

so, here in New Hampshire School Volunteer Week approaches, there is indeed cause for celebration. We, at nhPIE, hope that schools across the state will plan to recognize the terrific volunteers in their respective communities.

Brenda L. Abbott
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Assistant Director

When I first contacted nhPIE expressing my interest in the assistant director position, I pulled out a newly revised resume, some of the spiffier brochures and newsletters I had produced, along with a couple of letters of reference that my mother couldn't have done a better job of writing.

About halfway through my cover letter, I started my homily about volunteerism and building partnership coalitions drawing on my experience as a public relations professional.

Suddenly, this voice somewhere within my memory said, "Jean, who better than you can talk first-hand about education partnerships and volunteerism." Certainly I could draw upon my experience serving on boards and business experience, but it was my "roots" that I had almost forgotten.

Those long dormant images from way back of helping six-year-olds with the tedious exercise of forming letters on yellow sheets and witnessing young imaginations set free with first attempts as Young Authors all came back into focus.

Then there were those field trips to various destinations; and building a playground alongside parents, teachers, a principal and a lot of happy kids.

Upon reentering the job market, my participation changed and I substitute taught briefly, facilitated continuing ed courses, and each year, a high school student followed me around for a day to find out more about public relations and marketing (one young woman thought we were going to spend the day at the

"As I see it..."

A Businessman's View of Partnerships

The mutual benefits of school-business partnerships have only begun to be realized. In our work with dozens of school districts across the country, we are constantly delighted by new twists on this theme which are proving to be satisfying for both education and business.

But we also see partnerships that do not live up to their potential, or fail outright. Almost always the cause is that the partners have lost sight of some basic guidelines:

1. Public education remains the number one bastion of our democratic, pluralistic society, as the National School Public Relations Association points out eloquently in their "Learning & Liberty" program. Neither private nor public enterprises will prosper for long if this social fabric is eroded. Assisting the schools merely to fulfill this function is reason enough for any partnership -- and it must be the ultimate bottom line on all partnerships.
2. It is clear businesses today need a workforce trained as no other has ever been. Protecting & promoting economic growth in this way is an obvious benefit -- but partnerships need to realize that a particular school will not in itself solve this problem. Instead, the goal must be to help partner schools become so good that they are role models for the rest of education. Halfway measures won't do.
3. For the first time, public relations research shows that social responsibility activities - like social-business partnerships - do pay off on the bottom line. The studies indicate that customers have increased confidence in both the products

and policies of companies which actively demonstrate this responsibility. Other research, sponsored by important corporations like Johnson & Johnson and Philip Morris, suggests a direct link between shareholder or financial institution approval for companies active in this arena. However, not just any project is persuasive. Topping the list are things companies do in their local communities. Since the school-house remains the center of community life, efforts on behalf of education are particularly valuable.

4. As critical as the marketing of products and services is to businesses, this have proven not to be a sound basis for a school-business partnership. The reasons are obvious. When the marketing aspect comes through too strongly, the program is seen as opportunistic or even manipulative. Rather than helping the company, it backfires. Participating in a straightforward partnership can provide excellent awareness and recognition for a company and its products, however, so there's no need to exploit the situation unnecessarily.

Business has much to offer education -- but it can also learn a great deal from the schools. For instance, the participative management and decisionmaking style of schools is fast becoming the goal in business. Gaining public consent for policies and actions is old hat for schools -- and businesses realize today they must do likewise.

Business leaders who start with the assumption today's schools are failures, or school administrators are not good managers, do not make good partners.

Neither do school administrators who think business is only interested in profits. Schools do want and need to improve and grow -- but U.S. business has a lot of improving and growing to do also, as the new international competition is proving.

What better way for both institutions to face the future than in true partnership?

Patrick Jackson, APR
Senior Counsel

Celebrate

New Hampshire
School Volunteer Week

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