

Admissions Management Tips From Michael Platt



In this document, you'll find 17 admissions management tips, compiled from a series of posts by Michael Platt and guests on Career College Central's LinkedIn group discussions - including guest submissions from Dr. Susan F. Shulz and Richard Ashley.

Pulled from Career College Central's LinkedIn page:
www.linkedin.com/groups/Career-College-Central-2063352?mostPopular=&gid=2063352

Tip #1

Glengarry/Glen Ross...Some Reps Deserve a Set of Steak Knives.

Make sure your reps know that their salary is not the extent of your investment in them.

If you buy 20 inquiries a week at \$100 per for that rep, you are investing another \$100,000 a year in that rep. And no rep should feel that they are deserving of their portion of the leads.

Leads are an investment, and should one investment manager earn 10% growth while another earned 5%, would you give them an even distribution of your money?

Same SHOULD hold true for admissions. Reps are owed zero leads, and if you do not make them earn the leads through performance, you will limit the performance of the team.

With all of the performance metrics being used today, an even distribution of leads is no longer the best method, it's just the old method that most have failed to improve upon.



Tip #2

Am I a Buyer or a Seller?

While urgency and diligence are critical components of a successful admissions team, there is one perspective sorely missing.

Admissions reps need to stop behaving as sellers and start being buyers. Yes, you need to give the prospect enough info for them to make an informed decision, but it should be THEIR job to convince the admissions rep that they will work hard and succeed.

Admissions...just look at the word. They are the gatekeepers and need to take that perspective. When I train admissions reps, the three things I always get great feedback on are these statements:

“My job is to provide you with the information you need to make an informed decision, but more important, it is my responsibility to determine whether or not you have what it takes to work hard, complete this program, and become a successful medical assistant. Now tell me about you.”

“This program is tough. This is NOT for everyone. It may be for you, but it is definitely not for everyone.”

“There are many people like yourself who want a seat in this program. What sets you apart? Why should I select you instead of the person I saw earlier today?”

It is the perspective the admissions rep takes that determines the long-term success of the rep, the students and the institution. Am I a seller (low show rates, high drops from buyer’s remorse, and higher default rates) or a buyer?

And it takes three things to succeed from the buyer’s perspective. It takes belief in the value proposition, the courage to not slide back into the seller’s perspective, and top down support from management so that when a start looks weak, you are not pushed to start selling. It’s not like you don’t have another class starting in 1-4 weeks.



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Tip #3

Meet 'em Where They're At

I was just chatting with an admissions rep from CT on Facebook. I met her through LinkedIn, then friended her on Facebook and noticed her page was strictly for professional use. I asked her how that was going, and while she confirmed that Facebook is a good recruitment tool, she added another use I hadn't considered. She said that prospects today, especially those that find schools on the Internet, do not want to pick up their phones. They don't hate the reps, they just don't like the phone. So this rep, when she is unable to reach the prospects by phone, friends them on Facebook and begins the dialogue there.

Social networking is not limited to a recruitment tool. It can be used to work with alumni, student groups, placement opportunities, default management, student services and as a simple replacement for the telephone.

Tip #4

The 1% Factor

Admissions Management Tip #4. A rep with a 1% higher conversion rate is worth \$25,000 a year more than the standard. A ground school rep receives on average, 20 contactable inquiries a week, or 1,000 per year. A one percent uptick generates 10 more starts. At an average of \$18,000 in tuition, that is \$180,000 a year in tuition revenue. Take a 20% margin, and that one percent results in \$36,000 a year in profit. While that may not seem like a lot, a staff of eight reps who perform and are paid at a higher level will deliver an additional \$288,000 a year in profit. This fails to consider the higher completion, placement and repayment rates you are likely to experience with reps more capable of doing a great job up front.

So what do you pay YOUR reps? Could you deliver better performance if your compensation attracted and kept the better reps? Do the math, and more than likely it is just your own fear or outdated, unchallenged corporate mandates that stop you from having the most effective team possible.

Tip #5

Management Styles: Yours, Mine and Ours

One of the most common mistakes made by admissions managers is to make their style dominate each individual relationship. The most successful managers create relationship styles with each individual on their team based on the rep's personality type. If you always work to lead, influence and manage in only one way,



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you will only maximize effectiveness with “some” of your reps. My recommendation is to spend \$12 and buy the Keirseay sorter book, *Please Understand Me*. Have your reps take the short test, determine the personality type of each person under your leadership, and read up on what makes each of them tick. Once you truly understand them, the book helps you understand how to best lead and influence that person.

This book, and executing on the principles of individualized leadership styles, puts the responsibility on you to adapt to the rep, not the other way around. Then again, that’s why you get paid the BIG bucks, right?

Tip #6

Every Week the Same!

If you have starts every six weeks (or more often), never push harder at the end of a start. It is an inefficient way to manage. You burn out your reps, you empty your pipeline, you get off to a poor start for the next cycle and you are forced to do it again next time. You need consistent performance, week in and week out.

“Metrics should never change because of where you sit in the start cycle or where your numbers are at the time.”

Tip #7

A First Name Basis is Earned

Imagine going to a major university, walking up to the admissions officer and saying “Hey Keith, how’s it going?” Never. That person has the YES or NO that can affect the rest of your life. You dress nicely (a later tip), act respectful, and use their surname. Until a prospect is accepted into my school, I am Mr. Platt. I am in a position of authority and I have what they want.

From the prospect’s perspective: Who is Michael? He’s the guy who wants to be my friend, lull me to sleep and POUNCE, using this fake friendship to talk me into enrolling. Michael??? That’s what you can call me once you are a student. Then you are my friend. Until then, I will conduct myself like a human resource director who has the job (education) you want and need. And I can tell you that every job I have ever interviewed for, I called the interviewer by their surname.



Your reps should introduce themselves as Mr. or Ms. “so and so”, and THAT will set the right tone!

Tip #8

Changing TIMES

The times are changing, and so must the times we make available to prospects. Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. hours, is a model as old as this industry. But today, people are ready to research and review their options at other times as well. Weekends, evenings, etc. So, why do you schedule your reps using the traditional model?

Have you asked your lead management partner to provide you with a day and time analysis? It would be prudent to do so. And once you do, it will confirm to you that you need coverage Monday through Thursday evenings till 9 p.m., as well as coverage on Saturdays from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. Unless, of course, you think that THOSE prospects do not convert better when contacted quickly as the Monday through Friday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. prospects do. Or, maybe you believe that your competition is home eating dinner, too, so the race begins at 9 a.m. or Monday morning. In either case, you are likely wrong and missing starts.

So, get with the TIMES.

Hiring Heart

When I hire for almost any position, I place little value on things like education and relevant job experience. And the best part is, most/all of my competitors place MOST of the value on those two things. So, what do I look for? I look for three things:

1. First, I want a strong work ethic. I learn this about a person with my first question: “So, tell me what you know about us.” I tend to challenge with additional questions to gauge how well they prepared for their interview. They either did their homework or they did not. We live in a world where too many people feel they are entitled. Well, I can tell you that no one is entitled to work for ME. I make them fight for the job. I say things to try and scare them out of wanting the job. Someone who does their homework diligently and fights for the opportunity to work for me, will do their job with diligence and fight for the future of the prospective students.

Tip #9



2. Free thinkers. I will often ask a problem/solution question to see if the person can think on their feet and be creative in their approach. If they can't, they will get stopped in their tracks as new obstacles and challenges come up daily in the admissions world. Many do not see the value in creative thinking admissions reps, but as I have studied the best reps through the years, I find that free thinking, quick on their feet, creative men and women, are almost always the top performers.
3. Finally, I want a person of strong character. I always ask people who their heroes are and why. You can tell a great deal about someone with this question. I want someone who is influenced by the right people for the right reason because I need someone I can influence. Too many people are arrogant enough that they believe they have the answers before I ask the questions. No interest. No matter how good they may be, I cannot help them improve.

Tip #10

Alumni Associations (as submitted by Dr. Susan F. Schulz)

An easy way to increase enrollment of qualified students is through referrals. We all know that. What we need to focus on are the unique and obvious ways to get referrals. If we do a good job, we have happy, successful and employed graduates that will want to stay connected with their school - and they will want to refer their friends and family. All this points to logical reasons for alumni associations specific to career schools. Be a school that never leaves its students, and set up an alumni community geared to continually giving TO your graduates where all you want is their ongoing participation and referrals. (Easy to ask for job openings where they work and names of hiring decision makers, too!)

Tip #11

Everyone Loves to Role Play

The biggest admissions rep morale killer is when someone enrolls, but you can never get in touch with them again. It is like asking the man or woman of your dreams to marry you (prospect), they say yes (completed application), you tell your friends and family (DOA and the other reps), then they disappear.

Often the reason they disappear is that someone else in their buying committee went after their decision or your school and they were unprepared to handle it. So prepare them.





After a prospect fills out an application and says they are fully committed, back off a moment and ask them, hopefully by name (you should already know who the person is that is most likely to influence the decision and should know them by name), “If there was one thing Jessica (maybe the wife) would be concerned about, what do you think that would be?” They are likely to say, “Nothing. She supports my decision.” or “I make my own decisions and no one tells me what to do or not do.” So you may need to press in with, “Well, let’s say she did have a concern, even though she is supportive and may not even bring it up. What do you think that would be?”

Get it out of them or you may very well lose them. Don’t be afraid to push this.

So, let’s take a typical example here, like “She might say that she’s concerned that I won’t have enough time for her and the kids.”

Aha! Now you can help prepare him for this concern, because it will almost certainly come up. Now it is time to role-play.

“So, let’s say I’m Jessica. ‘Dave, I am supportive and want you to do what you think is right, but what’s that going to be like? I mean, when will you have time for the kids ... or even me?’ How will you answer her?”

“But she won’t say it ... Remain silent for a few seconds and he may just convince himself otherwise. If not, you might say “But if she did, what’s your response?”

The rest is you coaching Dave on some of the ways to handle the quality time concern and even some of the language he might use to assure Jessica. Take your time with this. It is worth the effort. I hear all the time from reps who do this, and the prospect actually tells them later that it DID come up and went well. Believe me, in most cases it went well because they were well-coached. You didn’t tell Dave to make up an answer, you just shared some options and then helped him better articulate the option that resonated with him.

Don’t arrogantly think that every enrollment is solid. Unless the buying committee was with the prospect when you met with them, they still more a suspect than a prospect.



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Tip #12

Hiring Athletes (submitted by Richard Ashley)

I was a competitive athlete in high school and college, and eventually a coach before I got into career college recruiting. I have learned that if you hire a person who is already a winner and team player, then you just won half the battle in training admissions personnel.

Since any form of incentive or bonus does not exist, we all face the reality of hiring admissions staff that must be self motivated to succeed. I call it the 'INTERNAL COMPETITIVE SPIRIT'; that inside drive that makes an individual want to compete against themselves, better themselves and always attempt to beat their best.

They also are trainable, because they have been coached most of their lives and understand they have to practice, practice, practice, learn, learn and learn some more in order to become successful in whichever career they chose.

In your interviewing process with potential admissions personnel, ask a few of these questions and you may find the right person with the right skill sets necessary to be a hall of fame admissions staff member for your school.

- Which sports did you participate in during high school and/or college?
- Did you win any honors, awards or special achievements?
- How many years did you participate in these sports or activities?
- Were you ever a captain or co-captain?
- What qualities or skill sets made you successful in this sport or activity?
- Who was your favorite coach and why?

This is a short list of questions that can give you a reading as to the competitive nature of a future staff member. The best admissions people I have ever hired over my 30 year tenure were 70% female/30%male.



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Here are a few of their past experiences:

Swimmer in high school and college with national ranking (female), high school wrestling team co-captain and state champion (male), cheerleading team captain in high school (female), long distance runner now and in college (female), high school quarter back (male), volleyball co-captain in high school and college (female).

These are only a few, but for the last one mentioned I also hired her friend who played on her college volleyball team as a financial aid officer, and then teamed them up at my school. They became one of the best student service/customer service teams I have ever had the pleasure to work with, because I knew the career college students they were working with would get their maximum efforts during the enrollment process.

In a final note, since they understand coaching, they also can move into admissions management in a shorter period of time.

Tip #13

Teaching Reps to Build Commitment, One Prospect Decision at a Time (submitted by Richard Ashley)

It is important that your admission teams understand some of the decisions a prospective student has to make within a few hours and days after the initial contact with your school. These are major decisions in the student's life, and yet we sometimes forget that fact when we are working with them in those first few days. A fair amount of our students are procrastinators, fence sitters, put off until tomorrow what I should do today mentality. This is not their fault, they have not been successful with education, they do not see its benefits, and they were average or below average students and are fearful of going back to school.

It is these fears that make the 10 decisions I mention below difficult for our prospect.

Have your admissions staff look at the decisions these students have to make and ask them to allow the student to make one decision at a time, then go forward to make the next decision, and so on and so forth. In other words, do not get ahead of the prospective student's decision making process. If we move too fast through these processes, we may put pressure on a prospect and they may chose not to make the next decision in the enrollment process.



MAJOR DECISIONS IN A PROSPECTIVE STUDENT'S LIFE:

1. Deciding to contact you
2. Deciding to make an appointment
3. Deciding to show up for that appointment
4. Deciding to start an application
5. Deciding to meet with financial aid/business office
6. Deciding to take academic assessments
7. Deciding to complete financial aid/business office process
8. Deciding to complete the application process
9. Deciding to attend orientation
10. Deciding to start school

Without these decisions and positive reinforcement at each stage of this process, you can lose or have lost students already – many times without knowing the reason why. Help your prospects make each decision at the appropriate time, feel comfortable about that decision and realize it was the right decision.

Each decision is the next level of commitment by your prospective student. Ten levels of commitment from these 10 decisions, if done properly, will give you more students that will matriculate and then graduate.

STUDENTS FIRST ... PAPER SECOND!

Know That You Care vs. Care What You Know

Don't give up on people who enroll then never show up. And don't keep calling. Once they miss the start date, give them time. Wait a month or two, and send them an email, or even a text. If they weren't taking your calls, they made a choice, one you should respect. Subject line should say, "Want to Make Sure You are Okay." Content should say that you were really excited FOR them and they seemed to be as well, or that you know sometimes circumstances change and that you respect that. That you don't want to bother them, so ask when is it okay to check in with you. Finish with a comment about how you hope that whatever prevented them from coming to school wasn't a bad situation, and that if they would like to talk, to call you. If you don't mind this, give them your cell number and make sure they know it is your cell. You may find that they just need someone they trust, to talk to, and this is an opportunity to gain trust by not pushing and showing more concern for them as a person than them as a potential student.

Tip #14





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Tip #15

After the Interview

Sometimes the best opportunity to teach comes when debriefing an interview with an admissions representative. These are golden opportunities and should occur within a few hours of the interview itself. Here are some things to consider:

1. What points should you have spent more time on?
2. Could you have established rapport, confidence, student interest sooner or better?
3. Was your introduction/warm up the best it could have been based on the situation?
4. What objections were expressed?
5. Were your methods of overcoming them as good as they could have been?
6. Did you really overcome all objections to the satisfaction of the student?
7. What were the key factors in securing an opportunity to ask for commitment?
8. Could you have gotten the commitment sooner?
9. Did you listen with empathy?
10. Who did most of the talking?

This is a short post interview review that can and will improve admissions performance, by allowing your staff member to look in that personal mirror, and reflect on the last 60 minute student interaction.

Tip #16

Use Your Resources

Sometimes admissions departments are so busy trying to enroll student, they fail to take the small but necessary steps to improve admissions rep product knowledge. When is the last time you had your placement director spend time with admissions sharing what they do, how they do it and reviewing their basic SWOT? What about FA? Externship coordinators? Obviously schools provide this training as it relates to programmatic product knowledge, but how often?

Also, track conversions by program offering. You will find that you have certain reps that are much better with certain programs. If most reps convert CPI leads for medical assisting at 3% but one is at 5%, have them lead a segment of your weekly meeting. Look for



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what each rep excels in (it does not have to be a specific program) and leverage that. I would do this EVERY week because it teaches leadership and that is a key component to the success of any admissions rep.

Tip #17

Stating Your Purpose, and Asking for Theirs

Jim, let's talk about today's interview. First of all, I'm an admissions coordinator here at Arcade Automotive Institute, so my purpose is twofold.

"First, I need to provide you with any and all information you need to be able to make an informed decision. But most important, I need to get to know you...because it is my responsibility to evaluate your commitment, desire and aptitude, and then make a recommendation to my boss as to whether or not I believe that YOU are someone who will work hard, understands the challenges of being an adult learner, and that you have what it takes to finish this program, get a good job in the automotive field, and become the type of EMPLOYEE my school can be proud of once you graduate.

"Now, tell me why you're here?"

- Be firm, concise and clear as to your commitments.
- Make sure they understand that THEY need to impress YOU.
- Do not be casual.
- Do not use your school's acronym, like "AAI"
- Use strong words like commitment, aptitude, dedication, etc.
- Be sure they understand you take pride in having strong graduates in the field.

MOST IMPORTANTLY - when you ask them why they are there, shut up and listen. At most encourage them to go on, keep talking, add clarity, etc., as sometimes you can get to the heart of the desire early on IF you are willing to talk less and listen more!