

Private Elementary School Parent Associations: The Best Of Times, The Worst Of Times

Description

Wacky antics, stealth agendas, soap opera plots, screaming fights, politics more labyrinthine than Capitol Hill. Is this a high powered, testosterone-fueled corporate boardroom? No, this is just your average LA private elementary school parent association.

Volunteering at your child's school can be as fun as a girlfriend's lunch or about as dreadful as spending time with a bunch of mean girls.

All the private elementary schools have parent associations. Some schools make sure the administration keeps a tight rein on the activities of the group, for obvious reasons. Other schools take the approach that the parent association's events are "parent run" and therefore somewhat out of the control of the school. Parent associations are a very visible reflection of the school in many ways, especially when they are responsible for numerous school events each year and selecting parents to serve on volunteer committees.

Here are a few types of parent association volunteers you might encounter:

- **The Professional.** Accustomed to working efficiently in a high-level job, this no-nonsense mom doesn't have time to waste. She knows how to run a meeting and cut to the chase. She doesn't suffer fools easily. If she gets antsy, she won't look up from her Blackberry.
- **The Flake.** You'll see her name everywhere there is a volunteer job to be done, but you'll never see her. She'll text the person in charge at the last minute with an excuse. But, her name was all over the place, so that's all she cares about.
- **The Micromanager.** She clings tightly to her job and likes to keep those under her on a tight leash. Refusing to share helpful information, this volunteer is not a team player.
- **The Reliable One.** The most loved volunteer. She's always willing to help, no matter what the task or how late at night she gets called. She shows up, does the work and leaves. No drama. No problem.
- **The Hidden Agenda.** This mom has an agenda. It may be to be appointed to the board of the school. It may have to do with her child. Either way, she's using volunteer work to advance her agenda and will step on anyone who gets in her way.
- **The Talker.** Her divorce, dating life, problems with her kids. It's all about her during meetings. She's hard to shut up and if you try, she may just keep talking.
- **The Self-Designated Super-Star.** She jets in at the last second to find fault with other volunteers decorations, yearbook design or other work. She insists on redoing the work herself so she feels like she

contributed. She angers other volunteers with her sheer arrogance.

- **The Leader.** Brings people together, motivates parents to stay late and makes it fun. A true leader who everyone wants to work with.
- **In Over Her Head.** This mom means well, but just doesn't have the skills or ability to do the job she's supposed to do. Usually people try to work around her, but sometimes, she'll be asked to step aside if a big project starts to fall apart.
- **Toxic Mom.** By far the worst of the bunch. She is unbalanced to begin with and a pressure-filled volunteer role makes her mean and antagonistic toward anyone she perceives as a threat. Try to figure out who she is early on and steer clear!

My shouting match one morning with a mom from the parent association (she's also on the board) in the Willows School parent lounge filled with other parents isn't one of my proudest moments. Tensions were running high. I was exhausted. It was the final few days before the auction fundraiser (I was a co-chair) and this mom came in swinging. This cringeworthy episode was, unfortunately, not all that unusual for private elementary school parent-run events. But, I learned my lesson. I'm just not cut out for parent association volunteering. I help our school in other ways, but I now stay far away from the parent association. It's in my best interest and theirs too.

Category

1. Beyond The Brochure

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1. volunteering at private school

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Author

admin