



Mistakes That Will Do Serious Harm to Your Alumni Program

1. Allow leaders in your community to think of your alumni as only a source of revenue.

We hear evidence of this one often. "We have to get those alumni addresses so that we can give them the chance to give." Really, those alumni might be ready to hear from you but try not to let anyone see them as great big checkbooks. And be careful with the "building a relationship" language: they have a relationship with your school already. They just don't have a relationship with you.

2. Have one alumni page on your website asking them to fill out a form so that we can "stay in touch."

This is so discouraging. The website is your front door, open 24/7. Imagine some friends from the class of '83 who have just gotten together for a beer and they pull out their phones to check out your website. They go to the Alumni tab and what they find is a form for them to fill out. They're knocking, and no one is answering. Give them real history, and pictures, and news of reunions. Give them news, and invitations to come visit classrooms or join the Board. If you don't do this, you have essentially absconded with their school. You might as well take the tab down because there is nothing for them to get excited about.

3. When they fill out that form, ignore them; just add their contact information to your database.

Alright, so they did fill out the form, even though they were not excited about it. You do have a second chance to excite them when you "call on them." (Filling out the form is like waving their hand in class: "Me, me, here I am, call on me!") Send them a quick "welcome to the fold" note, not an automated one, please. Call on them! Be excited to hear from them.

4. Ignore your school's history.

Most of you might have a couple paragraphs on your website. Are your alumni able to see their experience of your community in those paragraphs? Kudos to you if they can. We know that you have photographs; scan them and post them. Tell your story; invite them to tell theirs. Have features about former faculty members; have a link to the website of the religious order that staffed your school. Invite them to come to be interviewed by eighth graders, to come talk to students about their jobs or their experience in college. Remind your faculty, staff, parents and current students of the role that alumni play in your history every chance that you get.

5. Do nothing to make it easy for alumni to "reune" in the school building.

Help your school and parish administration understand that you are responsible for providing them with a venue for their reunion if they want one. You don't have to pay for it but you can make it much easier

for them to get together by sharing information, offering school tours, giving catering suggestions, securing the liquor license, arranging for set-up and clean-up, etc.

6. Share your alumni mailing list with the parish so that they can solicit them, too.

There is an alumni group and they will not give the school the data they have collected. This common struggle seems so odd at first: surely we own the alumni data, how can this alumni group tell us that they won't give it to us? Most likely they don't want to give it to you because they aren't sure what you are going to do with it. Do you have someone who is going to love it and care for it and keep it sacred? (Say "Yes, we do.") They are afraid that the data they have is going to be unceremoniously dumped into the parish data and that they will be solicited by the parish and not treated with the respect and TLC that they deserve. Do not let this "data dump" happen under any circumstances: this is sure death to an alumni program.

7. Communicate with them only when you are asking for something.

*We all know better than this, I know, but make communication a priority and include electronic news letters, print newsletters, Facebook, etc. Remember: communication **is** the ask.*

8. Make them pay to join your "association."

The only time that this is appropriate is if there is some real alumni association that is led by alumni and they decide to request dues. If such an organization exists at your school do your very best to have a close and loving relationship with them so that their work supports your mission and their gifts are closely aligned with your funding priorities. If no such organization exists who are you to determine that your alumni have to pay dues to be your alumni?

9. Do not be concerned about turnover in your development office; the school owns the data and it will be there forever.

*The best thing you can do for your school is to stay there. Change in development staff can be brutal for the program. Even if the program is never unstaffed it can be dealt serious blows by a change in brand (unless it is time for a change in brand), change in voice, (unless it is time, etc.) To many of your school's alumni, **you** are the voice of the school, **you** are the person with whom they have the relationship. Try not to undervalue this – or let your colleagues undervalue it.*

10. I bet you have your own idea of what could cripple your program. Fill it in here!

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