

Seven Steps to Partnership Success

1. INITIATE – If used in the context of the beginning of a partnership, this is the recruitment stage...finding each other. However, it can also be the rekindling of the relationship, the getting set for the new school year by making the first contact. Do not wait to be contacted—make that call to your partner and set up a meeting. Use staff and faculty contacts to make connections to potential partners. But also encourage businesses to initiate contact for the school with other businesses in regard to becoming partners. Current business partners are your best ambassadors.

2. DEDICATE – In order to succeed, you must get commitment from the top. This is absolutely essential in the establishment of a partnership! Be sure to be communicating with the business’s “decision maker.”

- ✓ Once you have the commitment established, you must dedicate yourself to ensuring the success of the partnership. This does not happen by good intentions alone; it will take effort on the part of both partners.
- ✓ Maintaining a partnership requires organization and management, just as any worthwhile project. And like any good relationship, it requires attention, understanding, and patience!
- ✓ As the school’s Business Partner Coordinator, you should be the main contact and facilitator of the partnerships. However, some schools manage the regular, direct contact between the school and the partner by committees or staff members designated as the partner contact person.
- ✓ Once a new partnership is established, build in time and opportunities to get to know one another. Invite the partner for a tour of the school and/or for lunch.

3. COMMUNICATE – As in any relationship, this is the absolute key to success! Most problems in partnerships are related to lack of communication or poor communication. Try to together to find out about each other. Visit each other so you can more clearly see what needs there are and visualize resources to meet those needs.

Businesses depend on the school to tell them how they can help. Schools need direction on what businesses are interested in doing. A good starting point is using a type of business interest inventory or resource assessment tool, which allows a business to indicate the areas in which they are willing and able to assist the school. By going over this form, the school can begin to formulate ideas on ways to utilize the resources indicated. It's a good idea to review this each year to enable the business to indicate current interests.

Is it wrong to ask for money? That is the big question! Schools need to let businesses know what they need, and, unfortunately, schools often need things that cost money. In addition to funding, share ideas on how the business can assist in meeting the school's needs in other ways, too. Some partnerships are financial resource-oriented, others are human resource-oriented. This program is about communicating needs and working together to creatively solve problems, so be sure to explore ideas.

- ✓ Get together at regularly planned intervals. How often depends on the needs/wishes of the partners involved. You will need to determine what is comfortable for the partner. Whatever the arrangement, keep the lines of communication open. **Example:** A high school established a partnership committee made up of faculty members representing all curriculum areas. These members serve as liaisons to specific partners (usually to businesses that relate to their curriculum area). The entire group, faculty and business partners, meets on a monthly basis, during first period at school. They discuss activities at school, school needs, achievements, etc. Partners feel very connected to school!
- ✓ However you choose to do it, communicate your needs and expectations of each other. Establish a clear vision! Once the partnership is established, work together on a formal plan of action to get those good ideas and intentions on paper with an agreement form. This helps assure attention, continuity and resources. Expectations are very clear!
- ✓ Communication should be on-going, planned and two-way and not only when you need something. Send each other your newsletters and share calendars.

- ✓ Communicate within your school. Make sure everyone (parents and staff) is aware of the partnership!
- ✓ Keep in communication with your district coordinator as well. She will appreciate knowing what your partners are doing and can assist you with any needs.

4. PARTICIPATE – Just getting an agreement on paper is not enough.

Remember: *“A vision without action is but a day dream.”* The business partners need to feel a clear relationship with the school. If the main emphasis is on human resources, you must make sure that they are as personally involved as they wish to be.

Schools need to feel connected to the business, as well. Tour each other’s facilities, meet each other’s staffs. Invite each other to participate in events and training opportunities. For example, in one school the business partners developed the idea to meet with curriculum groups on a teacher work days to discuss ways to be involved.

Let the community know that your school is interested in reaching out to the local businesses to encourage their participation in your school. List school needs in newsletters and post on community bulletin boards.

Bottom line: **Engage your partner emotionally to gain its loyalty!**

5. APPRECIATE – *“The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated.”* Recognition means retention! Retention is the art of keeping the partners involved by encouraging their annual reenlistment and is the key to maintaining a strong, effective partnership. The decision to remain in the partnership relates directly to the benefits received by all of the participants.

Have pride in your partnerships. Be sure that you are thanking the business partners often, both privately and publicly.

School personnel need appreciation, too! The more time business people spend in the schools, the more they are aware of the dedicated staff teaching in your school, the more they will be willing to assist with staff appreciation events.

6. EVALUATE - Effective evaluation is in the interest of all partners. Good evaluation techniques will tend to motivate partners to become more deeply involved.

At some point, most likely at the end of each school year, meet together to assess the partnership to determine if the partnership objectives were met. The evaluation can be an opportunity for the partners to increase their commitment or express concerns. If a partnership did not meet its objective, partners should evaluate activities which were not successful, incorporate new strategies and try again.

This will help determine direction for future activities. Businesses can evaluate level of involvement for the new school year. Also, partners can use the evaluation to fuel celebration of success.

Build on successes. Relationships take time to develop. Partners need to be motivated by involvement in something that works! The partnership must work for all involved!

7. CELEBRATE – Do not just work together... *celebrate* together! Include partners in special events all through the school year. Celebrate the impact of the partnership. Let them know they are making a difference. That work working together is making a difference in student achievement and behavior.

The warning signs of an ineffective partnership are inactivity. Do not allow your partnership to stagnate.

When you have gone through these seven steps, you will need to start all over again. A successful partnership is dynamic and cyclical!