

The Bishop's School



Established 1909

The Parent Meeting, Post Deny and Wait List Decision

Has the Helicopter Landed?

Kim Peckham, Director of Admissions and Financial Aid
Joy Davis, Associate Director of Admissions

The Bishop's School
La Jolla, California

September 2015

Learning Objectives

Consider pros and cons of post decision meetings

Admissions communications plan: post decision meetings

- Siblings, legacies, faculty/staff, and political connections
- Understanding your clientele

Best practices for straight-shooting communications

- Assuage anxiety
- Show the respect and dignity family/child deserves
- Gain long term supporters of your institution

Protect your school in the process





The Helicopter has landed and morphed.....



Into snowplow parents.....what's the difference?

Why is this important?

- Moved from hover and micromanage to *remove all obstacles*

Schools may be forced to have tough conversations

- Increased anxiety
- Pressing decisions
- Important connections

Parental Social Influences

Parents are often older (Baby Boomer/Gen X)

Fear of failure-personal and worldwide

Consumerism-assumption that wealth and success are tied together and education is the vehicle

See child's success as an extension of their own

Parent as problem solver-a handicap for the child

Parent feels entitled to crash land into child's life

Cell phone-a long umbilical cord?



New Manifestations

Excessive tutoring

Teleperformances

CV's

Tracking children...really?

Parent or child's interest?

Good intentions but...where to draw the line



Equilibrium for Parents

School culture that values personal relationships and face to face conversations

We meet with parents and have honest dialogue

Not a reflection of worth

Difficult-fear of failure

Build trust in decision making



Research: Pros...

Majority support parent conversations if done well and right

- Range from conservative to deeply empathetic

Reputation versus approachable

Cultural expectations

Need to pay attention to clientele

Diffuse tension

Institutional marketing



And Cons...

Litigious

Boarding

Stressful

Vulnerable

Poor use of human resources

Crazy!



Caveats

Develop your meeting plan; hone your craft

Cautionary tales

- Culturally may not work at your school
- Talk to your HOS, legal counsel
- Decision day vs. rolling admissions
- Handful may circumvent process
- Enrollment challenged
 - Siblings
 - Learning differences



Decision Day

45-75 Calls

Caring and kind conversations are *keystone* to our admissions philosophy

Director meets with HOS regarding calls to:

- Siblings/Legacies
- Faculty/staff
- Major donors/trustees/connections

Why?

- No auto accept policy
- High bar for academic performance
- Loyalty to the institution-our responsibility
- Value of our product or mission in relationships
- Calls perpetuate the culture
- Not so funny story...(this year's calling day)



Responses

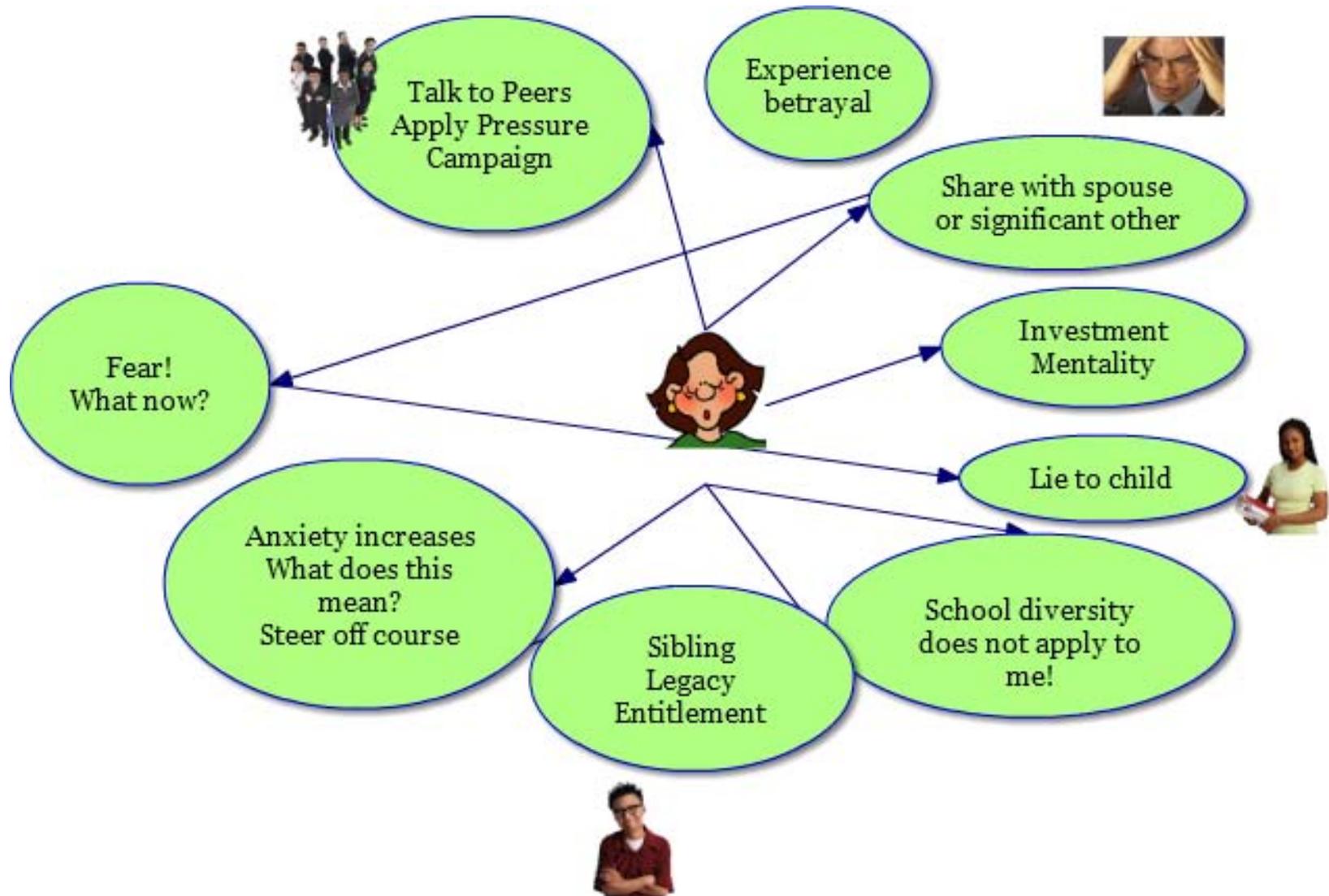
What is said during the decision notification phone call?

- Greetings, calling regarding decision
- Convey the competitive nature of the pool
- Quality of applicants
- Communicate decision by phone not letter
- Empathize; understand it is disappointing news
- Affirm the importance of their family to the school
- Offer to meet with them in person if they wish

Responses:

- Anticipated the call
- Shock or denial
- Anger
- Tears, emotional
- Confusion
- Compassion-must be difficult for us

Next Phase



Meetings

Return to objectives-Focus on the “WHY”

Does it:

- Align with office communications strategy?
- Ease anxiety and tension, diffuse negative emotion?
- Cultivate positive long term support/relationship with institution?
- Honor the child’s dignity, respect the family?
- Create a balance of accuracy and compassion?

Who is at the Table?

- Two seasoned admissions professionals; director leads
 - Mitigate the families ability to “misremember”
 - Eliminate the opportunity to misquote

One or both parents/legal guardians

Preparing for the Meeting

Responding to the meeting request

Assistant takes the calls, schedules the meetings

- Sets the parameters- 30 minutes max

Review application

- Comb for notes you can share supporting decision
 - comments on report card
- Be prepared to discuss test essay, when appropriate

Be prepared with data and background

- Ranges of scores for admitted students
(understand sending school)
- Review test scores, writing samples
- Investigate fully their connection/history to school

Tissues and trash can

Water

Turn down office phone, cell off



Wait List Meeting

Set the Tone

- Greet parents warmly, engage in light conversation
- Ask after their child
- Share you enjoyed spending time with their child, share an anecdote

Acknowledge it is a difficult or disappointing situation to be in
How can we help you through this process?

Listen

Point out strengths

Explain wait pool versus ranking

Address the competitive nature of the season

Never apologize, acknowledge “we understand that’s how you feel”

Remain positive in outlook, be cautious of “hopeful language”

Deny Meeting

Set The Tone

Frame the conversation to be meaningful and be mindful to *not* put your institution in jeopardy

- Same features as Wait List; prepare for stronger emotion
- Engage in warm or empathetic dialogue

Remember, confidentiality is key!

Be prepared with demonstrable, measurable stats

Focus on the individual, look them in the eye, speak in a calm voice

Affirm how important their family is, show respect for child and family

Ask “How can we help you understand the process?”

You can be honest and share that their student’s academic profile fell below the average of the pool

Can the decision be reversed?

Tips for Fielding Questions

Protect the institution first and foremost!

Parent WL Questions

- Will my child come off the WL?
- Should we submit additional documents?
- How did the Committee assess my child's file?
- Who is on the Committee?
- What score did my child need to get in?
- The school has been so good for my child number 1, why won't you take child number 2?
- How many did you take? How many in the WL?
- When will we know? Can we call you?



Should you encourage them to be hopeful?

How to respond when they voice discontent with their current school?

Final Thoughts

- Thank them for coming and for their honesty
- Show compassion for their disappointment
- Assure them if anything changes you will call

Navigating Treacherous Waters

Most Challenging Meeting-Be Conservative

- Use broad language
- Repeat competitive nature of pool
- Remain calm, be the soft voice in the room
- If pressed, repeat message several times
- Be compassionate
- Stay positive, focused, composed
- They want to be heard, listen
- Explain nuances of crafting a class
- Confirm documents are confidential
- Offer to be a resource
- Depending on report card allow that current teacher could be a resource
- If need be, alert security in advance



The way you make them feel is most important

Reapplications: Yes or No?

WL Responses vary

- If appropriate, be non-committal
- Encourage if it's a space issue
- Encourage sibs if they need another year
- Don't overpromise-you never know the caliber of the pool
- If you are explicit about what is needed, then be prepared to accept child
- Remember to do what is right for *your school*

Deny

- Not acceptable to encourage
- We never say an outright "no"...but do reiterate that a reapplication file would require significant improvements in areas of concern
- Our 6th and 7th grade denials have led to some qualified 9th grade applications for those students who were willing to take on the challenge

34 Reapplications this year, Offered 11, Enrolled 11

Hot Potatoes!

Sensitive issues need management:

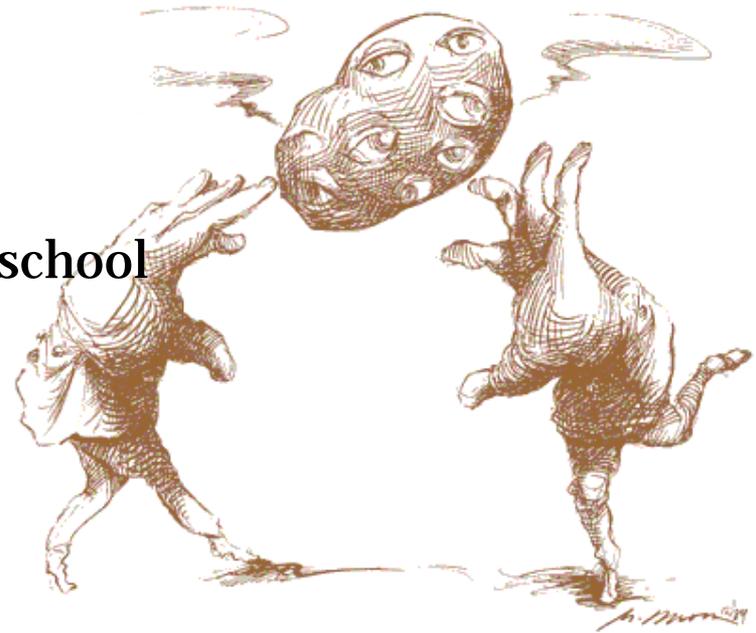
- Discuss with HOS-no surprises!
- Consult legal counsel
- Be generic, be personable
- Reveal no confidence
- Do what is greater benefit for child and school

Use carefully designed language

Comfort with meeting and why

Pre-meeting notes

Debrief and notate as necessary



Are you ready? 4 scenarios!

1. You've admitted one sibling applicant and wait listed the second. Parents want to know what the chances are that their second child will come off the Wait List.
2. A faculty member's daughter has applied to your school, she has been denied; the faculty parent is angry and talking to other faculty members about the integrity of the admissions process.
3. A sibling has been denied for the second consecutive year and parents want to know if they should apply a third time.
4. An accomplished student with strong test scores has been Wait Listed, yet his best friend with lower scores has been admitted; the families compare test results. You can't share your concerns about observing inappropriate parental behavior or troubling teacher recommendations.

Additional Thoughts?



Parting Words

What are some of the overall positive benefits to these meetings?

- Peace and closure for many
- Clearly defined areas for improvement, an academic path forward
- Misconceptions about the process and/or decision addressed
- HOS/Dir of Advancement/Legal Counsel gave their blessings

REMEMBER: Always be cautious, conservative and caring



Thank You!

Kim Peckham, Director of Admissions and Financial Aid
(peckhamk@bishops.com)
(858) 875-0809

Joy Davis, Associate Director of Admissions
(davisj@bishops.com)
(858) 875-0826