

ABCs of Male Involvement Handout

Engagement Pyramid

Gideon Rosenblatt, Former Groundwire Executive Director, studied the path to engagement and leadership in associations and found six levels of involvement/engagement. All the observations apply to *both men and women*:

1. **Observing:** At this level, a person becomes aware of your PTA probably from another parent or a communication. He/she does not know much about your mission. She/he has no real communication or involvement with you or the work you do. In a nutshell, this person knows your PTA exists.
2. **Following:** The person now becomes interested in what you do and starts to care. He/she provides contact info to receive info. She/he follows you on social media. Engagement is in the caring phase.
3. **Endorsing:** You have built trust with this person. He/she desires regular communication and wants to do simple, quick acts with little risk or investment of resources. She/he engages in low-level advocacy, makes small contributions, and forwards info to friends. Engagement is in the trust phase.
4. **Contributing:** The person is now contributing significant time or money to your PTA or school. He/she is deliberate in about the decision to participate. She/he contributes because of shared values or beliefs. The person wants personal communication and feels part of the work you do.
5. **Owning:** The person is fully invested in your mission and success. He/she wants regular engagement. She/he uses “we” instead of “you” when referring to PTA or the school. The relationship is now collaborative with regular two-way communication.
6. **Leading:** The person leads and carries out PTA’s work. He/she initiates communication rather than passively waiting to hear. She/he focuses on engaging others in the work. The person is mission-focused.

Rosenblatt’s research shows individuals engage by moving through these distinctive steps although some individual’s journeys are swifter than other’s. Questions for PTAs to ask:

- What is the perception of PTA to “observers” in your community?
 - What do men perceive? Is that perception different than that of women?
 - Can “observers” obviously see value in your work? Value to themselves? Their child? The school? The community?
 - How would an “observer” know your mission? Do your actions and communications accurately reflect your mission for all to see?
- What motivates your “followers” to share their contact information with you?
 - How often does your PTA communicate with members, nonmembers and the greater community? Through what channels?
 - What does your PTA communicate? Is communication positive with stories of success and value? Or is your communication stream full fundraising and volunteer pleas?
- How are you providing opportunities for your “endorser” to engage, act, and participate?
 - Do you regularly seek input from your community?
 - Do you recognize and thank “endorsers” for small acts and contributions? Do you provide meaningful and manageable opportunity to “endorse” your work?
 - Does your PTA provide opportunities for simple, quick, easy-in/easy-out volunteering? Or are all your volunteer opportunities tied to meeting attendance, chairing events, logging long hours?

- How does your PTA recognize and support significant “contributors”?
 - Do you connect the work of the “contributor” to the success of the PTA, the school, families, and the mission?
 - Do your contributors feel valued? Does the work they do feed their passion for your mission?
 - Is your PTA collaborative and inclusive, or do only a few people make all the decisions?
 - Do you recruit, promote and develop leaders for the right reason—a passion for the mission, a desire to do something to benefit PTA, children, families?
- How does your PTA treat its “owners”?
 - Do you speak the language of “we” as in “we are in this together,” “we will get this done,” “we are doing great work,” “we can make this happen,” or is your PTA about “me” and “I”?
 - Is “owner” communication regular and two-way, and meaningful in nature?
 - Do you demonstrate you that you value your volunteers’ time by using their time wisely at effectively-run meetings and efficiently-run events, and by not overworking or overburdening any one person?
- Does your PTA focus on its mission and create true “leaders”?
 - Is the work you do relevant? Meaningful? Long-lasting?
 - Does that work improve the lives of children and families? Improve the school and community?
 - Do your “leaders” inspire others to get involved?

Let’s talk about men:

National PTA regularly surveys men to find out why males lead, what attracts them to PTA, and what they want from PTA. Here are the ABCs:

A = ASK. Nearly half the men polled say they were not asked to join PTA!

- Make the “ask” relevant – connect it to the #1 reason why men say they join/lead PTA: “to improve the school to benefit my child.” Also relevant in our surveys, “being a role model” and “volunteering with my family.”
- Tell men that joining/helping demonstrates an interest in the school and a child’s education and shows support for teachers and the school system.
- Men surveyed say recruit other men by asking men to “be active in your child’s life.” Men find this messaging works: “be involved with your child,” “PTA benefits your child,” “help your child,” “PTA membership is good for your child,” and “PTA supports the success of your child.”
- Men respond to other men.
- Be specific. Our surveys show that one parent is responsible for reading and processing items sent as “Attention Parents” and that person is usually the female. So, be clear that you are talking to men--dads, brothers, uncles, etc.
- More than 90% of the men surveyed say their spouses or significant are already a member, and that fact contributed largely in their decision to join and engage. Yet only 50% of women say their spouse/significant other is a PTA member. Consider using women to recruit men.
- Message that PTA membership, volunteerism in the school, and engagement with education are not just for women—that studies show children benefit and are more likely to succeed when men and women are engaged.

- Talk to the male-oriented groups in your town. Explain the value of PTA and the power of men engaged in their children’s lives. Explore opportunities for collaboration.

B = BEND, be flexible, do things differently.

- Men tell us the #1 reason why they don’t join PTA is because they don’t have the time. Separate time from joining/supporting.
- If you want volunteers, be specific about your requirements. Almost half the men surveyed said they would volunteer if their roles and expectations were clearly defined.
- Surveys show men are result-oriented. They do not join or volunteer for social contact. They want to know their volunteer hours will lead to measurable results.
- Surveys show men are motivated to be involved if events/opportunities are aimed at them. Suggestions include school beautification projects, bike rodeos, book fairs, lunch buddies, dads read days, and family-oriented events like family barbecues/cook-outs, carnivals/fairs, proms and homecoming, talent shows, family movie nights, and ice cream socials.
- Men told us they are most likely to get involved if other men are involved or if their entire family can participate and be involved.

C = Communication is the cornerstone

- We asked men how to communicate effectively to get more engaged and joining PTA. Their #1 response: Male-oriented advertising. Ask for men. Message to men. Tell men they are welcome. Highlight male involvement. Recognize male volunteers. Their #2 response? Have men ask men.
- Men surveyed want fewer meetings with clear and results-oriented agendas, activities that achieve specific goals, quick and effective communication, and bulleted lists, summaries, updates, etc
- Men surveyed made the point that they want “less bickering” at meetings and less of an emphasis on fundraising. They want to serve on boards where school success is the focus and where there is “good communication and collaboration.”
- Communicate your goals, regularly communicate your progress, tie volunteering/membership to those goals. Promote the value of what you do and how it helps children and school succeed.
- All people—male and female—want to be part of a winning team, a successful organization, a fruitful effort. Connect the work of your volunteers and members to the success of your work.

Resources:

Men in Focus: <http://www.pta.org/members/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4885&navitemNumber=4903>

PTA Male Engagement Toolkit: <http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4477>