

THE BEST COLLEGE RECRUITER™

SPECIAL REPORT 1

"How to Make a Great First Impression with your Recruit and Parents During a Home or Campus Visit"

WE have all heard the expression “You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.” In addition, the experts [seminar leaders, psychologists, and writers] tell us that we only have from seven to seventeen seconds of interaction time with strangers before they form an opinion of us.

With the widely acknowledged pressure on college athletic recruiters to “make our case” instantly, here are seven suggestions for making your first impression a strongly positive one during a home or campus visit.

1. The greatest way to make a positive first impression is to demonstrate immediately that the recruit and parent -- not you -- are the center of action and conversation. If you demonstrate that the spotlight is only on you, you may miss some critical bonding opportunities. Show that you are “*other-centered*”, and first-time acquaintances will be eager to see you again.

As an illustration, my wife and I attended a luncheon at last year’s Final Four. Our table was full of people we didn’t know. While most of our tablemates made good impressions, one man emerged as the person we’d be sure to avoid all weekend. He talked about himself, non-stop. Only rarely did anyone else get a chance to speak. Unfortunately, he probably thought he was captivating us with his life story. His actions were reminiscent of the classic boor: “Somebody who talks about himself so much that you don’t get to talk about yourself.”

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2. You will also make an excellent initial impression when you demonstrate good listening skills. Always give positive verbal cues: “Hmmm...that’s an interesting point!” “Tell me more, please!” “What did you do next?” Just as actors benefit from prompts, your conversational partner will welcome your assistance in keeping the exchange going. Nonverbally, you indicate you’re a skilled listener by maintaining steady eye contact.

3. Use the name of the recruit and parent frequently. “Barry, your coach tells me you’re quite a singer, too. Is that right?” “Mrs. Smith, that apple pie was so good.” [*One note about parents: It’s “Mr.” and “Mrs.” unless they give you permission to call them by their first name. It’s all a matter of respect.*] Just as important, you will make conversations more personal by including the listener’s name several times.

4. Be extremely careful when using humor. If you’ve established through previous phone conversations that you utilize humor quite often, then it should not be surprising to the recruit and parents when you throw out a quip or two, or tell a funny story. But if you haven’t met the recruit and parents before the campus or home visit, stay away from sarcastic remarks that could backfire. Because you don’t know a stranger’s sensitivities, prolonged joking might leave a bad impression.

5. Don’t allow any confrontational behavior to escalate. If conversation suddenly turns to talk of another school and recruiter, don’t let it turn into a “He said, she said” type of encounter. Confrontation with someone you’ve just met can destroy any kind of rapport you’ve been building up to that point. Wait until you’ve established credibility with your recruit and parents before you challenge another’s statements. Dr. Wayne Dyer, the noted self-help guru, advises in his book “*Real Magic*”, to “give up the need to be right.” That might be a good idea.

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6. Appearance counts. The vast majority of head men’s coaches in all college sports appear at home visits in suit and tie. I would venture that nearly 100% of all female head coaches appear in professional attire at home visits. The Bobby Knights of the college athletic world can show up in casual sweater and pants because that’s his signature apparel. But if you want to make a good first impression, dress to the 10s. Again, it shows respect to the recruit and parents.

7. As a college recruiter, you carry the moniker of “communication specialist” with recruits and parents. Whether you accept it or not, an individual’s speaking style impacts the first impression, maybe more than you wish. Listeners judge intelligence, cultural level, education, even leadership ability by the words you select, and by how you say them.

If you’ve ever seen the movie *My Fair Lady*, Professor Henry Higgins changes the “guttersnipe” Eliza Doolittle into a lady by teaching her to speak skillfully. What did he teach her? Rather than mumble, speak so you’re easily heard. Enunciate clearly. Speak a little more slowly. Alter your pitch to avoid the dullness of a monotone. Display animation in both your voice and facial expression. Learn to gesture naturally, without “canning” your movements.

SUMMARY

Keep these seven suggestions in mind when you venture out to home visits or entertain recruits and parents on a campus visit. If you feel uncomfortable with some aspects, practice them before you encounter them. You never get a second chance to make a good first impression.