etc. (Always ask permission! Inexpensive brochure holders can be purchased at Office Depot or Office Max—a nice touch! Perhaps the parent who patronizes the business frequently is the best person to make “the ask!”)

Data Collection—

Hold a raffle and ask guests to fill out a “ticket” with their contact information as their chance to win the prize. Draw the winning ticket during the event, but let guests know they will be called if not present at the actual drawing! Make the call immediately if winner is not present!

Save all postcards for entry into a database for future contact! (Future contact No 1: “Thank you for attending our open house last Sunday!”)

The raffle prize can be a gift basket (school supplies, logo wear, books, etc.) on display, or tantalize prospective parents with free uniforms, spirit wear, or discounted tuition upon enrollment! Be creative and generous!

Have a guestbook for all guests to sign—assign someone to make sure they do! (Student Ambassadors do this well!)

The Day of Open House—

All administrators, faculty, staff, and select parents and students (ambassadors) should be on board—dressed professionally (or in perfect uniform!) complete with name badges (permanent is preferable) and smiles!

All should be prepared for their duties—Tours are effective and a good alternative to allowing guests to meander aimlessly. Choose tour guides carefully, and make sure to practice. (Some people are better at standing behind the punch bowl!) Tell

stories/anecdotes along the way that give “flavor” to the “facts.”

Parents should be prepared to give witness to the benefits their school has provided to their children and give compelling evidence as to why these guests should consider the



school for their children. Student ambassadors make excellent tour guides if trained well.



CURB APPEAL! MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION



Outcomes rarely turn on grand gestures or the art of the deal, but on whether you've sent someone a thank-you note.

*~ Bernie Brillstein, The Little
Stuff Matters Most*

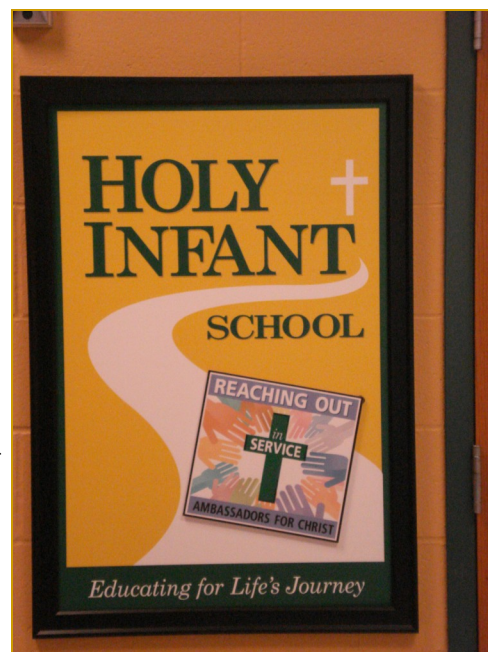


The building should be beyond clean and orderly, and attractively decorated with student work, students working (if appropriate) and best attributes highlighted! Have TV's in every classroom? Be sure your school video is playing on them as visitors tour the school! They may not stop and watch, but the effect will be subliminal and cumulative!

Have winning science fair/History Day projects on display with their creators standing by to explain their projects.
Catholic identity should be evident in every place and in every person!

A map of the building and FAQ's or a Fact Sheet presented to guests will be helpful, and a take-away reminder of your highlights. Make it attractive and informative—include contact information!
Registration packets should be prepared and available. Some schools are including CD's and DVD's to watch as a family at home.

The Day(s) After Open House—
Celebrate your successful open house and discuss everything that went right, and what went wrong, so your next open house will be even better.



The OH Committee should meet and discuss the strengths and weakness of the open house just held. Write both down in detail. Otherwise, you'll forget!

Plan next steps—Who will enter information into database? Who will write thank-you's to all who helped and to community leaders who attended? (Spread this task among a number of committee members! Principal will thank the pastor, student ambassadors and faculty. You might hold a small thank-you breakfast one morning after the open house for all volunteers. The committee chair might thank all committee members, and committee members can write personal TY notes to special guest attendees, such as the mayor, councilwoman, alderman, etc. You can never say too many "thank you's!!"

Keep a record and samples of everything you did—hopefully, you will have pictures of classrooms and hallways decorated, signage, refreshments, etc.

Share a photo gallery on your website of pictures taken at your open house. Re-invite those who could not attend for a personal tour! Never close the door!!!

Begin planning for your next, even more spectacular, Open House!