Your Familyâ€™s Key Messages: Make Your Application Standout

Description

If you missed our event on April 1 at the Beverly Hills Country Club, one of the ideas we discussed is the concept of developing â€œkey messagesâ€• about your family and your child that you will use throughout the private elementary school application process.

Iâ€™m a former vice president at Fleishman-Hillard, a global public relations firm. So, developing key messages to define a clientâ€™s campaign or image is second nature to me. When it came time to write our daughterâ€™s applications for kindergarten, I applied the same techniques I had practiced as a public relations professional. I developed clear, concise ideas or messages I wanted admissions directors to know about us.

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The image of the family on the right is generic. It could be any family. Itâ€™s your job to add color to that photo. Give schools a reason to be excited about your child. Illuminate that image on the right. Standout from the competition. Use the admissions process to capture admissions directorsâ€™ attention and hold it.

Once you develop your familyâ€™s key messages, you can repeat them again and again, whenever possible, throughout your written application, your parent interview, your follow-up thank you notes to admissions directors and in letters of recommendation friends write for you. Then, when an admissions director thinks about your family, hopefully, they will think, â€œThatâ€™s the family that is involved with their local Red Cross Chapterâ€•, or â€œThey are the family with the kid who loves to perform in school plays or draw comic booksâ€•.

When I say key messages what do I really mean? Iâ€™m simply referring to the most important things you want a school to know about your child and your family. If an admissions director thinks about your child or your family after your parent interview, what do you want him/her to remember?

For our family, here are the key messages I developed:

1. Both my husband and I are well-educated and we understand the value of education for personal and professional success. I graduated from UC Berkeley and have an MA from UCLA. Barry has a BA from Harvard in Math and a JD from Harvard Law.
2. We are not an artistic family, but we would like our kids to be exposed to the arts.
3. Our daughter is shy and studious.
4. We have served on non-profit boards and we understand the mission of private elementary schools.
5. I have fundraising experience that Iâ€™d love to put to work for your school. Iâ€™d welcome the opportunity to serve on fundraising committees.
6. We have ruled out our local public school and we are only interested in private schools.

This is just one example of how to define your family in a few key sentences. Take a minute to think about well-known American public figures like Oprah Winfrey. When her name is mentioned, we instantly think of an outspoken, charitable, wealthy, groundbreaking woman. What about Brooke Shields? Sheâ€™s an actress and mom. You get the idea. What comes to mind when people think about your family and your child?

The key is to be specific about what makes your family unique! Why should a top private school want to enroll your child and by extension, your family? Are you from another country? Would you bring diversity to the

school? Do you volunteer in your community? Do you have professional skills a school needs i.e. computer skills, graphic design skills, the ability to organize an after-school program or enrichment class, fundraising or auction experience? One note here: private elementary schools have lots of parents who want to volunteer to bake cookies or read to the kids. Thatâ€™s great, but it doesnâ€™t help the school with their enormous volunteer needs in other areas.

Every child and every family is unique. We have friends with whom weâ€™ve always joked that one day their child will be running the emergency room at Cedars-Sinai. Very bright, with a bold personality and tons of energy, their child was just accepted at all the private middle schools where they applied (from an LAUSD public elementary school). That brief description of their child leaves a lasting impression of someone a school would like to have as part of their student body.

The goal is to make sure you communicate the one-of-a-kind contribution your child will offer to each school where you apply. Youâ€™re helping admissions directors get acquainted with your family in a meaningful way. This takes some thought, but itâ€™s well worth the effort. It will help ensure you make a lasting impression at the private elementary schools where you apply.

Hereâ€™s Part 2 of the Family Message

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