

Rejuvenating Your School: Schedule a “Planathon”

We recently heard of a visioning exercise that seemed creative, effective, and easy to execute. Here it is – perhaps a good idea for an opening teacher meeting session OR for a special visioning evening with parents, teachers, and interested students (and why not pastor and parish council?).

Step One: “Dream”

This is the most exciting stage of the Planathon, since it is where ideas are born. Cover a large area of a wall with a plastic tablecloth (so markers will not bleed through onto wall). Then select two volunteers to print the group’s ideas on the tablecloth with permanent markers. During this step, no one is allowed to criticize or evaluate any idea. Often, good ideas go unexpressed because of the fear of criticism. Ask: “If you could do anything you wanted to, what would you like to do in the next year?”

Give time for things to start rolling, usually, the ideas come slowly at first and are somewhat predictable. Be ready with some suggestions of your own just in case the group has trouble getting started. Don’t offer your ideas, though, unless no one is responding. The secret to successful planning is getting the group to take ownership of the program. The ideas must be their ideas.

Encourage innovative thinking. As ideas are called out, write them no matter how impractical they may seem. Some of our most successful events began as pretty weird-sounding ideas. When the ideas slow down or there is no space left on the cloth, go on to the next step.

Step Two: “Decide”

Determine which of the ideas you want to try. Ask, “If we could do only one of these activities in the next three months, which would it be?” Challenge the group to come to a consensus, then circle those events on the wall. Often, you can combine two or more ideas into one activity. During this step, it’s perfectly acceptable to suggest modifications to ideas written on the wall.

Continue the selection process until you have as many events as you need for the time span you’re planning. As you’re deciding which ideas to use, have someone write the name of each event selected on a separate sticky note.

Step Three “Date”

Schedule the events. Hang large blank calendars on another wall. Refer to the church calendar to avoid scheduling conflicts. Also, encourage everyone to bring their personal calendars to the Planathon. Let the group decide where on the calendar they want to put each event, and attach the sticky notes to that spot. Continue the process until the group has placed every event. When everyone is satisfied, move onto the next step.

Step Four “Delegate”

Tell your group that every event must have at least two sponsors – one young person and one adult. Sponsors are responsible for planning and carrying out each event. Then ask if anyone wants to sponsor an event.

After this volunteering stage is over, go back over any remaining events and ask if anyone would like to sponsor them. Allow several seconds for each one and if no one responds, remove that event from the calendar. If no one is interested enough in the event to sponsor it, it shouldn't be on the calendar anyway.

Have someone list the names of the sponsors for each event so you know who to contact later. After you have sponsors for all the events, move on to the final step.

Step Five ‘Deliver’

Have the sponsors for each event get together for a few minutes to decide when they can meet to plan their event in detail. Give the sponsors a deadline for getting back to you with the rough details, such as the time, place, and cost per person. Sponsors will be responsible for giving you basic information about their event a few weeks after the Planathon so you can publicize it in a timely fashion. Stay in touch with your sponsors and offer your help where needed.

If you stage a Planathon in your School, please write and tell us how it went and share some of the good ideas it generated.