



Is Your Telephone Voice Friendly?

What you really want to do is make people feel good about your school, whether they are students, parents, staff, or the community at large. So you hold open houses and awards assemblies and send a newsletter home with the kids. But have you ever thought about those little things—seemingly trivial experiences—that can destroy in seconds a relationship you have worked for years to build up? Look around your building and ask yourself these questions—and think carefully about your answers:

- *How do you answer the phone?* Is the voice friendly or condescending? How many times does it ring before somebody picks it up? How many times is a caller transferred before getting an answer?

- *How do you handle visitors in the hallway?* Are they greeted like trespassers or members of the family?

- *What kind of help is there for visitors to find where they want to go?* All schools have signs warning people they must report to the office, but how many of them show people where the office is?

How to Make People Feel Good About Your School

- *How are visitors greeted in the office?* Does somebody look up immediately with a smile, or must the visitor stand interminably behind a counter before somebody acknowledges his or her presence?

- *How do you welcome new students and their parents* on their first day in your building? Are they just thrown into the crowd or is there an effort made to greet them? If the principal is too busy to say hello when they arrive, how about a phone call home in the evening to show that a caring human being is in charge of the school?

- *How do you welcome, and orient, new employees?* The way they're treated on the first day can color their attitude about their job for years. And this doesn't only mean inside staff. How about the crossing guards and playground aides? Do you make them feel like part of the family too?

- *How do you report a child's progress?* Do the parents have to wait for a quarterly computer printout, or does the school make an effort to tell mom and dad when their kids do something good?

- *How do you report bad news to parents?* Can you find something a little more humane than a form headed, "Discrepancy Report"? And what about the average student who doesn't get

into trouble? Isn't it worth the effort to remind the parents that you know the kid's alive?

- *How do you let the staff know what's going on* in the



Do you Welcome New Students and Employees?

building and the school district? "Family meetings" of whole staff—professional and support—are great morale boosters and guarantee accurate information.

- *Do you have a student or parent handbook* to interpret the rules to the people who will be affected and to set the tone for the school? If so, is it genuinely helpful, telling readers whom to call with problems, or is it a principal's flowery

greeting followed by 10 pages headed, "You will be suspended if . . .?"

● *How do you involve people in the regular life of the school building*—volunteers, lunch-hour aides, members of advisory committees—people who contribute to the school but rarely get to see it in action?

● *How do you plan school functions involving the community?* Do you schedule events like kindergarten roundup from 9-noon and 1-3 because that's convenient for you, or do you tailor the hours to the convenience of working parents?

● *How worthwhile are your parent-teacher conferences?* Are your teachers as uptight as the parents, or do you prepare them for the experience? Do you take advantage of the opportunity to pass out informational material as well as solicit the parents' views about the school and its program?

● *What do you do to attract parents and other citizens to school programs?* Is the content dry and esoteric, or do you base the program on what they want to talk about? Do you make a positive effort to lure senior citizens and local businessmen into your building? Wouldn't they be more likely to show up if they were involved in the planning of your programs?

● *How do you introduce new ideas to the kids, the staff and the parents?* Too much too fast often goes right down the drain, but involving them in the planning and implementation process can guarantee a smooth transition.

● *Do you know what to do when the media calls?* Does the principal know how to respond to the press during an emergency? Is there a formal procedure set up in the office, or is everybody expected to wing it and risk a distorted story?



How Do You Respond to the Press?

● *How do you provide for regular feedback in your building?* The best thing is to ask for reactions right away. Ask parents at the end of a teacher conference how valuable it was for them, or give them an anonymous questionnaire to fill out asking their feelings about the school. At the end of a PTA or community meeting, ask for suggestions about the next one.

● *Do you ignore the kids when they leave the school?* Exit interviews or structured questionnaires can be real eye-openers. Ask students when they graduate or move away what it was really like in the school and what they think can be done to improve it. And listen to the answers.

● *How do you provide for recognition of students and staff?* Periodic award presentations or other methods of praising people in public cost little but let people know you care for them—and inspire them to work harder.

● *Assuming you have a community newsletter, do you take the time to evaluate it and ask yourself: If you weren't you, would you*

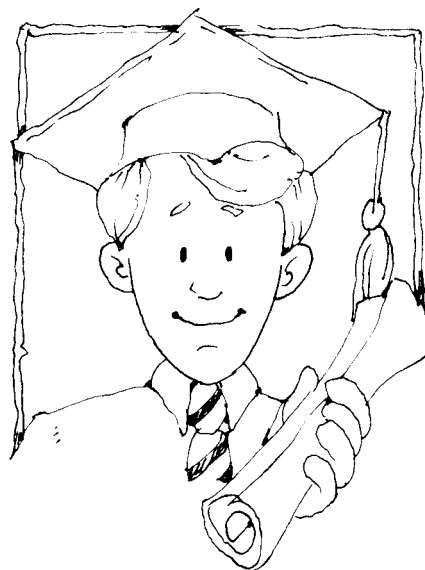
read it . . . and understand it?

● *How do you evaluate the performance of teachers and other staff members?*

● *What do you do to put some pride in the place?* School spirit does a lot more than just sell football tickets. Catchy slogans that students and staff can rally around—based on everybody's understanding of what your school stands for—can raise sagging morale and make a world of difference in the entire operation of a school.

● *Sometimes a principal's priority list has little room for activities like these because of the emphasis on academic excellence and higher test scores. Nobody questions the importance of those big goals, but all too often it's the little things that can make the difference between a skeptical school community and a supportive one.* □

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Do You Keep in Touch with Graduates?