

Admission CoP Summary of Conference Call

Topic

Admission Directors Can Do Everything (And Why They Shouldn't Have To)

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Facilitator

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Guest Experts

Rheua Stakely, PEJE Coach for Admission and Recruitment

Goal of the Session

Discuss the intake process in detail and how to build meaningful relationships with prospective families.

Handouts:

“Making the Case for an Admission Director,” by Rheua Stakely

PEJE Day School Peer Yardstick 2006 elementary school report, Slide 61, “Consider hiring a dedicated Admission Officer.”

Also referred to: “Toward A Proactive, Comprehensive Admission Program: What Every Head of School Should Know About Supervising the Admission Director,” by Rheua Stakely, available at <http://www.peje.org/docs/RheuaAdmissionProgramReport.pdf>

Summary

Rebecca: I'd to welcome our guest presenter today, Rheua Stakely. For almost everyone on the call, Rheua needs no introduction. Almost all of you have met her in one format or another, whether at a PEJE assembly, on site at your school as part of a PEJE grant or to train one of your Admissions staff or at one of her many conferences that she puts on throughout the year, across the country. She is PEJE's senior consultant in admissions, recruitment and attrition prevention. She also works in such areas as financial aid, organizational development, and strategic planning.

Our topic today we hope and we think is a little bit provocative. Rheua and I spent a lot of time brainstorming about what we thought Admission Directors really want to know about at this time of year. And in my role as CoP Facilitator, I'm hearing a lot of frustration, through emails, phone calls, and dialogue on the listserv about how hard it is for everyone to get their jobs done, how overworked we are and how we're being asked to do too many things in our school in not enough hours. And for so many schools, there's not a person designated as Admissions Director to do these kinds of tasks, so it's a team effort from volunteers, Heads of Schools, principals and others to get the work done. So, we're going to focus on human resources topics today. Our topic is “Admissions Directors Can Do Everything and Why They Shouldn't Have To.”

Just so you know who is listening in today, the participants on the call are Admissions Directors, either full or part time, some of them are solely Admission Directors and others have other job descriptions and other responsibilities in marketing, development, financial aid, and educational administration. We have board members, Heads of Schools, and various types of principals on the line today. And, we have a few people from advancement and development offices. So, we have

quite a diverse audience. And, hopefully, we'll have something for everyone. And with no further ado, let me turn it over to Rheua and we can get right into the heart of our topic.

Rheua: Thank you so much, Rebecca, and hello to friends that I know and friends I hope to know. I'm just going to give you a quick overview of where we're headed today and the agenda. For some of you, you don't yet have an Admissions Director and I want to quickly go into why and then take a full stop there and respond briefly to a few questions. I also want to talk about this impossible job of trying to do more than one job, including Admissions and why I don't personally think that's a great idea and then I'll stop at the end of that and entertain some questions.

Then, I'll talk about prioritizing in case you don't get the job divided up the way you really want it, how to know what's essential and then we'll keep going into what I think some of you might be hungry for, how do you know when you need to hire another person in the Admissions office, whether it's support staff or a second professional as a member of the team.

And, we also have hot off the press, some Yardstick findings that talk about the importance of dedicated Admissions officers and we'll talk about that at the end of the call.

So, I know that some of you are already convinced that you need an Admissions Director and some of you want to try to convince the powers that be that you need someone full time, you've been doing it part time. So, I want to start there and say some things very quickly, that some of you have heard before. And that is that I believe you do need to have a discreet, dedicated person whose sole focus is Admissions. So hiring someone full time to focus solely on Admissions is one of my sacred cows, if you will. And, of course, in that you need to choose the right person. So, if any of you are about to hire someone and you would like to discuss with me what to look for and what the job description might look like, I'm happy to talk about that with you personally.

Sole focus, why am I saying that? Some of you may be saying all I need to bring in is more inquiries; we have a registration process, not a complicated process. Well, I believe as a school, whether it's K-6 or K-8 or 9-12, you need to have someone who is going to focus on caring for the families once you've gotten them to inquire. And some of you are saying, I don't have a problem with that, I just need to find more families. Well, I think you need a full time Admissions Director, or at least $\frac{3}{4}$. When I say part time, I do not mean $\frac{1}{2}$. And there are many of you on the call that are $\frac{3}{4}$ and you know that you spend full time on the job. If there's anyone on the call that is part time and doesn't spend full time on the job you can let me know.

And the third part of this that is really important is to train this person. A bright person with a lot of skills is still not enough, you need to have someone who has a comprehensive and proactive understanding of what an Admissions department looks like.

I think that in the handout you got ahead of time from the chapter in the book that I wrote for PEJE, it talks about how Admissions is the largest source of revenue for schools. In some schools, it may be the only source of revenue. And therefore, it too important to leave that to a volunteer, or Head of School, Head of Pre-School to pick it up and try to get it done when they're not trying to put out fires. To me, if you have a product and you don't have anyone to sell it, it's crazy. To me, this is absolutely essential.

I think also whatever your tuition is, if it's 8K, 10K, 20K, when you're charging that sum of money or what's relative in your part of the country, I think it's hard to have a volunteer or someone who is trying to do other things picking up that job. So, I think it signals that you're a really professional organization if you have someone that is not only going to recruit students, but care and feed them through the process, and help coordinate all the volunteers that might be necessary to make that work.

And I think it's not a job for the key person, the point person, the Admission Director should not be a volunteer in doing it.

So, those are a couple of points on why I think it's important to have an Admissions Director. And some of you are thinking, yeah, yeah, yeah, but, we can't afford it. But, what I'm saying is that if you're trying to grow enrollment, you must make an Admissions Director a part of your administrative team and that person will more than pay for himself or herself after a year. And, if you read the handout that came out in advance, it talks about if you want to get an Admission Director right now and it's not built into the budget sometimes what I'm finding is that somewhere around the country someone is just so enthusiastic about having an Admission Director coming into the school that someone will fund it until you can build it in. Or some schools have found 3-5 people to contribute 5K or 10K each to build a salary for the Admission Director until that person can be planned into the budget.

So, that's my 10 minutes. So, I'm going to stop and ask if anyone who doesn't have an Admissions Director, if you have any questions.

Jennifer Shecter, Vancouver Talmud Torah: After attending your seminar I went back to our board and in talking with our principals about hiring an Admission Director they did not want to discuss it at all. It's just not on their radar. And they believe that the principal is doing a fine job in that area, even though she is putting out fires all day. So, I wanted to you to comment on that. I wrote a report, I presented at the Board Meeting and it's a no go. So I wanted to get your opinion.

Rheua: So, a couple of thought. It was a pleasure to meet you and thank you for your efforts. You may be speaking for a couple of other people on the call. So I wanted to urge to take a copy of the handout and spread it around and find one sympathetic voice in the school for whom this an important piece of next steps as your school becomes more professional. Number 2, it is downloadable from the PEJE website, it is the first chapter, the first section of the first chapter on how the HOS should be supervising the AD. I think that if you combine the fact that PEJE believes that this is a really important thing and felt that this is the first chapter in the book and is sending me around the country at some great expense that there should be some good argument therein.

I think that the other part is that you bring that the principal is already doing a good job at this and that should be enough. That will lead us into the second section. Just very briefly, I do know that there are some schools that do not have an AD and their enrollment seems to be just fine. The problem is what happens when it starts to decrease. I am aware that there is one city in which this is happening and there are many Jewish day schools in that city and there is no school that has an AD. And my fear is that they're worried about it, but they're not doing the right things about it. And with thoughtful proactive work, Jewish day schools can turn around the beginnings or long roads of dropping enrollments. Why am I saying you want to be vigilant, even if things are going well? It was Socrates who said the unexamined life is not worth living and I think we need to pay attention even if things are going well. And we need to ask ourselves consistently how we can do better. In this particular situation, if things have been going okay, can it go better and if so, how? I think having an AD is one of the ways to focus on how. The other part I wanted to get to is splitting the job, but I'll wait on that. Is there anyone else who has a question?

Cortney Cope, Chicago Jewish Day School: You talk about hiring an Admission person with a strong background, most Admissions Directors come from large schools, where there is history and everything is all laid out. How do you transition someone to a small school, where they've been recruiting 50-60 kids to a school where they're now recruiting a class of maybe 10 or 20 kids.

Rheua: Great question. There's an assumption there that I want to check and that is that the place to find an Admissions Director is from the Admissions team of another school and I want to caution

against that. I don't want to say that never would you hire someone who's done Admissions somewhere, but I think your concern about it is well founded. Just because they've been second in command somewhere where there's a pretty big network already built up doesn't mean that they're not going to be able to do well in a school that's struggling to find people. So, I actually believe if you hire someone with the right personality, you can teach someone the skills to do Admissions work. So, I think the first thing that's important is that you hire someone who is warm, welcoming, articulate, enthusiastic and is a self-starter that takes initiative and is organized and doesn't need to have a lot of direction. I don't think it's necessary to have Admissions experience or marketing or business school experience or to have some of those skills that you would think, wouldn't it help if they came in with that. I think that it's helpful to have someone who is a clean slate, but does know the Jewish community and does have the right personality. Remember I said, full time or part time, that person can be trained in Admissions thinking. Rather than getting someone who's experienced, get someone who's fresh and train them. So, I think within a parent body, you could find someone with knowledge of the Jewish community and who's warm and personable and whose kids are back in school and ready to get into the job market.

Zev Lanton, Hebrew Foundation School, Quebec: When you say train, could you be specific in how that person would receive the training?

Rheua: Yes, there are a couple of ways. One, I have been in a couple of cities around the country doing 3 day trainings for Admissions people, that's one route. Another is that I have met with probably 70 Admissions Directors on their campus one-on-one to do a 5-day training. And by the way, some of those are not brand new ADs. Very recently, I was with someone who had been on the job 5 years, another person who had been on the job for 12 years, and another who had for 17 years, and even though she had 17 years of experience and 3 people on her staff, we still had 5 days of training to do. Very high level tweaking, different from training a brand new Admissions person, who may have been a classroom teacher in the past, took time out to have kids or has been a lawyer, and took time out to have kids and is coming back into the job force. So, training is something I love doing and I do a lot of. There are BJE's around the country in SF, LA, Toronto, who have called me in to do trainings as well as PEJE sessions around the country. So, those are a couple of ideas. So, there a number of different ways that training can be accomplished.

Zev Lanton, Hebrew Foundation School, Quebec: What kind of salary range does an AD get?

Rheua: That's a great question for you to email Rebecca and she has some data to pass on to. It varies greatly from location to location, so one way to do it is to ask Rebecca. Another way is poll schools in your area, private schools that are not Jewish and just ask them what they pay for a mid-level administrator. Independent schools all have an AD, so they should be able to tell you what they use for a salary. NAIS members may request this data from NAIS as well.

So, this kind of flows into the next section. For those of you who don't have an Admissions person, this is for you, too. Please don't combine admissions with some other job in the school. For those of you who are already in that unfortunate situation let me just say, bless your heart, good for you, I admire you, I don't know how you do it. Here's my pitch, I strongly feel that it is not wise to divide the Admission officer's job into very different parts. I'm looking at the list of participants; Admissions and placement, Admissions and development, Admissions and marketing. I think Admissions work is about what I call "outsiders". Who is not yet in the school that we would like to invite into the school, what are they thinking, what are their needs, how do they talk, what's on their mind? If I get into that, then I need to eat, sleep, drive to school, shower, the whole bit, thinking about who's not here that ought to be here. Who are they? What can I do in terms of all kinds of feeder organizations? How do I cultivate the families once they call me, what about the website, is that doing all the things that it needs to do for Admissions only. You need someone to think about the outsider, the people that are not yet with you. Most of you probably have a lot of siblings who are

automatically thinking about your school, but I want to be careful about thinking that you can just keep those siblings happy and you'll have a fine and strong recruitment and enrollment picture.

I think that the AD needs to spend all of her time thinking about this outsider think. Other members of the school need to be thinking about insider stuff, HOS, principal, need to think about the kids that are in the school now. You take care of kids, parents, putting on events to raise money, taking care of curriculum, faculty. All of those are really important insider jobs and I think it's very awkward to have the AD for one minute focus on putting out fires in the school or taking care of things in the school and on the other hand think about who's not here that ought to be here. So, I feel very strongly, if you can work that magic and be great, that's great, but if any of this is resonating with you, if your HOS needs to give me a call to change your job description, give them my phone number. I'd be delighted to ease your burden. So, I feel pretty strongly that is a job that can not be done as well as you could if you're trying to do other things.

I'm looking at this list and one of my friends is the Director of Admissions and placement. Which means, she's placing 8th graders in high school, because she doesn't have a high school. So, wait a minute, I'm thinking at precisely the same time of year that you're trying to read files and figure who's coming to your school, you're also trying to write recommendations and send kids to the next step. I can't believe you can do that. So, please, if your HOS needs to talk with me, please send them in my direction. I want to reiterate, that a half-time position, this is not. I really feel that to do Admissions well, you need to do at least to ¾ time. I'm just wondering if there is anyone on the call that is doing half time or two-third time who would like to make a comment.

Michele Snitkin, Solomon Schechter Academy, CT: I work 17 hours, officially. It's a lot of balls in the air. It's very difficult to get everything done. For example, this week I dedicated a lot of hours to our annual appeal mailing.

Rheua: That's development work. And this is deep in the Admissions season when you should be cultivating a crop of students and deciding who is going to come. So, you've got Mission Impossible. Good luck and thanks for being on the call and have your Head call me.

Rita Mishan, Barkai Yeshiva: So, I work part time, but I'm very organized and focused. And I do about, 12-15 hours a week, but it's strictly Admissions and pretty much all the follow up, beginning the leads on the families, and all of the follow up. Making sure they're all taken care of and all of their responses and all of the correspondence, once the decisions have been made, in terms of letting the families know.

Debbie Balk, Yavneh Day School, OH: My question is about the idea that Admissions is about the outsider. Because, I wear a number of different hats; I do Development, Admissions, and Marketing. And, my issue is that I spend a good portion of time, especially in the last 2 weeks, since our re-enrollment packets have gone out, on retention. Is what you're trying to tell me is that my job really is not retention, that I should leave that to my Head? And that my job is to be going to the outsiders, given the limited number of hours in the day?

Rheua: That's a great question. Let me just clarify a couple of points, so that we're all talking about the same thing. The word retention and re-enrollment is really 2 different concepts, although they do have impact on one another. If you're sending out re-enrollment packages, then I don't think that's your job. If you are part of a team that tries to prevent attrition, that I think that's a good thing, but I see that as bigger job than just Admissions. If Admissions has done a good job at the front end of the process, then keeping kids in the school needs to be an all school project, not just an AD project, number one. And, number two, now is not the time to be responding to attrition problems, the time to prevent attrition is the fall. Now, if families are not re-enrolling, it's too late. They have already made their decisions, for the most part, or already engaged in some deep, serious discussion about not

returning. This is reactive and needs intervention, not from the AD, but from the HOS, appropriate intervention, by the way. If you haven't been to my attrition prevention workshop at a PEJE conference, I'll probably be doing that one again. And, I'm happy to say that schools around the country have been reporting to me that they've cut their attrition in half in one year. So, the good news is that doesn't take a whole lot of time, but that it does take an important focus. So, I don't see that as an AD's primary job. Although, it's certainly important to be a part of the team, so to go back to the original point you made, re-enrollment should be someone's job, not yours. I can also argue that if you have a support staff person who's very good at details and people want the mail to be sent out of your office, that's one thing. But, I don't think it goes out under your name. I usually see this as a Business Office project. It's a contract and you expect them to return it and it ought to come from the Business Office. This also might be something that you and I and maybe your HOS would discuss at a later day. I really thank you for bringing it into the conversation.

Others of you, who are waiting to speak, please keep your questions in mind and we'll come back to them later. It occurred to me that one of the things that might be helpful when Rebecca and I were taking about this Mission Impossible topic, that for those of you, for better or worse, you have many goals to juggle and how can you prioritize your time, your limited time, for all that needs to get done. For my purposes, someone taught me this a thousand years ago and it was so helpful. So, if you've got your pencils handy, it's not rocket science, but it really does help. And that is, what is absolutely essential that I do and that I do right now? And then, what is essential that I do, but it doesn't have to be done right now, I'll put it on the calendar? And then, what is actually nice if I get around to it, but maybe it's much later and that might even be not at all? There's another area, really, could I delegate to someone else. It's a good thing to do, but really, it's not my job. So, for those of you who have multiple job titles, I'm not sure if that part helps, in defining between the two bits, but within a bit, it might be very helpful. Part of this is knowing what the whole calendar looks like for Admissions. That's why I talk about proactive Admission work. Why it's important to be comprehensive, what are all the pieces involved for Admission work. Some people on the call might be thinking, is there really that much to do in there? And, yeah, there's lots to do, depending on how you define Admissions and Recruitment as a job. Knowing the whole picture, what is essential to be done in the fall, what is essential to do in the summer, to make sure things start off well in the fall? I think sometimes, we are reactive; we wait for things to happen, rather than setting out and encouraging, generating things to happen. Then, what can actually wait till late and be done in the spring or when things slow down a little bit in the summer. When I have Think Tank time, what might I leave to that time to really to hit the ground running in the fall. Some of you might be saying, summer is my busy season and I'm saying if summer is your busy season, if spring if your busy season, then you have a reactive Admissions program and we need to re-prioritize, take another look and be more proactive. Again, call me if I can help with that.

Figure out what is essential, what can wait and what is not my job as a way to help with that limited time. So, I'm just going to ask a couple people to respond. What is your most essential thing that you're working on right now? What's your top priority at this time of the year in Admissions?

Rita Mishan, Barkai Yeshiva: Right now in Admissions, our most important thing is letting applicants know who has been accepted and who has not and getting responses back and numbers of who wants to attend.

Rheua: Very good. So, it's decision making time, sending out decisions and I think you used words that resemble tracking how things are good. Tracking, all the time, not just now, all through the fall. Right now, those of you who have already sent out acceptances and are waiting to hear if people are going to accept your acceptance, that's known as the yield. And tracking yield year after year becomes incredibly important for projecting numbers ahead and figuring out how many people you can put on the wait list. I know some of you are going, ha ha, wait list. Well, let me just tell you that I had four schools last year that told me that for the first time in the history of their school, they now

have a wait list for kindergarten. So, what I'm getting at is that, I probably visited 25 schools last year, before those statistics came out and I think it was the tip of the iceberg, and I'm thrilled. And, I hope to keep hearing stories like that. Another person? What do you consider essential?

Helen Quint, JCDS of Boston: We're collecting information about our applicants and bringing them in, meeting them, giving them an experience at the school, collecting school reports, which have only been coming through in the last few weeks, we've been getting them. So, we're not ready yet. We're on a cycle where we only notify people March 9th and many of the New England schools are on the same cycle. It's recommended that we wait until then to let people know when they are invited to enroll.

Rheua: Bravo. So, Helen's bringing up a really important point. Helen's part of a Boston-area independent school group in the New England region that adheres to March 10th or March 9th decision date and I'm all for that, to be part of a group, to be part of a team and go with them in terms of when you're going to notify parents. Rita, who spoke from the NY area, she's part of a team there, where they notify families there about kindergarten enrollment in February. So part of that is joining your regional association and sticking with them on those decision dates. But, both people have mentioned that they are collecting information about individual candidates, reading about them and deciding about good matches and who's going to thrive and all of that stuff, and making decisions and getting your letters together so that all are going to match up and getting ready to send out contracts to new students. By the way, I hope you're planning to send out financial aid awards. Oh God, Rheua, don't bring that up, but sending out financial aid letters with your acceptance letters, that's for another phone call. Sorry!

Rebecca: Why don't we take a couple of questions?

Rita Mishan, Barkai Yeshiva: You said that we should send financial aid forms to everyone that gets an acceptance letter?

Rheua: No, send financial amounts to those who have applied for financial aid. You send the financial amount when you accept them, which means that if you have families that need financial aid, they have applied at the same time when they are applying for Admissions.

Rita Mishan, Barkai Yeshiva: You say that you should give that to them with the application.

Rheua: Correct.

Rebecca: That is a whole topic for another call, but it sticks to the same point that Rheua made to be proactive. So if you are sending out Admission letters, offers, in February or March, families should know about their financial aid award at the same time so that families can make a fully informed decision all at the same time, without waiting for several months to find about their financial aid award. So, again, proactive is the word here. Are there any other questions about prioritizing your work path?

Cortney Cope, Chicago Jewish Day School: My question is, how much priority should be given to people who have missed the Admissions deadlines, but are sort of on our hot list? We're in a community where we're a new school and we're not always people's first choice in terms of applying, sometimes they need a little nudging to apply. So, how much priority should we put towards that?

Rheua: Well, actually, I'm happy to say that I've had pretty darn good luck helping schools that are 3 or 4 on the list turn into the number one on the list. We could talk a little later on. Just briefly, I'm a big believer in constantly mentioning when your deadline was or is, so that in fall you mention it in

print, you mention it on the phone when you're signing people up to come in to visit. Our deadline is January 31st, so you're in plenty of time, just wanted to let you know, so come for a visit and we'll get you started. January 15th, somebody calls for the first time, I'm going to say exactly the same thing. Thanks for calling, deadline is January 31st, you're in plenty of time, but you've got to hustle because we want to get everything in in time for you to be in this first batch. Well, now it's February 8th, somebody calls and say, I'm so glad you called. Let's get things started. Our deadline was January 31st, however, we're probably going to read another batch after this first batch and I'd encourage you to get things going as fast as possible and we'll see what we can do. So, I'm going to constantly be mentioning that we have a deadline. Why? Because I see that as sounding professional, that you have standards, that you're being thoughtful, and it also adds a sense of urgency to the conversation. Not that I'm turning them off, but that things are urgent, let's get rolling.

It also sounds like I might be a little behind the beat, so I better to hurry up. Gee, that's a school that people seek out is the message. Even if I know that I'm going to have space available after the first round, I'm not going to say "oh, yeah, we're going to have spaces, do what you feel like". Obviously, I'm not going to say that. Often, we're a little discouraged and that comes through. So, I'm going to keep with that same upbeat and urgent tone no matter when they call. Even if it's March 31st. Gee, our deadline was January 31st, I'm so glad you called. We're still hearing from the first round of acceptances and if you hustle and get your papers in, we'll see what we can do. What are my chances? Don't know. Let's get started. You sound terrific, love to meet you. You see the difference? It's kind of a can-do attitude, not so much a come one, come all sense. I hope what's coming across is a sense of professionalism.

Cortney Cope, Chicago Jewish Day School: Thank you.

Judy Taff, Chicago Jewish Day School: I have a couple of parents, prospective parents, who called to ask if they could have their application fee waived because they are going to apply for financial aid. The application fee is \$75 and I wanted to know what your reaction to that would be.

Rheua: That's a good question. I actually, on the application fee, when I'm sure they're a financial aid family and not just trying to nickel and dime me, then I say sure, no problem. I don't want to do it automatically. I'm not going to hassle people over it, I'm not going to hold up their application over it, I'm going to note it, remind them once, and then I'm going to forget it. By the way, I'm not going to do the same thing with an enrollment deposit and tuition, I'm much different on that one, but the application fee is a slightly different matter.

Judy Taff, Chicago Jewish Day School: Would it be appropriate, to say that we could not waive that fee, but if they were to be accepted, that the fee could be credited to that deposit that they are going to have to make?

Rheua: I wouldn't. It's either application fee or it's not. You've turned it now into a portion of tuition, which is confusing two very different parts of a process.

Judy Taff, Chicago Jewish Day School: Even though it's about their being able to afford, you know what I'm saying?

Rheua: I hear you. But, you're confusing two very different parts of the process and the word if in the middle, is a big one. I'll stand by what I said before. But, I'm really not going to push people on application fees. Deposits and tuition payments are very different. I'm going to push hard on that.

Helen Quint, JCDS of Boston: We had a conversation here at JCDS and it actually came out the other way. We feel that it is important. We invest a lot of time in each applicant, especially visit time and so we do explain that we wish we could but that we can't waive that fee.

Rheua: Well, this is going deeper than I planned to go, but I'm going to push against that. I'm a financial aid officer for a couple of Jewish day schools and I did financial aid at Exeter for 12 years and I've just seen too many families where it is certifiable that they do not have a lot of money. A woman who's on aid with dependent children who gets \$11,000 a year, I'm not going to ask her to pay a \$75 application fee, I'm not going to ask her pay to file the financial aid form, I'm going to waive that fee. There are too many costs associated, they've got to get stamps, envelopes, some households don't have envelopes sitting around. I know this may sound crazy to some of you, but I've been around the block a few times and I'm just not going to be that rigid about an application fee. Yes, there are costs associated with it, that's what being part of a school is all about. That goes into building a tuition that goes into a budget. For some people, it is definitely going to be a hardship. I'm not going to do it regularly. I just want to be careful about it. Just because they ask me, it's not going to mean I'm going to say yes. It's also not going to mean that I'll say no.

Rebecca: Let's take one more question, then move on.

Aviva Yablok, Manhattan Day School: When a family gets a letter from the school that says their child has been accepted into the school and we need to hear from you within the next two weeks to hold that spot and they don't respond within two weeks, is it professional to call them? I'm just never quite sure how to handle that?

Rheua: Boy, I love that question. This is a longer response than I think we have time for. But, the short answer is yes. I would hope that other things might have happened first. Lots of advance notice that the decisions will go out on, you're NY, February 5th or 6th or something like that?

Aviva Yablok, Manhattan Day School: In our particular school, we have a rolling Admission.

Rheua: Oh, don't use that word. You want a deadline. If you want to turn around rolling Admission and have a full school in March, then we need to talk differently from the very beginning of the school year. To go back to your question, by the way, if you do what I'm advocating, you might not have this question about needing to call so many people. I think we need to get advance notice on our checklist so that decisions will be mailed on such and such a date and that parent reply date is such and such a date. In the New York consortium of Jewish Day Schools they adhere to that, same with the Boston area schools and other parts of the country as well. Regional associations have their own kind of timelines, but I think having a deadline becomes an important part of that. Then, when I accept families, I'm going to let them know that the date is X. Then, after date X, the parent reply date, I'm going to send a letter that says, as of today's mail we have not heard from you and in order to move to another round of candidates, we need to know as soon as possible whether or not you'll be taking the place. I hope your enrollment check is crossing my letter in the mail, if not, please call me ASAP to let us know what your plans are and to reserve a place.

Judy Taff, Chicago Jewish Day School: So, you're giving them a second chance?

Rheua: I wouldn't call it a second chance. I would call it doing follow-up and being responsive. I would go there and I would say I need to hear from you. Today's Monday, I need to hear from you by Friday. Either have your check or hear from you by Friday, if not, we will look at our other candidates or whatever is truthful about your situation. Then, if I don't hear from them by Friday, I'll call them. But, if I'm HOS I'm not calling them, my AD would be calling them.

Rebecca: Let's move on. We have one more topic we want to cover, which is the opposite side, which is not when you're scrounging for students, but when you have a plethora of students coming into your school and the work has gotten too much for one person to finish. Rheua?

Rheua: Thanks for the lead in, Rebecca. This is the one that warms my heart, when schools are feeling like they need some help because they have so many applicants. And some of you are going yeah, yeah that will be the day. And, I'm saying, don't be so skeptical so soon. I'm happy to say that some schools that have never been full are now, when they send out their first batch of decisions are having waiting lists. And it's in different parts of the country, not just large cities. That's the good news. But, it didn't happen because I said so, it happened because some people are doing a lot of hard work in a proactive way and are being thoughtful and comprehensive about what they're doing, very strategic about what they're doing, figuring out what happens first and second and how to be proactive about it. When I've been asked recently, I feel like I need some help, what do I do? I don't have a short answer for this question. Uncharacteristically, I don't think there is a magic "if this, then that". I think that one measure of when you need some help in Admissions is when you're full time and you have so many visitors, that you have a hard time answering the phone and scheduling all of the visits. I'm making a big assumption here, one is that the phone is ringing because people want to come for a visit and that in fact you are scheduling one-on-one visits. Both of these things I see as very important. And, now the PEJE Peer Yardstick data has now given us hard data to show that those things are important. That having a one-on-one tour becomes very important. If I'm a smallish school, meaning 250 or less, and I have 60-70 applicants, as a full time AD, I should be able to handle that. But, if I'm having 80, 90, 100 visitors to campus, if I'm an elementary school, since most of the schools on the list are elementary schools, at least a K-8 or K-12 school, if I'm going to spend the right amount of time and take good care of those 80, 90, 100 phone calls, I want to make sure that I have the staff to do that. That's about the point where I want a part time person to help me out. Probably, a part time professional person, meaning a colleague, as opposed to a support staff person, meaning a secretary. In other schools, you may say, no, first I need a support person. I say ok, let's have that conversation. Sounds ok to me, in theory. In fact, that maybe what you finally decide on. It will vary slightly from school to school. But, I do think it's more about volume of inquiry than it is about size of school.

But, it first pre-supposes that the AD is full-time. By the way, I'm not a big fan of hiring support staff to do all of the answering of phone calls and all the statistical analysis. I think the AD needs to understand statistical analysis and need to understand how to take data in and data out. I don't think that a support staff person instead of me understanding the technology is an asset. I think it's in addition to me understanding the technology. That my support staff person might put in all the data, but it doesn't mean that I don't know how to and it also means that I know how to retrieve it. Rebecca, do you want to weigh in on this, because you have experience.

Rebecca: I do. The other reason Rheua and I came up with the idea of why a second staff person might be particularly necessary is for that rather large number of the schools in the country, whose campus are in more than one location. You have an elementary school in one place, a middle school or high school in different place and so you're constantly going back and forth for tours or events in different places or you're Mon, Wed, Fri at the elementary school and Tues, Thurs at the middle school and that becomes increasingly difficult to manage when the number of your applications, tours, and numbers grow. And so, for the campuses that are facing more than one location, if often becomes increasingly sensible to have someone who is onsite at each place all the time. That would be another good reason we thought about expanding staff would be important.

So, Rheua was talking about the topic of data collection and statistical analysis. To stay on that point, the second handout that was provided to everyone, was a single slide from this year's Day School Peer Yardstick findings and if everyone has the opportunity to look at that, I'll explain how to read that page a little more clearly. The Yardstick findings this year took aggregate data from three years of data collection so that we know really good findings not just from what happened last year, but from what's happened overall in the last three years. What we're able to see out of three years of data is how much difference Admission office staffing makes in the growth or attrition of school enrollment. If you're looking at the chart, the three orange bars on the left that say Same School

Trend, these schools represent schools that submitted data to all three years of the Yardstick findings. That's a pretty small group, 38 schools in that group. In that group, the number of Admissions staff, on average, that they have is .9 FTEs, full-time equivalent and that means that portion of the week that that staff person worked. The five bars to the right from fifth to ninety-fifth are in order of one of two things. The fifth percent is either the smaller schools or the most quickly shrinking, the schools with the highest attrition. Schools at the ninety-fifth percentile are either the largest schools or the fastest growing schools. So, you can see that the fastest growing schools or the largest schools have the most Admissions staff. And, the smallest schools, or schools with big attrition problems, don't have any staff at all. You can plot for yourself where you might fall on that spectrum and figure out where you are in relation to that kind of data.

This is a best practice indicator for school growth, meaning that Admissions officers do directly affect the size of the enrollment of the school. For those of you that have split job descriptions, you might be full time, but if you're also responsible for development, say, you are not one full time equivalent, you're only part of one. So, you can count yourself accordingly. But this is really a hard data way to verify what we've always known, which is having a person whose job this is does in fact qualitatively matter in school enrollment. We felt it was very helpful to share this with you as one more strengthening argument about the value of your position in your school. As it says on the top left, ES MS, this is the Elementary, Middle School chart. If you're a high school, the data looks almost exactly the same with one difference, which is that the ninety-fifth percentile is 2.0, not 1.6. At the high school level the biggest and fastest growing schools have even more staff.

Rheua: Rebecca, very well explained. Isn't she great everybody? It certainly helps, makes sense to me too.

Rebecca: Not everybody is a numbers person.

Rheua: Important, though, to be able to understand this stuff and ponder it until we do. I had last year completed a task with three schools that were in the 850 to 950 camp and their Admissions people had been on the job from 7, 10, 15 years and each of them had 2 other, or 3 other people on staff with them full-time helping out in Admissions. They didn't grow to 1000 as K-12 schools, or in one case K-8 school, by accident. I want to go for a quick minute, back to where I started, saying I do believe it's important to have a full-time or part-time Admissions Director, whose sole focus is Admissions. Let me go back, if you have somebody that you're going to hire $\frac{3}{4}$ because you're a school that has 100 students or 150 students and you're trying to grow, you want to have 250. Or you're at 250 and you want to have 350, if you're trying to grow a school you might be able to get away for a year with a $\frac{3}{4}$ time AD, but very soon, when that school, when people come knocking on the door big time to that school, you're going to need to move that position to a full-time position. Please erase from the conversation part-time equals half time because that's not in the conversation at all. There's no half time Admissions person that in my judgment is ever going to do a truly proactive, comprehensive job. If you're here on this call and have been doing it, I will bless you again. But, it's not something I would recommend. I think we often take good people, turn them into Admissions people, don't pay them full time, they work full time, and we let them keep going along like that. I think we have to be careful about that. I think that's not fair, to take a good person and not pay them for the time they work.

Was there one last point we were going to make? Ah, yes. I had down, that I was going to mention earlier in the conversation that if you would like to have a conversation with me about who to hire, the qualifications, and where to find the person, I'm happy to have that conversation with you and I will then send you two documents that I have developed about hiring the right Admissions professional, but I don't send those out without having a conversation first. I want to just say, that I thank you all, for being on this call. Each of you have very different needs and I appreciate you carving out time for this, and certainly to Rebecca for putting it all together. It's been a pleasure.

Rebecca: We do have a few minutes. Our formal presentation is over, but a couple of things. The first is that we were recording the call so there will be notes developed afterwards. If you RSVP'ed, then I have your email address and I emailed the handouts to you, you will receive those automatically. You are welcome to share them with whoever might benefit from them in your school. We'll stay on the phone for a few more minutes. If anyone has any questions, please introduce yourself and ask them now.

Cortney Cope, Chicago Jewish Day School: You had talked about in your handout that Admissions encompassed recruitment and retention and marketing, do you have a sense of, I know those things often overlap, but is there 33, 33, and 33 percent or is there, what is the breakdown of the job? How much of an AD's job should be purely assessing the outsiders, how much should be doing recruitment, marketing the school in general and how much, approximately how much time should be spent in terms of retention.

Rheua: Well, I think the AD should spend 0 time marketing the school in general. Let me say that again, I think the AD should not spend any of his or her time marketing the school in general. I think that needs to be somebody else's job. I would not be an advocate of having an Admissions and Marketing Director. Research shows that general marketing means press releases, public service announcements, feature stories, do not increase enrollment. But, specifically targeted Admissions events and ads for Admissions events do help boost enrollment. I want to be very specific. General marketing, I do not see as part of the Admissions plate. Specific Admissions marketing I do see as part of the Admissions plate, but I wouldn't call it marketing. I would say that the Admissions person needs to go to a marketing firm to help develop an ad series for marketing Admissions, not for general name recognition. That's a longer conversation, but I want to be clear in my thinking about that, but part of that is the definition of the word marketing. I think we often mean different things, but when I say marketing, I mean marketing for very specific Admissions purposes to get the right kid to come to my school now. I'm still focused on the outsider. I'm not focusing on general name recognition stuff. One number, number two is that I don't think that attrition prevention is, I don't call it retention, I call attrition prevention, I don't think that that is an AD's job. I think that if she is using truth in advertising, if she is not promising programs that you can't deliver as a school and if she is admitting kids that you can serve well, then attrition should not be an Admissions problem, meaning related to the Admissions functioning or not functioning. If the AD is doing her part or his part, at the front end of the process, then attrition is an all-school problem that needs to be addressed, coordinated by the HOS and needs a lot of people helping make it better like better attitude on the part of faculty, responsiveness to issues as they come up, proactive planning of upbeat activities in the fall so that people wouldn't dream of leaving the school and not returning their reenrollment contracts. I don't see that as being an Admissions function to take care of attrition prevention; I see it as an all school project. I don't see it as a and a . Admissions has a comprehensive whole to it, that involves pieces of all of that, but not the entirety of marketing, not the entirety of attrition prevention.

Rebecca: I think the other thing that I would add to that is a huge number of the functions an AD is responsible for are seasonal tasks, and so not all of those things that you asked about percentages on happen at the same time. They happen at different times of the year, so at one time of the year you might spend a lot of time doing one thing and then not even have to think about it again for another 8 or 10 months, till it's time to do it again. So, it's split a little differently because so many tasks are seasonal tasks.

Rheua: Yes, well said.

Rita Mishan, Barkai Yeshiva: My question is on recruitment. Basically, if your school seeks to maintain small classrooms and luckily, your classrooms are full to capacity in your pre-school program, do you go out and recruit more if you are full to capacity?

Rheua: That's a very interesting question, actually. And, I'm going to say absolutely.

Rebecca: It's time to start adding more sections of each grade. If you can fill them, you should have them.

Rita Mishan, Barkai Yeshiva: But, if there's a goal to maintain only two classrooms per grade in the school and have 40 children, that's all. They don't want to grow bigger.

Rheua: I'm going to say very strongly and clearly with my answer, with my response, absolutely, unequivocally I am going to continue to recruit. You can say why and I'll say because and we can keep going. It's a great question for a longer conversation, but just because your "full" to me doesn't mean I stop recruiting. I need to be vigilant and let me just give you an example, I have worked with a school in the New York area that has close to 1000 students, they have never recruited for their high school because they've always had 25 area middle schools that came to their school. Two-thirds of their entering ninth graders came from schools other than their own middle school. Ok, out of that two-thirds coming from outside, half of those feeder schools started their own high schools. Now, suddenly, this school has had a one-third drop in enrollment because they didn't pay attention to what was going on around them. Now, what does that have to do with a lower school? Everything. I think if take Admissions for granted and don't think we have to keep thinking about where are great kids that ought to be coming to our school, I think we've got our heads in the sand.

So, I'm going to go back and say, I think, let's not get complacent. If we have low attrition, what does that mean, less than 10%, cut it in half. If you have 5% attrition, cut it in half. If you have 3% attrition, cut it in half. Never take attrition for granted. Always stay vigilant about attrition. I'm going to say the same thing about enrollment, never take recruitment for granted. Always go out and recruit. It may be an anathema to some of you to think you would ever turn away a Jewish child, well all I can say is when you're there is let's talk about it. Until you're a place where you're turning away more kids than you have space for, let's get you there first. I think it's a good practice to always recruit thoughtfully.

Cortney Cope, Chicago Jewish Day School: If you hire an Admissions person, at our school one of our selling points is our staff. We have a great HOS and fantastic teachers, and we feel during the tour they sell the school. How can you keep them, particularly the HOS, involved in the process while relinquishing the reins to an Admissions person?

Rheua: Who's the they? Who's the them involved in the process?

Cortney Cope, Chicago Jewish Day School: The HOS. While relinquishing the reins. So, you know, if the HOS is the one who normally runs the tours and they're a big selling point to our parents who feel connected with, very accessible, it's people are often sold on the school by her. How can we keep that, staying positive, while going to a model where we're using an Admissions person?

Rheua: Well, there's a hundred other things that need doing by an AD that is not giving tours and filling the school during a tour. So, I think if you get your HOS to meet families while on tour, that's a great thing. If she's willing and available and you think she's charismatic (not all heads of school are, sorry). 99% are, therefore are good people to meet when you're on tour. But, that's not the only person who ought be doing tours and talking to families. Quite frankly, the research doesn't show that the heads of school are the best sales people for schools. Research does not show that ADs are the best salespeople for schools. Research shows that the best salespeople for schools are current

students and current parents. That doesn't mean don't hire an AD, what it means to me is that you need to have some ambassadors that are carefully chosen by the AD, trained and coached by the AD, and I happen to call those ambassadors PALS. PALS is an acronym that stands for parents, alums and students. So, I want my strong group of volunteers that I chose, not that the Board gave to me. Current students that I chose, that are not selected by teachers. I want them working with me on tours, I want them working with me at open houses, I want them with me on feeder school presentations, if I'm so lucky as to get such an animal to happen. I want them with me coming to parlor meetings and school fairs. I have lots of uses for the right parents and students that I've selected. So, if you haven't been to my PALS workshop at a PEJE Assembly, it will happen again in at another date. I feel really very strongly about that. So, I don't give tours. I have students or current parents giving tours, or at least part of a tour. And if your HOS is particularly charismatic, wonderful. That's terrific. I bet if you had parents and students meeting those people, they would be raving about those people, too. I think it's very dangerous to put the all the faith in the HOS. If that person leaves, now what are you going to do? Whereas there are always going to be great current students and great current parents, so I would keep them in the pipeline and let them be my best salespeople.

Which by the way brings me to one other thing that we still have to, if we have any board members on the call, I just want to say that, a note I've written to myself is that if there are any schools that are having recruitment and retention activities and are managed by a board committee, my strong recommendation is to dissolve that committee just as immediately as possible and turn that over to the school professionals. Even if you don't have an AD, stop doing that as board work and let the HOS do that. If you have an AD, I don't know why you want to keep doing it. I think you need to let go, board members need to let go of day to day management issues, Admissions and marketing are day to day management issues, attrition prevention day to day management issues, turn it over to paid staff and the board needs to keep on loftier issues about how to keep the school alive and well in years to come like building endowment. So, I'm very serious about that. Sorry I left it to the last minute, but I feel that boards should get out of the recruitment, retention, attrition prevention business, and let the professionals do that work.

Rebecca: Alright, well I think it's time for us to say goodbye this afternoon. Rheua's contact information, phone and email, is on the handout you received. If you do have follow up questions, certainly send her an email and we can continue the conversation. You can contact me at Rebecca@peje.org and I have additional experience and resources to share with you. Thank you for joining us today. We had a great call and thank you so much to Rheua for your time and wish everyone a wonderful afternoon.