

“The Right Start to College” Student Retention Model

with Don Fraser

Motivating Students from Day One

On the first day of classes, colleges have an opportunity to tap into a student's enthusiasm and turn it into motivation for success.

Unfortunately, colleges often miss this chance to build on a student's eagerness to succeed.

Colleges fail to take advantage of the powerful impact of first impressions and the opportunity to lay down a core foundation that students can build all of their courses on. On that first day, students need a core concept of relationships and career vision so they can attach that to all of the different courses they're going to take.

Students will stay in school when they are motivated, and that motivation stems from the reason

they are going to college. That reason is to get a job.

They don't want a job that's minimum-waged based. They want a

On the first day of classes, colleges have an opportunity to tap into a student's enthusiasm and turn it into motivation for success.

Unfortunately, colleges often miss this chance to build on a student's eagerness to succeed.

job that has a great deal of potential for their economic future and for that they know they need a career education.

Through my journey at Durham College and also through research, committees and national conventions,



DON FRASER has been a professor in sport management at Durham College in Ontario, Canada, for 29 years. He co-designed and implemented Durham's student success program 15 years ago and has been working with student motivation ever since. He is a professor at the college and is an

independent consultant and trainer in the area of student retention and motivation. He has delivered student motivation seminars to college staff members at colleges across North America. Fraser has done a great deal of research on student success and retention and received a NISOD award

for his work in the area, and has developed “The Right Start to College” retention model. In addition, in 1989 he received the Special Achievement Award from the Province of Ontario for dedicating 20 years of service to amateur sport in Ontario. He was the manager of the Ontario Games for two years before joining Durham College.

Contact Information:

Don Fraser
LDF Publishing Inc.
P.O. Box 45
Port Perry, ON L9L 1A2
Phone: 905-985-9990
Toll Free: 1-877-492-6845
Fax: 905-985-0713
E-mail: donfraser@ldfpublishing.com
Web site: www.makingyourmark.com

I've realized that the most powerful time that we can deliver a message of success is through the first impression.

We've promised this to them in our advertising. We've delivered it in our calendars. We've done it in our liaison discussions. On day one the students

On day one we do have their attention. They walk in absolutely primed. They'll never be cleaner, better dressed and more ready for action.

basically want three things:

- Relationships. Students want to be comfortable with their classmates. They want to

feel they fit in socially and that they can develop a network of friends.

- Career vision. This is the most powerful motivator. Part of that vision is the job market, and on day one they're very open to taking a look at what they know about that job market and what is and isn't realistic. They want to know what skills they will need to have a successful career.
- To know how to succeed. Students are wondering what it will take to be successful in the academic career program. They want to know what is different from high school and other colleges they may have been at.

On the first days of classes, students are more open to build on those three basics than any other time.

However, what I've found is that in the past, most of us as academics have blown that opportunity.

Throwing Away the Old

We typically do what was done unto us, and on a typical first day of school a college will give out the schedule and syllabus and cover the grading system. There are also some directors who look to scare students

by telling them that one of three people won't make it.

After 20 minutes the students' motivation is down, and may be worse than it was in high school.

If you want students who are motivated, that first day is the most powerful time for the faculty team to tap into their motivation base.

Why does information fail to stick to the brain? No attention, no interest, no context, no repetition and no learning.

On day one we do have their attention. They walk in absolutely primed. They'll never be cleaner, better dressed and more ready for action.

They proved their interest by putting thousands of dollars on the line. They've got a time commitment, so they have an interest.

What we have to do is give them a context and a relationship for learning.

Someone who has been in the bottom third of academic performers can move to the top third very quickly. Why? Because it's real to them.

We know the first day is different. Students have a chance for a fresh start. There have been courses focusing on the first year experience since the 1890s. The common sense of this has been around for a long time.

A student at a CCA college has a career focus. You can do so much more to create a lifelong partnership with that student because of that career connection. It's applied learning from the moment they walk into the classroom.

This isn't generic education. This is education that's going to be applied in your career and the clock is ticking.

Me Inc.

One of our presentations is "Me Inc. and the Eight Cornerstones of High Performance Careers." It

emphasizes that students need to develop the best all-around set of career skills they can.

The Evolution of *Making Your Mark*

About 15 years ago, Don Fraser's wife, Lisa, took on a project to turn a number of little pamphlets and booklets into a motivational, career-based book for students.

The project became *Making Your Mark* now in its sixth edition. More than 600,000 copies have been sold, and it is used in more than 1,000 educational institutions across North America. It was used in Canada before a pilot project in New York brought it to the United States.

"We found more success in the States than we did in Canada, so we quickly started realizing that it wasn't just a book for Canada," Don said. "We deal with well over 1,000 institutions and about 70 percent of our work is in the states. The area of our growth that has increased the most in the last two years has been the CCA colleges."

Making Your Mark gives students a variety of tips and techniques that will help them make the best use of their time in school. Organizational and time management techniques are included, as are note taking, concentration and study hints.

The book has a light, student-centered style, and also includes information on organizing papers, reports and assignments, studying for exams and managing college life.

Most importantly, the book notes that it is not a guide to study skills. It is about helping students get a good job after they graduate.

This helps keep students focused and motivated to do well in school.

On day one, we need to connect with what motivates students and paint a clear picture of their education and career journey. Students need to know how to be successful in college and the workplace, and have a clear overview of what is expected of them.

At the same time, the day has to be fun. Colleges can provide food, play music and include activities.

Colleges also need to show students how we can be kind and how we're caring for them. We also have to show students that we want them to be professionals, and make them feel capable. Schools need to create an atmosphere of comfort and confidence, and model caring in order to encourage the students' passion for learning.

This is how we'd all like to be treated—as human beings and future professionals.

I think there's a Me Inc. generation and the Me Inc. generation knows there is going to be more contract employment and less government support. If they want economic opportunity they're going to have to take their skills to the workplace.

If you want Me Inc. high-performance skills then you're going to have to practice them on a daily basis. You can't wait until the job interview because it doesn't happen that way.

We help students create a career vision, and understand how their education relates to their career.

The Unmotivated Student

For students who are coming to your school after an unpleasant or

If you want Me Inc. high-performance skills then you're going to have to practice them on a daily basis.

difficult educational experience, the motivation level may not be especially high.

Students may walk in with baggage from previous educational experiences, or frustrations from high school. They may have been taking subjects they weren't interested in.

When they walk into our classroom, it is important to make it

If somebody doesn't make it, there's always the excuse that failure is part of the process. It just destroys me that some schools live in this myth and think they have such a quality program.

clear that their world has changed. Education is their decision. They're in class with people who are dedicated to the same vision they are.

We want them to walk in and feel that

they're in an educational partnership. We're treating them as a professional in training.

With the welcome materials from music to food we have to treat them as if we're welcoming them to a new world, to a place that is dedicated to them.

The experience we give them on the first day will help them understand that we're different. We're going to build on exactly what they want, which is a career.

Students must also realize that there is almost no correlation between previous academic records and how somebody is going to do in career education.

A student who has had difficulty in the past with being motivated or just did not enjoy the material presented to them needs to know that when they walk into a career program that the world can change for them.

All that counts right now is their behavior, work ethic and their interest in becoming what they want, which is a professional. They need to know

that whatever frustrations they have had or whatever they think they're weak in, they can change things at the start of their academic program here.

To succeed, they have to apply a daily work ethic of wanting to be that professional.

An emphasis needs to be placed on their choice to be in school. They have a career vision, and a high-paying career is what they really want.

They need to understand that their behavior isn't just to get good grades but is the behavior of the workplace.

They need to learn how to get new habits of high-performance management skills. Research shows that people who perform at the higher economic level in careers are the people with these skills.

Students who do poorly in high school don't have those self-management skills. We need to give them an insight into what it's going to take to create those new habits, showing them that it's not just about grade chasing but it's about having those skills and taking them into their careers.

Failure Not Part of Quality

If somebody doesn't make it, there's always the excuse that failure is part of the process. It just destroys me that some schools live in this myth and think they have such a quality program.

John Hopkins University doesn't have a failure rate in its medical program. Harvard Law School doesn't give out grades because nobody fails. All you have to do is hand in the work. They know they get motivated people therefore their job is just to fine-tune their skills and abilities.

We have to look at everybody as having that potential. We don't want

them to fail because we didn't give them a vision and a proper start.

Some students could have been very successful in a field, but we didn't give them that foundation for change that they needed to get through in that first two weeks.

In one research study, instructors were told they were being given the IQs of each student in the class. After grades were handed out, it was revealed that it wasn't the students' IQs but their locker numbers between 90 and 140. And there was a relationship between their locker numbers and their academic performance, because if we think someone is really smart they rise to that expectation.

It's my whole goal on day one to make students feel they are high performance career people and we are not treating them as students at risk.

Our opportunity on day one is to create a positive, professional and training partnership. That opportunity doesn't exist on day two if we miss it.

The Days After

We have to make sure the motivation generated on day one is not a one-day wonder. Whatever we do in week one and week two is very formative, and what we do at the midterm of October is also powerful.

I do a presentation with colleges throughout North America called "Best Practices in Student Motivation Day One to Graduation." One of the things you have to do to keep students motivated is to tap into alumni, because after about three weeks even my wisdoms grow thin with the students.

After that, the power is bringing in an industry speaker, employer, co-op supervisor, or graduate.

We should also have students read the professional magazines, and offer a kind of socializing environment.

Developing Good Habits

It takes time to turn that initial motivation into good habits. Research says it takes 21 to 45 days to develop a new habit.

Just discussing self-management skills for one day won't be the magic formula for a person who has had three or four

years of poor habits in high school.

As educators, we may need to slow it down a little bit to really give them the focus on these skills, not in a boring way but in a fun way.

For example, I do a note taking exercise with students that shows them how motivation can help them be better than they thought they were.

I show students a videotape, but before showing the tape I ask how many are weak at note taking. Fifty percent will say they're weak at note taking.

I'll tell them I believe I can improve their note taking by not teaching them anything about note taking. Then I set up the videotape with a number of questions they have to answer, and put them in groups of eight.

I tell them that after the videotape we will pass around the notes twice, first to look at them and then to evaluate and rank them from the best to the worst.

After I run the videotape, I ask, "Before we pass round the notes, how many took better notes?" All the ones who were weak note takers put up their hands. When I ask them why, it is because they didn't want to be embarrassed in front of their peers.

It's my whole goal on day one to make students feel they are high performance career people and we are not treating them as students at risk.

I remind them that before that exercise they thought they couldn't take good notes, and even though I didn't teach them anything about note taking they have improved.

I ask why they would be motivated more by two minutes of embarrassment than they would be by the impact their classroom notes have on their grades,

I point out that the way they are currently approaching life is to be more motivated by peer embarrassment than a million dollars.

which will affect their economic potential.

I point out that the way they are currently approaching life is to be more motivated by

peer embarrassment than a million dollars.

Capturing First Impressions

Schools need to find out early in the semester what students think of their classes.

In business and industry there's something called first impressions research. Fortune 500 companies don't wait until week 14 to ask customers what they think of the product or service. They ask about first impressions.

Yet in an academic setting, the VP of academics and directors often ask students what they think of the faculty at the end of the semester.

Should we wait until the end of the semester? If we wait we have missed the students who have dropped out, the ones who have the most difficulty. We never captured what they thought of our faculty and our program.

We should capture, just as industry does, first impressions.

Measuring the Success

I have found that we all know the common sense of the approach that schools need to launch students with

a feeling of career confidence as opposed to increased anxiety.

The question is, can faculty and management do this as a team? And if we do it, do we measure it?

When I started this in 1974 I was a very fresh, naive and inexperienced teacher. I partnered with another director, and maximized that partnership and put together a successful program.

But by the mid-1980s I think we lost a lot of what had made the program successful initially. We had more budget, a thicker curriculum and a bigger team. However, we had lost the simplicity of the students feeling that we cared.

We needed to make them feel capable and let them know what the bottom line was, and the bottom line was that they felt confident and had career confidence.

We developed a retention program and received recognition for it, but I almost gave up on all of this around 1992. I had been a speaker at national conventions and received a NISOD award, but I started to see the wheels falling off. A buddy of mine suggested we get some research to show how powerful this is, or we would just be thought of as the flavor of the month.

Institutions needed to know if this increased revenues. We found that, yes it does, because students don't drop out nearly as much as they do when you don't do it.

There is also a higher degree of student satisfaction and they speak well of the institution, not just when they graduate but on that first day.

When will a student be asked more than any time in their life what they think of the career institute that they went to? They'll never be asked more than at the end of day one.

Research shows the power and economic benefits of this program:

- It will improve the faculty team culture.
- It will connect to a better student motivation base.
- It will connect to revenue because you'll not have as many students withdraw.

Getting Faculty on Board

The most difficult part of getting faculty involved with student retention is to create a team culture.

You can develop a champion faculty member who connects to the social, the relationship, the career vision and doesn't just do a great job, but goes way over the limit. But that won't continue for five years because that person will burn out.

You can't be the champion and have 100–200 students all depend on you for their career anxiety and their evolution in the job market. You have to have a team.

That's what was done at Triangle Tech. They did their training as a team. They didn't train a faculty member to be a champion, but shared this information so the team could take it to a higher level with a student motivation program. That's not easy.

The first thing a school has to do is look at its own history. Proprietary colleges have very, very strong career professional cultures. I'm really just saying, let's take it to the next level.

The next step is training. I don't think you establish this team culture without training, or without a partnership between management and faculty to do something differently.

Faculty and management have got to partner this because the traditional model of curriculum, schedule and delivering that curriculum doesn't create a team culture. We need to take a step back every so often and see what we can do as a team.

We need to sit down in our program teams and see what we can do on day one. What can we do all the way through first semester, second semester, and all the way to graduation?

Being a teacher at the college level can be a great job, or a real challenging and frustrating one. But here's the one question: How many

faculty members would like more motivated students?

All teachers want motivated students, because it's tough

to have students in front of you for a whole semester who aren't motivated. If you want motivated students, you have to invest in setting a motivational base.

To do that you need three things: relationship building, career visioning and how to be successful. After that teachers can use whatever their strengths are in teaching; they just can't be boring.

A person can teach with many different styles, from cooperative exercises to applied application to field work to great theoretical lectures. But nobody wants you to be boring.

Getting the Training

Much of the work I do initially with any college's director of education is a free consultation just to chat. We talk about having a common vision, because unless the president and academic director want to accomplish this vision there's no need for consulting and a complicated consulting report.

A great deal of the training is done via teleconferences. I do teleconference training as a consultant, with three people to more than 100 people at different sites.

The most difficult part of getting faculty involved with student retention is to create a team culture.

People who want to work with me can get our book or newsletter, or look at our Web page, www.makingyourmark.com. They can also give us a call.

The book, *Making Your Mark*, is a resource on what it takes to be successful. My wife, Lisa, and I have tried to write it from the point of view of it's all based on career high-performance self-management. It's not a book of study skills. It's a book on career self-management.

We sell the book for \$6.95, and it can be as cheap as \$2.25 if you buy it in bulk for an institution. Lisa and I turned down a publisher who wanted to buy and have us as authors, and wanted to sell the book for \$15 or \$20.

We said that was too expensive. We wanted it to be so inexpensive that an academic director could buy it and give it out at the beginning of a term, and have a direct workshop on what it's going to take to be successful.

I've been doing this for 15 years, and experiencing it as a teacher in my own college team, and know that this is just common sense.

This information is in our book, and on our Web page there are many documents people can download for free. We try to give away as much as possible so people understand the idea, and then we can do some supportive training for them.

**Career
Education
REVIEW**

Written by Terri Dougherty.
