

Meeting Helicopter Parents Halfway

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Wendy Peterson & Becky Bitter



Introductions and a Bit of Humor

- **“Helicopter parents” is a term to define parents who are “always hovering – ultra-protective, unwilling to let go, enlisting ‘the team’ to assert a variety of special needs and interests.”**
- **But, we are not alone! Parents around the world are hovering....**
- **And a look into the future? The ‘helicopter parent’ is replaced by the ‘stealth bomber parent’ (according to Howe and Stauss)**

Who Are These Helicopter Parents, Anyway?

The Boomers! (Born 1943-60)

- Grew up as indulged youth during an era of community-spirited progress
- The proud creation of postwar optimism, Dr. Spock rationalism, and *Father Knows Best* family order
- Self-appointed arbiter of the nation's values

(other generations include the Lost Generation (1883 – 1900), GI Generation (1901 – 1924), the Silent Generation (1925 – 1942), and Generation X (1961 – 1981))

Boomers as Parents

“The nature of every college function from admissions to campus life to the classroom to career counseling will change dramatically. The doctrine of *in loco parentis*, thrown over by rebellious Boomers forty years ago, will reemerge in a new community guise as the Boomers’ own children fill dorm rooms.”

From Millennials Go To College, Howe and Strauss

~ Providing the Context ~

- **Those children in our dorm rooms are the Millennial Generation (Born 1982 – now)**
- “**Millennials are smart, ambitious, incredibly busy, very ethnically diverse, and dominated by girls, to this point. They make decisions jointly with parents (‘co-purchasing’ a college) . . . and have very demanding parents.**”

From Millennials Go To College, Howe and Strauss

Seven Core Traits of Millennials

- **Special** – vital to their parents' sense of purpose
- **Sheltered** – safety and security critical
- **Confident** – high levels of trust, optimism, and connection to parents
- **Team-oriented** – Barney, soccer, school uniforms
- **Conventional** – comfortable with parents' values
- **Pressured** – busy, overscheduled, avoid personal risk, trophy kid pressure to excel
- **Achieving** – focused on grades and performance, higher school standards are a political priority

....in Short...

- **Millennials [and their parents] have “high expectations of authority and ‘zero tolerance’ for institutional failure.”**

What Issues Do You Currently See?



Issues and Needs

- **Constant contact**
- **Need for approval**
- **Use of the word “we” by parents**
- **Inability to let go**
- **Expectation that parent has rights to student information, by both parties**
- **Communication challenges – how do we communicate expectations, boundaries, processes, etc...**

And now, A Story

The Case of the Ineligible Applicant...

In which an Admissions Officer received an animated phone call...

What are Our Possible Reactions?

- **Initially – we may want to say “Let go!”**
- **But, reality is their relationship is different, and we need to acknowledge that....**

What Are Our Goals?

- **Want to be Allies, not Adversaries**
- **It's a partnership that we want to be successful**
- **Desired results:**
 - **Better satisfaction**
 - **Higher retention**
 - **Fewer angry phone calls to president's office**



So, How Do We Get There?



Tips for Building Partnerships with Parents and Students

- **Be aware and Beware of your Audience!**
 - **Overarching strategy is to be mindful of parent / student needs up front—
acknowledge and review processes / programs / communications with that in mind....**
- **Acknowledge that the parents are partners**
- **Use phrases that acknowledge the parents' desire to be involved**
- **Help them know how to be involved**

Tips for Building Partnerships with Parents and Students (cont)

- **Helpful communication tips:**
- **Instead of “I can’t tell you that”, or “FERPA doesn’t allow me to tell you anything”, try “Sounds like you care a lot about your daughter...” convey that we care too; and “Here’s what I can tell you”**
- **Give overview without sharing specific details (“Most students in this case...”)**
- **Give averages (if helpful)**
- **Ask parents what they already know as a way in to the conversation...**

Tips for Building Partnerships with Parents and Students

- **Think about inclusion from prospect to graduate**
 - **Campus tours; recruiting materials; orientation programs; publications; web sites**
- **Set expectations up front (being proactive about communicating about policies)**
 - **Communicate about FERPA and other policies early and often**
- **Develop staff training that acknowledges millennials and their parents**

What's Worked For You?

Other Examples

- **Clemson recruits parents at orientation to come back the next year and share their experiences**
- **Web sites specifically for parents**
- **“How to Let Go” guides**
- **Orientation sessions that include parents in new ways, and that allow more communication points between parents and students (Vermont)**
- **Newsletters, etc., to parents**



Healthy Hovering

- **Employ proactive, not reactive, strategies in an intentional way**
- **Make sure that parents know that you care about their student – empathy goes a long way!**
- **Show parents that you understand them**

