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The Journal of Technology Studies recently published an article “Technology Education in Prospect: Perceptions, Change, and the Survival of the Profession.” Over thirty-five distinguished professionals offered their opinions and responded to issues pertaining to the profession’s needs (e.g., What are we? What should our curriculum be? Are we vocational or general education? Etc.). Similar dialogue took place at the 85th Mississippi Valley Technology Education Conference (MVTTEC) in Rosemont, Illinois, and, more of the same is discussed informally on the local, regional, and national level.

Considering this, though such rhetoric in the long term is necessary and important for clarifying our profession academically, it seems that more immediate problems need to be addressed. The bottom line is that we need to find immediate and practical solutions to sustain and remedy the technology teacher shortage among the ranks of the profession. Without solutions to this larger cause, philosophical dialogue will be a historical event in homes, schools, restaurants, etc., in relation to “what should” or “what could” have been done.

Let’s face it, all active members of the profession know that the profession needs to recruit technology educators in order to sustain its existence. This need has never been greater! Yet, recruiting and marketing strategies are inadequate to meet the demand. Weston (1997) asked, “how can technology education survive the future?” Volk (1997) projected the need for the profession to find solutions to program development shortcomings for preparing technology teachers. The literature supports many more views and the list goes on. Are their words falling upon deaf ears? In fact, knowing what the profession knows about the teacher shortage nationally, respond-

Perspective: Technology Education Marketing and Recruiting Strategies

Joseph A. Scarcella
ing to marketing and recruiting challenges and finding solutions to fill this void are status quo. How can teacher education programs maximize their strategies for recruiting and marketing technology teachers and sustaining their programs? The key, according to Merrill (1998), is that marketing and recruiting (promotion) should be treated as a process rather than an event.

To that end, this article will attempt to show how the profession can potentially increase its recruiting and marketing effectiveness and efforts, and find strategies to sustain its programs. Merrill’s model and views are the underpinnings of this article – modified, interpolated, and rephrased for discussing a technology education marketing and recruiting approach.

The Profession’s Approach

Though many states have modeled and shown how to market and recruit technology education teachers on the local level, few (if any) such strategies have trickled to the larger cause. Most affiliations’ past and present solutions to marketing and recruiting for technology education teacher shortages have been crisis intervention. Individuals and groups know there is a need for marketing and recruiting. The immediate (and simplest) solutions have been sending and posting flyers, word of mouth, emergency approaches, etc. While well-designed flyers or telling others about the astronomical number of teacher vacancies needed to be filled are admirable, such methods are inadequate. In truth, such methods don’t increase enrollments. They increase efforts and waste time for all parties concerned. This approach is depicted in Figure 1.

The bottom line on the graph in Figure 1 is the critical line and shows the level of recruiting and marketing over time. Responding to the need is also important. However, the question is “how much of the generated efforts are converted into increased enrollments and saving programs?” As evidenced in the profession’s recruiting and marketing approach, enrollment numbers are not increased before an attempt is made to respond to marketing and recruiting needs. Therefore, both lines report similarly. When responding to enrollment needs, individuals are exposed to new information, become excited, and the top line rises on the graph. Unfortunately, depending on the nature of the marketing and recruiting strategies, while enrollment of new students increases, over time it generally rises then falls significantly. The critical and compounding problem – “what happens to enrollment after responding to the need.” Notice how the line drops after responding to an enrollment need. This occurs as individuals struggle to change their marketing and recruiting strategies. In non-supportive work environments, individuals will often fall back on their old ways of working and enrollments will return to their original or lower level. Since marketing and recruiting was an immediate response and potential solution to solving a need, individual efforts and effectiveness are soon forgotten, and both time and energy have been wasted.

Figure 1.
A New Approach

The graph in Figure 2 illustrates how curves can change dramatically when recruiting and marketing technology education becomes a part of a larger process that includes effective Groundwork, Provisions, and Acceptance.

As shown in Figure 2, enrollment levels move evenly before acceptance. The greatest levels of increase occur as the participants’ acceptance is actively supported by upper and lower levels of administration, faculty, and staff, as well as effective marketing and recruiting strategies, follow-up, coaching, modeling, etc. As recruiting and marketing is accepted, enrollment goes up. As individuals gain experience with new methods of recruiting and marketing, motivation to respond to the need goes up. Consequently, the upper level continues to rise, and the bottom level rises, falls or stays the same.

Accepting and recognizing that the profession’s recruiting and marketing practices are inadequate, both past and present, are necessary for resolving the technology education teacher shortage nationally. A solid strategic plan must be developed. The need for massing forces at a critical point, at a critical time, to obtain a critical objective has never been more apparent and more necessary than now.

The New Approach

The New Approach can help the profession nationally by helping local, regional, and national affiliations understand the significance of the problem and organize their efforts to ensure that recruiting and marketing improves. If the profession works from a national level, it can create conditions for success. The New Approach focuses on four areas described below (Groundwork, Provisions, Acceptance, and Assessment).

Figure 2.
Groundwork

During the Groundwork stage, the profession must develop a strategic plan. It should focus its efforts on helping national affiliations increase their ability to effectively receive, and later apply, what they know. Effective groundwork imparts collaboration and camaraderie among individuals and groups. Learning experiences are developed and resources become available to further their marketing and recruiting efforts. There is understanding of the problem, what is required, and what must be done. The result – individuals become active participants, rather than observers, because provisions for success are identified and developed. The following concepts were developed for consideration by the profession to help affiliations, groups, and individuals prepare this endeavor effectively.

- Create marketing and recruiting strategic plans and impart them to the professional community.
- Communicate why marketing and recruiting, as a national effort, is important.
- Communicate expectations for affiliations, groups, and individuals.
- Establish clearly defined marketing and recruiting goals and objectives.
- Establish resources and support mechanisms.
- Using the strategic plan and established goals, assess affiliations for the effectiveness of their marketing and recruiting efforts.
- Reward affiliations when successful.
- Conduct research to assess the organizational performance.

Provisions

The Provisions stage represents the profession’s actual commitment level to marketing and recruiting. Active participation is contagious and can provide the following:

- Focused efforts for marketing and recruiting teachers.
- Unified expectations, experiences, and strategies among participants that facilitate implementation and success.
- Establishment of ongoing marketing and recruiting strategies among the profession.
- Security - knowing that the problems are recognized on a local, regional, and national level.
- Disclosure of other resources, perspectives, and information.
- Inspiration, motivation, direction, vision, and focus to initiate change.

Marketing and recruiting for technology education is not an academic activity, it is essentially a social endowment - communication, teamwork, collaboration, and leadership is necessary. If individuals or groups are brought together for a focused cause, new energy will emerge that might not have been possible otherwise. The profession will increase its capabilities by meeting the challenge head-on, creating ample opportunities to develop an action plan, encourage professional membership participation, and make a commitment to apply what they learn in a long-term strategic plan.

Acceptance

The acceptance stage focuses on what happens when people believe a problem exists and the degree to which they effectively implement a plan for change. Technically, this is not a stage, but a place in time where the profession would reflect honesty about what the profession is all about. It challenges basic beliefs and assumptions and can be uncomfortable. Concurrently, this is when leadership and introspection translate an idea into results. Individuals, groups, or affiliations might consider applying the following techniques:

- Model a marketing and recruiting strategy and demonstrate performance.
- Allow individuals, groups, or affiliations the latitude to discover new and better models.
- Be proactive.
- Provide positive feedback and encouragement.
- Design a mechanism for promoting high performance and standardization.
- Be accountable for successes and failures.
- Modify systems and processes to promote involvement and improvement.
- Work together and review what
has been done and learned.

- Take time to follow-up at conferences.
- Make marketing and recruiting a priority.
- Support communication throughout the profession.
- Teach what was learned.
- Keep the end in mind.
- Do it for the larger cause.

Final Words

Technology education is a unique, high-spirited discipline known for its unmatched level of excellence and leadership practices. Still, knowing what the profession knows about the teacher shortage nationally, responding to marketing and recruiting challenges and finding solutions to fill this void are status quo. To achieve a goal of increased enrollment and prevention of further demise of a great academic discipline and tradition, the profession’s current procedures must be analyzed. Logistically, the limitations to the profession’s growth are finances, manpower, resources, etc. A strategic plan and concentrated effort nationally must be found. Hopefully, the New Approach will help the professional membership make marketing and recruiting a priority. If “marketing and recruiting” is treated as a process, rather than an event, the profession might be able to take action that generates results. The result: As in its history, technology education will sustain its reputation as a thriving and valued discipline.

Assessment

The assessment stage occurs throughout the three stages listed above (Groundwork, Provisions, and Acceptance). Assessment is important because it will force the profession to answer relevant but simple questions. Consider the following:

- What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- What are its resources and obstacles?
- What does its future look like?
- What did it do right or wrong?
- What is its place in education?
- What lessons have been learned? Where does it need to improve?
- How will it meet its goals and objectives?
- How will it know when it has met its objectives?
- How important is the outcome? How will it find support?
- How will it assess its performance?
- How has the profession changed?
- How does it need to improve?
- Who should be involved in the strategic plan?
- Who is responsible for the outcome?
- Who will assess the performance objectively?
- Who will benefit?

The bottom line: Assessment encourages performance, helps validate performance, and identifies activities where performance can be improved.

References


Joseph A. Scarcella, Ph.D., is Associate Professor in the Department of Math, Science, and Technology Education at the California State University, San Bernardino, CA. He can be reached via email at jscarcella@csusb.edu or on the World Wide Web at http://soe.csusb.edu/jscarcella/main.html.