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Fostering a Culture of Collective Security

By Robert M. Keiser M.B.A., Executive Director, Southeastern College/Southeastern Institute

As a citizen of the great state of Florida, a previous resident of the city of Parkland, and a current member of academia, last year's school shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas (MSD) has hit very close to home. My thoughts and emotions have ranged from pure outrage to profound sadness, to utter confusion. Unfortunately, MSD is just one of many recent school shootings. I have often wondered if society is becoming desensitized to school shootings as they seem to occur so frequently. This startling trend of shootings on campus, and other acts of violence is our new reality and cannot be met with complacency or self-assuredness but instead must be met with action and decisive leadership.

Protecting institutional stakeholders is not only ethically correct, but it is also the best way to protect the institution from liability. Most campuses employ some form of security such as a mass communication system, blue-boxes, security guards, etc. At Southeastern College/Southeastern Institute we go to great lengths to ensure our campus-based stakeholders are safe. Safety initiatives encompass a layered approach that includes, but is not limited to, written policies and procedures, positioning armed guards on campus during all operational hours, equipping our faculty and staff

with walkie-talkies and panic buttons, mandating the use of identifications badges for visitors, and utilizing an alert/emergency information system. Additionally, the campus staff is trained as operational Campus Response Teams (CRT) and participate in regular crisis training.

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Although our institution goes to great lengths and costs to ensure the security of our students, staff, and faculty, I do not believe that any strategy or initiative is effective enough to prevent acts of mass

violence on campus. Sadly, it is clear that campus-based security has not been effective enough in preventing mass shootings or other acts of violence. These incidents have occurred at well-capitalized schools with robust security frameworks and at institutions with lesser means of deterrence. I firmly believe that

violence and not an irrefutable answer to the threat of mass violence. To truly protect an institution from the threat of a mass shooting a culture of collective security must be fostered and invested in.

In an attempt to mobilize all university stakeholders in a collective approach to security we discuss and demonstrate our Crisis Response, Alert Now, and Ombudsman systems during orientation. We instruct students to report suspicious activities to faculty and campus administration. Additionally, we conduct regular active shooter, bomb threat, fire, natural disaster, shelter in place, emergency and external lockdown, and conflict resolution drills. We consistently collect recent contact information from students so they can stay in touch with administration during all crisis related matters and we utilize satellite phones in case normal communications with students and campus-based personnel are severed. All guest on campus must be issued a visitor and parking pass. Must know emergency information, and safe living off campus brochures are circulated to all our students along

I firmly believe that security frameworks are important facets of campus security and should continue to be invested in, but without the creation of a culture of collective security, I believe these security frameworks can provide a false sense of security.

security frameworks are important facets of campus security and should continue to be invested in, but without the creation of a culture of collective security, I believe these security frameworks can

provide a false sense of security. In fact, it is of pinnacle importance that institutional leaders must not become complacent and rely on their investments. Instead, it is imperative that campus administrators understand that even the most modern security systems serve simply as a deterrent to acts of



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Southeastern, Robert has worked in admissions, financial aid, academics, and governmental relations. Prior to his time in Higher Education, he worked for U.S Financial Services in wealth management and Skanska USA, construction management, in business development. He also served as an appointee to Florida Governor Crist's Governor's Council on Physical Fitness. In this capacity, he contributed to a state action plan to combat childhood obesity and testified before U.S. Congress on behalf of the FIT Kids Act; an act mandating one hour of physical education in America's public schools.

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with external and internal security resources published on our website.

The key to these initiatives is that all of these security measures are regularly discussed, practiced, and involve all university stakeholders, including students. University stakeholders, including students, must understand that they play a pivotal role in protecting university life. The value of collective security must become constantly preached and practiced and must become as important as any operational KPI or institutional outcome. To do this, we discuss security in management meetings, have regularly scheduled CRT meetings, and hold institutional actors responsible for their crisis preparation and response. Additionally, we encourage institutional leaders to ask for feedback from stakeholders to improve security frameworks and to collect information. We instruct the administration to promote and practice psychological safety to ensure that feedback is not criticized if threats do not materialize, and a culture that articulates each stakeholder's role and importance in preventing violence on campus.

The power of a culture of collective security is bolstered by modern technology and the investments that campus administrators make for security purposes. In this vein, nearly every student and university employee has a smartphone. With modern cellphone technology, it is completely feasible to communicate with all stakeholders in an immediate fashion via voice, text, or app. This

provides institutions incredible ability to disseminate news of a threat to both internal and external actors and to activate a collective defense against the advent of a mass shooter. With modern technology, if stakeholders are trained and are vigilant, all institutional stakeholders can play a role in protecting each other and foiling potential acts of violence. Thus, the power of campus-

based security frameworks is reliant upon the vigilance and buy-in of all campus stakeholders, not the investments made in preventing potential acts of violence. If all campus-based

stakeholders see themselves as pivotal cogs in an institutional security framework a collective culture of security will serve as the best protection against acts of violence.

Hopefully, Marjory Stoneman Douglas and other similar tragedies have manifested that it is no longer acceptable to tell ourselves that it will not happen to us and we, therefore, do not need to worry. On the contrary, we must accept this new reality and become active participants in a collective framework of security.

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Four Elements Needed for a Successful Teach-Out

Written by Sara Klein from an interview with Mitchell Fuerst, President, Success Education Colleges

Teach-outs are a way for students attending a closing college to continue their educational journeys. When a teach-out occurs, another institution creates a plan to provide continuing services to these students, so they can complete their programs with minimal disruption.

Mitchell Fuerst, a second-generation college administrator, following his mother, Marsha Fuerst, who founded the colleges in 1966, is currently President of Success Education Colleges (SEC), which has 10 campuses in two states, and has 15 years of teach-out experience.

Many years ago, Mitchell went into his mother's office and told her there was a troubled college, asking her what could be done. "It looks like they may cease their operation; what can we do?" Mitchell said. "His mother then said, 'Let's just help the students.' She was just interested in completing those students' education. She didn't ask about financial aid or anything on the monetary side of it; she just wanted to help the students." That was his first experience with a teach-out, and he's been involved with administering eight teach-outs for institutions across California.

There are many reasons why colleges might close and the most

important thing to do is to take care of the students.

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"College closures happen for a myriad of different reasons. It's not just issues with accreditation or with the U.S. Department of Education or a financial problem; it's usually a number of different reasons," Mitchell explained.

number of different reasons," Mitchell explained. "We see this happening across the higher education landscape, which includes public, not-for-profit and private, for-profit institutions."

Teach-outs don't only help the students affected; they can be a positive boost for the institution implementing the teach-out.

"Since we've done these teach-outs, [regulators in the triad] know our organization even better; they know

our team,” Mitchell said. “As a result, I think we’ve gotten an increase in credibility from all regulators because we had the fortitude and ability to finish up the students and bring these teach-outs to a successful conclusion.”

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once there is a college that’s going to cease operations, is for the school that’s closing to reach out to teach-out partners early in the process. However, Mitchell has found that

typically the colleges wait too long, trying to remedy their own operation.

“Colleges that are having troubles need to reach out to teach-out partners early in the process, so the college doesn’t precipitously close and then the students are left kind of floating. [The ideal scenario is] where a teach-out agreement is in place and it becomes a much more orderly transition,” Fuerst described.

If a school seeks a teach-out partner early in the process or later, as often happens, the second step is the same, and that is to assemble a team to visit the campuses that are affected. Teams

can be comprised of whomever is deemed necessary, but Mitchell uses a specific proven formula that has been utilized many, many times.

“Typically our most senior executive committee members divide up and then usually take other corporate directors, and in many cases campus directors,” Mitchell said.

The next step is for the team to spring into action. Mitchell used the example of Brightwood College, which closed unexpectedly, to further explain what the teams do.

“We sent teams into each one of the [Brightwood College] campuses that were in our areas to talk with students and those team members at those campuses about how we were able to assist,” Mitchell said. “The team goes to the campus to start talking to the students immediately and talking to team members that their potential is a path forward.”

The team’s main goal is to provide options to the students affected by their closing schools. One option these students have, in California, is they can apply for the Student Tuition Recovery Fund (STRF) to get their loans forgiven, which is perhaps a less than ideal solution for many.

“We have found that in almost all cases the students want to continue their education. They want to



MITCHELL FUERST, a second-generation college administrator, is currently the President of Success Education Colleges (SEC), which is the parent organization he created to hold the Colleges’ three brands (North-West College, Glendale Career College and Nevada Career Institute); a system of allied

health schools based in the Los Angeles and Las Vegas areas. Currently, SEC has 10 campuses in two states. His Mother, Marsha Fuerst, founded the Colleges in 1966.

Mr. Fuerst received his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from California Polytechnic University, Pomona and has a varied

background in business and over the past 25 years has been instrumental in the growth and development of the Colleges’ educational programs, as well as Student and Team Member populations. He became the Colleges’ President in the fall of 2010.

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complete what they started. Perhaps they could get their money back and their loans discharged and that type of thing, but they can't get the time back," Mitchell said. "In the Brightwood situation there were Nursing students who were in an RN program, which is a two-year program and some of them were within four or five months of graduating. So they don't want to have their loans forgiven, they want to complete their education."

Another option is for the students to go to another school like a public institution Mitchell explains and how that is also not usually the best solution.

"For example in Nursing, [if they try to go to another school like a public institution], they unfortunately won't articulate their credits and there are no slots for them anyway to gain admission to a public institution because they're all impacted," Mitchell said.

For many, then, the students' best option is to elect to go to a teach-out if one is provided, as a means to complete their education.

"So [in the Brightwood College] case, we were able to gather the students up and say, you guys have multiple options and we're going to try to glue together a teach-out where we're going to hire all the faculty, we're going to get a facility – either this one or someplace else – and we're going to continue your education," Mitchell said.

Teach-outs don't happen immediately; they take time to put together. One thing that needs to be present is regulatory support. The institution needs to talk to the Department of Education, as well as going through the approval process from the regulatory bodies, which can take anywhere from 3-4 weeks if there aren't boards or programmatic accreditors, which cause the process



Former Brightwood College vocational nursing program students learn Glendale Career College has received conditional approval to teach-out the program.

to take longer. This particular one took SEC a little less than two months to implement.

"The reason why it took us that long is beside the regulatory triad that gets involved, we had two different Nursing boards to talk to as well," Mitchell clarified. He further explained that usually teach-outs come together more quickly than two months, because the regulatory triad has been very supportive of teach-outs. "They bend over backwards to do whatever they can to make sure the students can continue their education. I'm talking about national accreditors, our state bureau or oversight agency, and the U.S. Department of Education. In every case they have been very supportive

in getting the students back in school.”

After regulatory support, three additional things need to be present for a teach-out: students, employees, and a facility. Students are, arguably, the most important aspect. They need to be communicated with very quickly.

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“If you don’t gather [the students] together and tell them that there’s a path forward in continuing their education with their same instructors and potentially in their same facility, they end up dispersing and usually apply for loan forgiveness or tuition relief, which in most cases takes them sometimes years to resolve,” Mitchell said.

together and tell them that there’s a path forward in continuing their education with their same instructors and potentially in their same facility, they end up dispersing and usually apply for loan forgiveness or tuition relief, which in most cases takes them sometimes years

to resolve,” Mitchell said. “Once the students disperse, it becomes very difficult to get them back to class. So you need to communicate with them very early, share the potential plan with them, which is to hire the faculty and staff they’re familiar with and who they trust.”

Financially, it’s always best to protect the students, so they do not end up paying more than they originally planned. Students are already upset about their college closing, so charging more to move forward is like adding salt to the wound.

“In our experience, one way to have the students stay glued in to the process is that we always say we’re going to charge the students no more than they originally signed for on their original enrollment agreement, even if that program that they signed up for is less tuition than ours,”

Mitchell explained. “The bottom line is we always prorate it based on the original tuition because they don’t need that additional debt or aggravation. We’ve always found that it’s the best way to do right by the students.”

Sometimes the institution providing the teach-out won’t receive funds at all for certain students if Title IV has already been applied and dispersed. However, the reason for doing the teach-outs is to simply help them finish their education.

“[Money] is never the focus of our teach-outs and why we have done this so many times over many years. Given our experience, we know that teach-outs are not going to financially burden us. There is a lot of coordination and a lot of work that will stretch our team, [but we never focus on financial aid],” Mitchell explained. “The team in our colleges don’t mind working extra hard because they know that their work is resulting in saving additional students. They feel an enormous sense of pride [in being able to finish up these students].”

One additional thing that the teach-out institution needs to do with the students is communicating with them that they must get their transcripts and ledger immediately.

“These are the two most vital things that we need down the road to enroll them, to put them into our system, and to prorate their tuition. [Their ledger card and their transcript] are the building blocks of a student who’s entering a teach-out institution. If we have to, we advocate for them in talking to their closing school to please get those transcripts and ledger cards printed, so that these students can continue,” Mitchell said.

The third thing needed for a teach-out, after regulatory support and students, is employees. Many times the teach-out institution tries to use

the faculty from the closing school, if possible.

“The right recipe for a successful teach-out is to hire the faculty from the closing institution who the student’s trust, because the students feel safe, they feel comfortable, and they feel that there truly is a path forward and there’s somebody there that’s kind of looking out for them,” Mitchell said. Furthermore, it provides a sense of security for the faculty as well. “Again, it’s a huge sense of pride for every one of our existing team members to be able to help not only the students, but the employees from a closed school now have their own path forward of getting a paycheck. Because they’re such terrific employees, we have a spot for them, either long-term or at one of our other campuses. It’s a huge pickup for us. We’ve gotten some of the most fantastic new team members from a teach-out,” Mitchell explained.

The final component needed for a successful teach-out, after the regulatory support, the students, and the faculty, is the facility. Whatever works best is what is used, which could be at the closed college itself, at the teach-out institution if there is room, or another location. Each teach-out will be different, depending on the size and scope of the teach-out. If it’s small, the teach-out institution’s facility may be able to absorb them, but the most successful scenario is when the closing school facility is able to be used.

“We call this another ingredient in our recipe for a successful teach-out and that is to teach them in their existing facility,” Mitchell said. “So we are able to tell them you’re going to have your same instructor, your same curriculum, and you’re going to come right back to this classroom. The only thing that’s going to be different is your scrubs are going to have our institution’s name on it and your

enrollment agreement will be with our institution and your diploma will be from our institution.” All but one of the eight teach-outs Mitchell has been a part of have been able to use the existing facility by negotiating a short-term lease with the landlord.

There are usually equipment needs for the facility as well, and most closing schools “say yes, use the equipment. So we get everything needed. It’s crucial that you have to do that,” Mitchell said. “It’s not like I

have equipment and chairs and tables and labs for 300 additional students for a Nursing program within days. Sure, we can assemble that equipment but it’s going to take too much time.”

Financially, in Mitchell’s experience, conducting teach-outs doesn’t financially burden the institution. They may operate in the red slightly, break even, or maybe operate slightly in the black.

“But it’s whatever is in the best interest of the student. As my mom always would say, if we just take care of the student, everything else will be okay. So that’s what drives us to this day,” Mitchell said.

Mitchell believes there needs to be a lot of work done in the area of policies or legislation to help facilitate teach-outs and hopes to be able to get all the stakeholders to come to the table for these kinds of discussions. Many times, the mechanics of a teach-out are really unknown.

“Teach-outs ultimately will save everybody. They save the students, they save the faculty, they save the taxpayers, they save everybody that’s potentially affected. So everybody wins if a teach-out happens,” Mitchell said.

Mitchell also wants to assist school

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Converting the Worst of Times into the Best of Times: Market Research in a Time of Rebirth

By Aaron Edwards, Founder, Edwards Strategies and Dr. Joel English, Vice President for Operations, Centura College, Aviation Institute of Maintenance, and Tidewater Tech

Introduction

As career school operators, we know that the last two years have featured a cultural phenomenon where politicians, higher education administrators, and society, in general, have rediscovered the value of skilled trades and the educational pathways that prepare people for well-paid jobs in technical areas. We have collectively admitted that we pay about the same hourly rate for a plumber or electrician to make a house call as we pay our dentists and physicians, and even the final hold-outs – public high school guidance counselors – are admitting that career training is not only a viable educational path after grade 12, but it is a more probable route to gainful employment than a four-year degree. If we can simply be great at what we naturally do, we should have a strong future.

However, if you're reading this article in Career Education Review right now, you might correctly be called "lucky." We know that the last seven years in higher education (*all*

sectors of higher education, make no mistake) have featured declined enrollments and shuttered institutions. In July 2017, Inside Higher Ed reported that the number

In July 2017, Inside Higher Ed reported that the number of Title IV-eligible institutions decreased nearly 10 percent from 2013-2016, which doesn't even include the closures of the Brightwoods, Corinthians, ITTs, Souths, Virginia Colleges, and Vatterotts that shut down in 2017 and 2018.

of Title IV-eligible institutions decreased nearly 10 percent from 2013-2016, which doesn't even include the closures of the Brightwoods, Corinthians, ITTs, Souths, Virginia Colleges, and Vatterotts that shut down in 2017 and 2018. On Jan. 29,

2019, Education Dive recapped all 172 school groups that closed between 2016-2018 (not 172 campuses, 172 **groups** of campuses), and that list features private and public institutions; career schools, community colleges, and universities. It's been a tough go.

That said, within a culture that has freshly agreed that what we need

that **are** teaching the right things at the right place and time will likely not only survive but thrive. This article gives the example of how Centura College, based in Virginia Beach, Virginia, has been critically analyzing its offerings within its campuses, and how it has employed Edwards Strategies to conduct the market research that has led to key strategic decisions.

Researching troubled campuses

Back in 2012, Centura College consisted of 11 campuses which were spread from Washington, D.C. to Orlando. Centura College thrived when everyone thrived. And no surprise, Centura's population waned along with the trends over the past seven years. Centura College quietly taught out programs and consolidated a few campuses over the past seven years (always making sure to teach every student through the end of their programs, always offering career services to every graduate, never leaving a single student without a school from which to graduate). By 2017, Centura seemed to have the right mix of strong campuses and programs in Southeast Virginia, but two campuses – one in Richmond, Virginia and another in Columbia, South Carolina – continued to struggle. The institution's tried and true programs in Medical Assisting and Medical Billing and Coding

That said, within a culture that has freshly agreed that what we need most from higher education is career-based programming that prepares graduates for skilled trades, we believe we stand to win more than we lose, if we are willing to look objectively and critically at the programs we offer within the communities in which we offer them.

most from higher education is career-based programming that prepares graduates for skilled trades, we believe we stand to win more than we lose, if we are willing to look objectively and critically at the programs we offer within the communities in which we offer them. Our

challenge is to intensely evaluate the programs that we teach, the campuses we administer, and the communities in which those campuses are situated to assure that we are teaching the right things, in the right marketplaces, at the right time. Schools that are not teaching the right thing in the right place and time will appear on Education Dive's next update of closed institutions. Schools



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stopped drawing the attention needed to amass the student body needed to sustain those campuses, and they feared that closing Richmond and Columbia may have been necessary.

But before taking a teach-out action, Centura College fielded a call from Aaron Edwards' marketing and consulting group, Edwards Strategies. The question to Edwards Strategies was: What should Centura be looking at to determine whether they were teaching the right types of programs, given the communities they were serving, and given the competing institutions around those cities? The campuses in Richmond and Columbia perpetually struggled in student population, and they were losing ground rather than gaining financial viability. Over the following months, Edwards and his team engaged in multiple layers of market research, population analysis, employer and job outlooks for the types of programs Centura College served, and the competitive set within the metro areas in which these two schools were housed. The next section provides a detailed view of the research process and how the research team did their work. But first, let's take a look at the decisions Centura College made, based on the results of this study.

Good news for Richmond. The *Edwards Strategies Report* quickly showed that the Richmond, Virginia metro area, when compared to the types of schools that currently had campuses there, supported reinvesting in that campus. The population of Richmond proper was 223,170, and only about a third of that population already had a post-secondary diploma. The population had grown 9.3 percent since 2010 and was still in a growth pattern, and the suburbs of the city (such as the southern borough of North Chesterfield, where the campus resides) continued to grow.

Importantly, there were only six significant competitors within the city offering programs like those that Centura offered, and there was no community college nearby offering programs like theirs. (Since the report concluded, three of the six competitors closed along with their large school group parent companies.) And Edwards Strategies found a wide range of medical groups and hospitals, as well as construction and trades companies, who craved hiring certified graduates of programs like Centura's. Though the current mix

of programs were exclusively in Allied Health (Medical Assisting, Dental Assisting, Massage Therapy, and Practical Nursing), the *Report* noted a thriving construction and maintenance community that desperately needed certified professionals in building maintenance, welding, HVAC, and elevator repair.

The *Edwards Strategies Report* spelled a reasonable future for our Richmond campus if Centura was willing to reinvent themselves by adding new programs and potentially sunsetting a few underperformers.

And that's exactly what Centura College did. Throughout 2018, Richmond taught out two underperforming Allied Health programs, but more importantly, they added Skilled Trades programs. By adding Combination Welding, HVAC, Construction Electrician, and Building Maintenance to our Richmond campus, Centura built a more balanced and robust offering of

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Trades programs to add to their healthy Allied Health programs. Centura wasn't just throwing trendy programs together; rather, they chose programs that were tailor-made for the employers seeking work in local industry, to assure that the programs are not only compelling to inquiring enrollees, but also directly focused on the employers who need to hire their graduates. Indeed, Richmond did

featured an aging population (suggesting possibility with Trades and Allied Health programming), the Report observed that there were 11 competitors currently teaching similar programs. One of those competitors was the public institution named Midlands Tech, which offered all of Centura's programs at the attractive pricing structure that being part of the state community college system allowed. Midlands Tech enjoyed a student population of around 11,000, and their marketing budget put Centura's to shame. It was certainly not the role of Edwards Strategies to tell Centura to close its Columbia campus, but their objective research provided the information Centura needed to determine that it would be unlikely to be able to thrive within that market, against that competition, with the programs that they were likely to offer. And so, in June 2018, Centura College made the determination to cease enrolling new students in that market. They are teaching all of their students through the end of their programs, and they are providing dutiful career services to all graduates as they conclude their education. But later in 2019, when Centura has taught out all students

Indeed, Richmond did appear to be the right place for a campus, as long as they were able to adapt program offerings to teach the right things.

appear to be the right place for a campus, as long as they were able to adapt program offerings to teach the right things. Today, the Richmond

population is growing, and Centura feels confident that this school will be a winner.

Not such good news for Columbia, though. The *Edwards Strategies Report* showed a contrasting picture down south, where the population of Columbia was only 130,192 and was only growing at a 3.2 percent rate since 2010. Nearly half of that population already possessed a post-secondary degree. Though Columbia was a rather industrial city and



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of Career Schools and Colleges (ACCSC) for six years, serving as the Chair for two years, as well as chairing the Distance Education Committee. In previous positions, Dr. English served as the CEO for the Ohio Centers for Broadcasting, Illinois Centers for Broadcasting, and Miami Media School, a family of schools dedicated to technical education in radio, television, and internet media broadcasting. He also oversaw distance learning and school operations at several

campuses as a Regional Director and Executive Director at Centura College, and he was formerly an Assistant Professor of English and Distance Learning at Old Dominion University. Dr. English published *Plugged In: Succeeding as an Online Learner* through Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, as an extension of his dedication to supporting student success within online courses and programs. Dr. English holds a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Composition from Ball State University, and an M.A. and B.A. in Technical and Expository Writing from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

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and served all of their graduates, they will discontinue operations in Columbia.

What was essential for Centura College was sound, objective research with which they could make decisions about struggling campuses. Of course, the faculty and staff at the Columbia campus would have loved to teach their students within their existing program mix indefinitely. Campus staff and faculty are naturally student-centered and love working with students, which is wonderful. But the closer an educator is to a school and a community, the less likely they are to be able to think objectively about what changes might be needed to remain viable. No surprise, no Columbia-based Billing and Coding instructor ever suggested that the school might want to close the Billing and Coding program because of competition, nor did a Columbia administrator ever suggest that the Columbia community might be too oversaturated with competition to keep the school growing. Few of us naturally make observations that would ultimately result in our own unemployment – at least we don't say it out loud. Similarly, no Richmond-based Medical Assisting instructor ever said, "You know what would make this school great? A Welding program." Again, the closer we are to what we've always been, the less likely we are to suggesting revolutionary ideas that may upset our own apple carts. Status quo and rebirth are natural enemies.

In order to reimagine, Centura College needed an objective perspective and a third-party investigation of the markets, the job opportunities, and the competition. Once Centura had the courage to look at what was being presented, they were amazed at how brave they could be to follow the natural and logical pathway (to teach out one campus

and refresh the programming at the other). Let's take a look at how Edwards Strategies structured their research project.

The Edwards Strategies process

The Edwards Strategies process started with the understanding that the project was large, potentially disruptive, may not make friends at the campus level. The Edwards team considered four main areas of inquiry for the project:

1. Analyze the segmentation and demographics of students with whom the campuses had historically been successful
2. Determine potential opportunities to improve enrollment at the Richmond and Columbia campuses
3. Assess the markets of each city and surrounding areas
4. Assess program viability of current and potential programs given the area's workforce opportunities

The approach for each section required dozens of data points and unique considerations. Edwards Strategies outlined several items that they would need from Centura College in order to effectively analyze each component of the project. A significant element to even starting this was ensuring the data was accessible and clean in order to build a solid foundation.

The starting place was to analyze the student segmentation of Centura's students over a historical perspective. This inquiry examined the demographics of Centura's students on a program-by-program basis. Oftentimes, the data doesn't

The Edwards Strategies process started with the understanding that the project was large, potentially disruptive, may not make friends at the campus level.

necessarily align with institutional perceptions; indeed, institutions sometimes don't understand or admit to themselves who their student body is and isn't, and where their growth potential may lie. Within this phase of the research, Edwards Strategies reviewed active and prospective student demographic information at multiple levels. Ultimately, we wanted to see what the Centura student population makeup was: age, gender, ethnicity, program mix, degree type, day and night shift, inquiry mix, location, etc. This research phase also

This research phase also investigated the students' geographical location within the cities, allowing us to determine the current penetration of the Centura College name within the areas, how much competitive weight Centura seemed to carry socially, and the recruitment potential within those areas going forward.

those areas going forward. This thread of research would provide a clear statement about potential student population growth, with which Centura College would be able to create a strategy to realize that growth later. Understanding who Centura was currently serving was a paramount first step.

Second, the research project compared active students to the prospective students Centura was recruiting at the campuses, both at the lead source level and at the program level. This inquiry allowed us to compare the overall student population to the market itself and compare the student population to the inquiry mix, so as to evaluate recruitment opportunities.

investigated the students' geographical location within the cities, allowing us to determine the current penetration of the Centura College name within the areas, how much competitive weight Centura seemed to carry socially, and the recruitment potential within

Additionally, we evaluated the distance of students to the campuses and to competition, in order to determine the impact that driving distance made on enrollment and to ultimately refine recruitment pockets. Edwards Strategies was quite aware that schools like Centura College rarely ask the difficult questions about whether their campuses are located in the right place within a city, if for no other reason, because the cost and headache of moving locations would be too great. The location question is rarely a question for which schools want to hear the answers. But the Edwards Strategies process asks those hard questions, because each factor impacting institutional success is critical. These questions allowed us to ensure that marketing strategies would line up with the current student population, and it would allow the institution to evaluate specific programs and put weight onto programs that would be more likely to succeed within the area of town and neighborhood in which the campus resides.

Third, Edwards Strategies conducted a full market assessment of the cities and surrounding areas in which the campuses resided. Obviously, understanding the dynamics in the markets themselves was critical for establishing primary recommendations within the report back to the institution. Inquiry points for the project evaluated both the competition of other institutions within the geographical area, and a review of the employment market itself. The Edwards team studied the historical footprint of competitors, an evaluation of the competitor's advertising spend as compared to Centura's, messaging approaches, proximity to the Centura campuses, number and level of programs offered, and a comparison of tuition rates. Within the employment market

research, the team studied population trends, 10-year employment projections by field, education trends of citizens, income levels, and market demographics. The extensive report that followed this research allowed Centura College to evaluate key performance potential within both of the markets being studied:

1. How competitive is the market overall?
2. How is Centura College positioned against competitors and how can it become better positioned?
3. Is Centura's marketing investment ensuring enough market share?
4. Are the market demographics favorable for our student population and do they project favorably in the future?
5. Are there jobs today and will there be jobs tomorrow in the fields that Centura is likely to teach?
6. What programs are most aligned with the workforce development opportunities most common to the markets being studied?

The fourth and final movement of the research project inspected a full range of workforce development needs within the study markets. In its simplest form, the Edwards Strategy project would help identify which programs Centura should continue to focus on, which they should consider teaching out, and what potential programs might be worth adding down the road. Within this inquiry, Edwards Strategies studied the job demand of various occupations within the regions, evaluating current and future career opportunities within each market. The team compared national trends with these regional trends, evaluating the potential of occupational areas over a 10-year period into the future, and they evaluated the institutional competition, prospective student demand, and job growth in terms of

all of these occupational areas. Edwards Strategies also evaluated the earning potential of new professionals within these occupational areas, the potential for employer partnerships (including the names of the top companies with whom Centura should engage), and the top individual skills that these employers needed. Given this full picture of employer needs within the markets, Edwards Strategies was able to recommend new program areas that Centura should consider adding to their program mix.

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The Edwards Strategy Quotient (ESQ)

Edwards Strategies layers hundreds of data points into its *Edwards Strategy Report* in order to provide institutions with a clear and concrete sense of which programs (both current and potential) project most favorably. Combining student segmentation data, market evaluation, and overall program-specific data points provides a global view of program viability, and all details of data are described within the report. But with so much big data rolled into the report, institutions find themselves asking for a simplified, boiled-down version of the research, which will also deliver the program review in a manner that is easily digestible. To provide this snapshot or “dashboard” view of program observations, Edwards Strategies provides an analysis of each program labeled with an Edwards Strategies Quotient (ESQ). The ESQ is a weighted calculation for each program based on market evaluation, local and national competition, employment outlook projections 10 years into the future, job demand, student interest, relationship to current programs, school brand recognition, and new

program positioning over the short and long term.

While school administrators and academic affairs departments certainly want to be presented with the vast array of data points and results found within the *Edwards Strategy Report*, it is common for top executives of the institution to flip directly to the ESQ to see how individual programs score within this quick-view of the program outlook and market research. This is how the ESQ Program Landscape chart presents within the *Report*:

campuses, in order to show how the programs and campuses compared to each other. When Centura administrators viewed the *Edwards Strategies Report*, they immediately saw that all of the programs yielded a lower ESQ in Columbia than in Richmond. They could then begin to drill down on why Program 1 seemed to project so favorably in one market over the other, or why Program 3 didn't seem to be highly viable in either market, or ultimately, why Columbia seemed to be such a weak market altogether in comparison to

Program Landscape

	Program 1		Program 2		Program 3		Program 4	
Campus	Columbia	Richmond	Columbia	Richmond	Columbia	Richmond	Columbia	Richmond
Competitors Offering Program	8	5	1	0	1	0	3	1
Student Demand	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
Employment Opportunities	High	High	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
2026 Job Growth	20.20%	28.59%	14.63%	8.17%	9.58%	7.20%	NA	18.42%
Top National Program	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Top Local Program	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
ESQ Score	4	9	8	10	4.8	6	4	10

Within the Program Landscape chart, any reader of the *Report* can quickly see how the programs being offered (and being recommended) for a particular campus rank within the market factors being researched. Within the Centura College project, Edwards Strategies compared each program side-by-side between

Richmond. Though the Edwards Strategies process and the report it produced provided detailed explanations of hundreds of data points, nothing was more immediately-telling to the Centura College team than the quick-view of program viability presented on the ESQ Program Landscape.

Centura College of Allied Health and Trades

After Centura College concluded its research project with Edwards Strategies and made the changes to its Richmond and Columbia campuses, the campus directors at Centura's other thriving campuses in Southeast Virginia wanted a piece of the action. Centura College administration challenges campuses to innovate programming that will be impactful within the local communities, and seeing the impact of the *Edwards Strategies Report*, other Centura Campus Directors requested a similar research project for all of the communities they served. In mid-2018, Centura College rehired the Edwards team to conduct that project, and again, they gained beneficial information. The report conducted for these remaining four campuses guided Centura to teach out most Business, Legal, and other para-professional programs at its Virginia campuses and to focus on Allied Health and Skilled Trades, much like the programming mix refined in Richmond.

Indeed, the institutional introspection that followed this second report led to a powerful (even if slight) branding decision: Today, when you see a Centura College ad or website, you'll see that the Centura College logo has been treated with the call-sign, "Allied Health and Trades."



Centura College Logo, 2007-2018



Centura College Logo, 2019

That new "Allied Health and Trades" moniker may or may not attract any more students, and it may or may not mean much to anyone outside of Centura College. But at least internally, it has helped the institution clarify for itself who they are, what their programmatic strategy is, and how they believe they will be successful within the coming decade. Edwards Strategies never suggested anything to Centura about its logo, but the objective research that they conducted led the institution into a level of introspection and strategy that resulted in a declaration of identity, and branding around that identity. The future of institutional success relies upon our ability to teach the right things in the right communities at the right time. And for Centura College, the key to unlocking that future has been rooted in the objective research and analysis within this project.

Innovative Disruption: Challenge Your Institution to Level Up

By Theresa Miulli, Director of Education, Compass Rose Foundation

Disruption: a change or interference in routine and tradition. In education, disruption has the ability to strike fear in academic leadership for a variety of reasons. Disruption can exist in the form of academic or personnel scandal, compliance shifts and change mandated from accrediting bodies or the Department of Education, government shutdowns, and a multitude of other interruptions in how academia does business day to day. Adversely, disruption can challenge the status quo, force evolution, and impede on the notion of “it is how we have always done it.” Disruption, when unplanned and forced, can break down the most stable of school cultures. However, I challenge each of you to see disruption for what it can be. Disruption can serve as a catalyst for much-needed change in the educational arena. View it as an opportunity to meet rising student expectations. Innovative disruption can provide your institution an opportunity to level up. Embrace the change and challenge your education community to stretch their current state of mind into a mindset of evolution and invention.

Innovative education is ever evolving education. Innovative

disruption is the idea that an institution can continue to grow in population, increase student outcomes, and continue to reach new generations of students through planned, exciting, managed, and continual change. Change, however, is terrifying! So many schools get stuck

So many schools get stuck in an educational rut because rather than challenge the status quo, leadership, administration, and faculty settle into an easier, less productive form of education delivery – exhausted erudition.

in an educational rut because rather than challenge the status quo, leadership, administration, and faculty settle into an easier, less productive form of education delivery – exhausted erudition. Exhausted erudition leads to unstimulated students, lower retention, lower placement rates, and, ultimately, the lack of sustainability and longevity for an institution. If you are ready to challenge yourself and your institution, keep reading. If you are

ready to push for higher enrollment numbers, higher retention, and higher graduation rates, embrace innovative disruption!

Innovative disruption must infiltrate

Innovative disruption must infiltrate throughout multiple departments within your school in order to be effective.

throughout multiple departments within your school in order to be effective. Now to be clear, I am not stating change everything, all at once, while disregarding what is working well. I am not saying to disrupt the culture for the sake of change. I am encouraging each of you to continually reflect and ask questions. How could this be better? How can I meet student needs more effectively? How can we serve students while pushing them to be better than the last generation of students? A culture of innovative disruption must be embraced by the team majority to effectively plan and implement transformation on a consistent basis in your school. Just because “we have always done it that way,” does not mean it’s the best way right now. It may have been the best way at one time, but times are changing, and it is

our job to change with them. As influencers, it is our job to address these changes and adjust to meet the current student’s needs. Follow me on a journey through student outcomes, admissions, and overall student success, while at least considering that perhaps, it is time for some disruption in your institution.

What is our purpose as career schools? This should be simple and easily answered by all of us. As a career institution, our job is to educate and ultimately, get students to secured, sustainable employment while concurrently guiding them towards gainful employment. Now, here comes the harder question. How do we continue to evolve what we are doing to meet both student and employer demands? Do we need to? Can we continue to do what we always have and continue to meet employer needs? Take a moment to consider the programs and trades your institution serves. Have their needs changed? In an effort to increase graduation and placement rates in your institution, I offer you five potential disruptions to integrate into your school.

1. Career pathways advising. In business, it is often stated to



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a Technician, Faculty Member, and an Administrator. Theresa is currently a Doctoral student with the University of Florida, studying Higher Education Administration, focusing her dissertation on Vocational Education and Gainful Employment legislation. Theresa’s experience has led her to be invited to speak at a variety of conferences, to include speaking for the Career Educator Alliance, the American Association of

Cosmetology Schools, and for the Accrediting Commission of Career Schools and Colleges. Her focus continues to be on educator professional development, curriculum development, and instructional design. As a school leader, she continues to push to increase student outcomes through innovative education initiatives and strong team building.

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develop your strategic plan with the end goal in mind. First, determine what it is you are trying to achieve, and then model your plan of action to best reach that end goal. Starting with the end in mind allows a team to continually visualize the ‘why’ behind the hard work put into a project. With this in mind, consider how focusing on the end goal throughout a student’s program can ultimately lead to higher success rates for your institution and your student. So often academia focuses on the journey of education, forgetting that for a student in a career college, the journey is just a necessary step to their end objective – employment. Going one step further than employment – sustainable income and gainful employment. Career Pathways provides students a series of specified pathways for which a student can endeavor in their chosen scope of practice. For example, a cosmetology student has a multitude of opportunities upon graduation; color specialist, platform artist, educator, or even salon owner. A well thought out Career Pathways advising program involves students narrowing in on their exact goals and dreams and meeting with advising on a very regular basis to move through a checklist that will lead them to said career goal. This focused, career driven advising continues to remind students of the end goal, which could ultimately lead to higher graduation and placement rates for your institution.

2. Student success coaching. Taking a hint from the community college sector, Student Success Coaching models are beginning to make gains in the traditional world of education. Student Success

Coaching is more than your typical advising session. Easily integrated into a Career Pathways Program, Student Success Coaching is student-centric monthly advising that focuses not only on the student’s success within the school but in navigating through the many obstacles outside of school that could ultimately prohibit the student from completing their program. A

strong student service program, coupled with career coaching and curriculum advising, builds a strong

A strong student service program, coupled with career coaching and curriculum advising, builds a strong Student Success Coaching program.

Student Success Coaching program. When combined with Career Pathways, this advising method caters to both students and future employers as it is intended to coach the student in general life skills as well as focusing their school time on career goals. When incorporated into a student’s program, a student may walk out of your doors with more confidence and a stronger understanding of how to succeed in the professional world of work.

3. Faculty-driven employment workshops. How involved is your faculty in the placement efforts of your institution? Are they not the experts in the field in which you are placing them? Faculty-driven employment workshops offer students insight into the field they hope to work. Often, we find our institutions segregating into departments rather than working together towards the end goal of a lucrative career. We see administration working with students on resumes, portfolios

and, ultimately, placement into a field they, themselves, may know little about. Integrating faculty into your placement efforts creates a holistic team with everyone working towards a common goal. Faculty are your best resource in not only collecting information on where graduates may work, but garnering employment verifications, as is often needed by our accrediting bodies. Your

Your faculty are your experts in the field and will have the best knowledge on what businesses are hiring in their scope of practice!

faculty are your experts in the field and will have the best knowledge on what businesses are hiring in their scope of practice! Use them for

networking, outreach, and for building student connections to these businesses.

4. **Diversity and inclusion initiatives.** Taking a cue from the traditional education sector, career colleges (yes, even the smaller ones) may need to start considering how diversity within your school is impacting student success overall. Are we, as a sector, embracing and incorporating a multitude of cultures into our school ethos or are we simply continuing with a narrow focus on the classroom setting and learning objectives? Students commit to completion when they feel they are a part of something. Reflecting on current diversity initiatives while concurrently creating programs to embrace the many cultures in your school can lead your institution to higher success.
5. **Extracurricular activities.** So often, the career college sector focuses on the trades we are teaching, we forget to provide

students a series of alternative experiences that teach beyond our textbooks. Innovative education embraces extracurricular opportunities, mirroring activities that you may find in the traditional sector of higher education. Groups like Skills USA, Premiere, and Professional Beauty Association offer competition opportunities for students in trade schools. Student clubs and community service groups can flourish and unite a campus, giving students the support and harmony they may need to complete their programs.

Are you ready to embrace innovative disruption yet? Cultural shifts moving from a culture of stagnant, traditional education into an environment of embracing change and evolution are difficult for a team to achieve. Disruption in career services, advising, diversity, and extracurricular activities are just the tip of the iceberg. Change can be terrifying, especially when working with long term employees. It is so easy for both faculty and administration to settle into the cushiony, comfortable world of tradition and stability, and it is often hard for education professionals to stretch both themselves and their education models into something a little less traditional. Innovation can happen in small, manageable, digestible steps. Innovation should be managed around a team of change agents and not the hopes and dreams of one. So, what do you think? Is it time for your institution to challenge the status quo?

We Invited Our Marketing Agency to Our Annual Planning Meeting. Here's Why You Should Too.

By Charlie Buehler, Vice President of Marketing, Broadview Education Consortium

Many of us have had the “privilege” of orchestrating an annual planning meeting. Although these meetings are important and can be very meaningful, they are difficult to organize and a beast to pull off successfully. Many essential questions must be answered: where should we host it, what should we cover, and who should be there? Not to mention probably the most important question of all: what should we eat? For anyone who has taken months to plan out these events, you fully understand the joy and pain of this process. For our annual planning meeting this year, I found myself in this time-honored position and wrestling with these same questions. I was also working through a recent transition to a new marketing agency. Over the past couple of years, we have become a very different organization, and this meeting was going to shape not only our year ahead but the future vision of our schools.

Historically we had always had our marketing partners do some sort of a presentation on our plan, new creative, new concepts, etc. But this

year was different. Our new agency, Becker Media, had only been on board for a few months. Our campus leaders and teams did not really know much about them. Although I had daily conversations and transition meetings, they were also still learning about us. If there was ever a time to

If there was ever a time to truly change how our annual planning meetings were structured, this was the year.

truly change how our annual planning meetings were structured, this was the year. We decided to take the bold step of not simply inviting them to present on our marketing plan but instead invite them to participate in our entire annual planning process. It is slightly unconventional to invite an outside group to participate at that level in your internal planning meetings. However, it was an amazing experience for all of us. Here are some of the reasons why it was so

successful and hopefully it will prompt others to consider doing the same thing.

One of the desired outcomes of inviting our partners at Becker Media was for our teams to meet our agency team and gain more insight into why we chose to work with Becker. As most who work with external agencies know, the interaction between your company and the agency is generally limited to a small number of people. Most never get the opportunity to interact with the external marketing

team. There are certainly valid reasons for this, but as we have all experienced, this can also foster not only a level of curiosity but often times distrust.

There are certainly valid reasons for this, but as we have all experienced, this can also foster not only a level of curiosity but often times distrust.

Every aspect of our organization had gone through major changes and the front-end marketing and enrollment departments were no exception. These meetings presented a great opportunity to bridge the unknown and put faces and personalities to our marketing agency partners.

Kyle Shelstad, an admissions representative at the Institute of Production and Recording in Minneapolis, found value in the interactions and face-to-face time. Kyle recapped, “Meeting the team from Becker helped to reinforce what I

believe happens in the admissions process. You may know the abilities and outcomes of a school, or in this case marketing agency. However, people more often choose who they are going to work with because of the personal connection they make. Before anything else can happen, enrollments, success, etc., you have to build a connection and trust. This meeting helped me build trust with our internal and external marketing teams. This meeting also helped refine my understanding of what each new student goes through. Realizing how critical this trust relationship is to the success of the student journey, I have found myself spending more time developing a relationship with the prospective student before diving into why he/she should choose IPR.”

This was not just about finding out what people were like or understanding their personalities. It was more important that our partners at Becker explain their understanding of the market in our sector and help ensure we all had the same, realistic outcome expectations. The days of high demand and quick converting inquiries were long gone. We could no longer live in a single-attribution mindset as it pertains to how our inquiries were generated. As an organization, we were finally able to fully understand and see the benefits of a truly integrated marketing approach. However, having realistic



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and updated expectations of what outcomes could look like was still a struggle. Having our experienced partners stand in front of ownership, the board, executive leadership, and campus leaders and layout their idea of successful outcomes was truly eye-opening. It was the moment that everything clicked for the room. Not only had we changed our marketing approach, changed our agencies (twice), but we now had to fully change our understanding of success.

It was also a great chance for the team from Becker to explain where they saw our organization and teams. Prior to the meeting, they did some mystery shopping of our various locations and were able to provide data on everything from inquiry to attempted first contact time through lead nurturing and follow up. The team had the ability to discuss where we had great strengths as well as our areas of opportunity. This is information we had talked about time and time again with the campus-level teams, but as we all know, it resonates differently when it comes from an external voice. The team presented the information professionally and in a manner that never talked down to anyone or any team. Even in the areas of opportunity, it was always presented as something we would all tackle together.

The next desired outcome was for Becker to learn more about our organization, our struggles, and our goals. The importance of transparency regarding your business is a key component of building a trusting, solid working relationship with an external partner. Our sector has gone through so much change over the last decade, and one would struggle to find an organization that has not felt pain from those changes. More often than not, we provide marketing with a budget and inquiry goals. Sometimes, we will provide

additional data such as start goals, program goals, etc. Not to discount the importance of those numbers, but the idea was that if Becker knew the reasons behind these goals, it could help them better understand the importance of meeting those goals.

Over the two days of the meetings, the Becker team heard from Broadview Education Consortium's CEO, Jeanne Herrmann, on the vision of the organization in the coming year and the overall strategy to get there. They also were able to hear from various members of the leadership team and how their departments fit into the overall strategy. The campus-

level leaders were able to present their campus' strategic plan for the upcoming year including growth strategy and overall census goals. During day

two, the team was able to directly interact with the admissions teams from each campus. Being able to connect with our front-line admissions team members allowed the Becker team to share a lot of knowledge and best practice tips for how to work with specific types of inquiry sources as well as understand the overall marketing strategy.

When asked how the team from Becker Media felt about being invited, Roger Becker, CEO of Becker Media, responded:

"We were honored to be invited to participate in the event and got a lot of value from the two days we spent together with their team. It was instrumental being able to interact and spend valuable time with all the school directors and admissions personnel to get a first-hand understanding of the respective challenges of all the schools and the goals for 2019 and beyond.

The campus-level leaders were able to present their campus' strategic plan for the upcoming year including growth strategy and overall census goals.

“Spending the time not only gave us insight into the metrics of the different schools’ performance and challenges, but also a feel for the culture of the schools, the people, and the broader organization. By participating in this event, it gave us the confidence that we’re valuable partners in their success and that we’re appreciated for the role we continue to play.

“We left the event with a high level of enthusiasm for the mission of the company and a clear picture of what our role is expected to be in the partnership moving forward. We interact with BEC on a daily basis via phone and email, but it was invaluable to spend the additional time in person discussing business and interacting socially.”

As Roger mentioned, even the social nature of the meetings proved to be invaluable. Our organization is family-owned, and that culture permeates throughout all of our campuses. As most would attest, it is one thing to hear about that type of culture and another to experience it. We are a melting pot of personalities and work styles, and we benefit from the fact that we all process the things in front of us differently. Becker was able to see that during the various presentations and conversations held during the two days of meetings.

One of the most unexpected surprises of the two days came from dinner on the first night. Becker Media graciously sponsored dinner that night and invited the ownership, board, executive leadership, and campus leadership out to dinner. As anyone who has ever attended a work-sponsored dinner, you know this can go one of two ways. For all of us, it was an amazing experience to put the constraints of work behind us for a night and socially interact with each other in ways we do not normally have the opportunity to do. Finding

the commonalities between us all, both professionally and personally, helped solidify relationships that were already on a solid, successful path. Whether we were bonding about food or family, listening to those from warmer states complain about the Minnesota weather in October, or laughing about how many notifications someone had on their phone, the evening was one that we felt took the partnership from solid to exceptional.

The lesson in this exercise was clear: stepping outside of the realm of “this is how we have always done it” helped our organization tackle the unknown and build solid, legitimate relationships that will move us forward into 2019 and beyond. As the person who works daily with our partners at Becker Media, I have experienced the courting phase of exploring the potential of a new partnership, the transition and learning curve that comes along with starting that new partnership, and now the joy of seeing this collaboration turn into something truly special for both sides. Not only do we know more about our external marketing team, but it is apparent that they know exactly what we want to accomplish. That intersection of where each sides’ strengths meet is the point where goals become reality. A key part of that reality started with the invitation to join our annual planning meeting. To anyone searching for a way to take your planning to a new level, consider inviting those that are key to achieving your goals. The better each side knows about the other, the more transparent everyone can be, the better chance there is of reaching and potentially exceeding your goals.



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