

Banding Together with Your Community

Dr. David W. Vandewalker

Scientists have often questioned why fire ants can survive floods because fire ants' bodies are denser than water. After research, it was discovered that they actually link their legs together building an "ant raft." Additionally, they have tiny hairs on their bodies that trap air bubbles. Interestingly, the ants would die if a flood impacted them individually, but as an insect group, they cling to each other and can endure a flood. As we begin to come out of the pandemic experience, it is the perfect time to proactively and intentionally link your parent boosters together with your community to reinforce the success of your programs.

In a similar manner, booster organizations can band together with friendships forged through events and programs to be stronger as a group than they would be individually. That revelation is what makes booster organizations thrive and do exceptional things for students. In addition to direct friendship, there is a fascinating phenomenon that Mark Granovetter discovered in research called "weak-tie acquaintances". These friendships can be leveraged in booster organizations to expand the influence and impact of the booster community (Duhigg, 2012).

The concept of weak-tie acquaintances has deep ramifications for a booster organization, particularly regarding fundraisers. For instance, if your organization plans a fruit sale

fundraiser, often students ask close family, friends or neighbors to buy the fruit. Once those people groups have been solicited, the potential "buyers" are tapped. How can the fundraiser continue to grow and offer profit for your booster organization? The answer is found in weak-tie friendships.

Weak-tie friendships are those friends of friends with whom we connect. These people aren't close friends, but you do know them. They might be part of a civic or service organization (i.e., Kiwanis, Lions Club, Rotary club, Scouting); these acquaintances might be at your church, synagogue, or mosque. These contacts might be part of your fraternity, sorority, or neighborhood Facebook page. Granovetter posits that these groups or organizations "represent the links that connect people who have acquaintances in common, who share membership in social networks, but aren't directly connected by the strong ties of friendship themselves." (Duhigg, 2012, p. 223-224) These weak-tie friendships are "gold" for a

booster organization as these people can be influenced to participate in your fundraiser not because they know you well personally but because of social currency—they want to be a part of something because others in the community are joining in.

Granovetter learned that weak-tie acquaintances were frequently more important than close friends in discovering job opportunities because casual acquaintances offer a wider access to people. These contacts that we might relate to several times a year are the people who might know about a job that we haven't heard about as opposed to the family and friends that we have already mined for information (Duhigg, 2012). The same premise is true of booster fundraisers, special events, corporate sponsorship programs and donations. To expand these markets, more "buyers" need to be harnessed. Your weak-tie connections are a strong source of possible revenue.

People want to be a part of a winning team; they want to join in

As we begin to come out of the pandemic experience, it is the perfect time to proactively and intentionally link your parent boosters together with your community to reinforce the success of your programs.

Banding Together with Your Community

a project bigger than themselves. When explaining that others in an organization are participating in a project, a common response is that people want to be a part of the project because of social belonging. If others in an organization are helping, others want to participate. Importantly, social belonging is part of everyday life and it's free; therefore, harness it to your advantage.

Consider creating events to which weak-tie friends can be invited, for instance:

- Veteran's Day and other parade performances
- Outdoor pops concerts
- Chamber groups performing for monthly historic society, arts and humanities organizations, or VFW chapters
- Mini pep rallies for assisted living residents
- Drumline performances at a local shopping center for local community or event day

Let your weak-tie friends know of specific events and fundraisers by:

- Sharing calendar events via Facebook
- Liking and commenting on your weak-tie friends social media accounts
- Posting stories through personal and community social networks
- Reporting face-to-face program information in civic groups, service organizations, etc.
- Placing event flyers on community or workplace bulletin boards (print and virtual)
- Positioning event flyers on community store windows

Dr. David W. Vandewalker is the Coordinator of Music and Performing Arts for the Fulton County Schools (Atlanta, GA), the founding artistic director and conductor of the professional ensemble, Cobb Chamber Winds, and the administrator, artistic director, and principal conductor of the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Wind Ensemble. Dr. Vandewalker earned degrees at Baylor University, Central Michigan University, and Boston University where he received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Music Education. With 27 years of teaching experiences spanning elementary, middle school, high school, and higher education, Dr. Vandewalker most recently served as the associate director of athletic bands/assistant director of bands at Georgia State University (2012-2016) and Director of Bands at Harrison High School in Kennesaw, Georgia (2000-2012). A Conn-Selmer Artist/Educator, he has led concerts before esteemed audiences such as the CBDNA/NBA Southern Division Conference, Music for All National Concert Festival, and The Midwest Clinic. Marching Bands under his direction received honors including participation in the 57th Presidential Inaugural Parade, 2009 & 2014 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, ranked top ten nationally by the 2013 College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA), and was a Bands of America Grand National Finalist (Top 12). Dr. Vandewalker is a recipient of the Sudler Flag of Honor, nine-NBA Citation of Excellence Awards, three National Wind Band Honors Awards, is recognized in multiple editions of Who's Who Among American Teachers, and is an elected member of the American Bandmasters Association. He has published numerous articles in professional journals, chapters in multiple volumes of the Teaching Music Through Performance in Band book series (GIA) and Rehearsing the High School Band (Hal Leonard), and books including Boosters to the Rescue and Strategic Plans for a Successful Booster Club (GIA). Additionally, Vandewalker is a nationally-renown staff development presenter with multiple clinician appearances for GMEA, Music for All Summer Symposium, Smith Walbridge Directors Institute, TBA, and The Midwest Clinic.

Think about creating weak-tie connection partnerships:

- Small business owners to offer fundraiser items as client gifts
- Business owners to offer fundraiser items as employee gifts
- Partnerships offering in kind services (e.g., marching contest advertisement for water bottle donations, jazz band performs live, at a local bistro, in exchange for providing box lunches at an away game meal)

With the use of weak-tie connections, information about your booster activities can spread faster and have more impact on your organization and community. When weak-tie acquaintances are leveraged, it's often difficult to *not* be a part of what your booster club is doing because of the need of social belonging in the community. Just as the ants, at the beginning of this article, linked together to literally save their lives, your organization can unleash fundraising, special events, and corporate sponsorship programs potential by banding together using strong and weak-tie relationships.

References:

Duhigg, Charles. *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business*. New York: Random House. 2012

<https://www.pestworld.org/news-hub/pest-articles/floating-fire-ants-how-fire-ants-survive-flood-waters/>