

How to get the forms back on time

Robyn Pearce

How often have you wasted time trying to get permission slips back from parents – or any other kind of form?

Although the digital world has changed some of this issue, the problem remains that sometimes important communications are ignored. Everyone's busy – parents included – and with the best will in the world things slip through the cracks.

When I wrote 'About Time for Teaching' <https://www.gettingagrip.com/product/about-time-for-teaching/> Sue Vitnell from Victoria contributed some very useful suggestions to overcome this eternal communication chestnut.

"For many years, I've been involved in various groups – sport, associations, industry groups, professional associations, scouts, schools (preschool and primary) – and the most common lament is: No-one returns our forms on time.

"There are many ways to get the message out to parents but sometimes the children don't pass them on. Other times they end up in a pile on the kitchen bench. I'm guilty here myself – I personally have a tendency to say 'I'll do it later'!

"I'd like to encourage schools to match their distribution and receipt methodology to the personality preferences of the families! Alternatively, put in steps to cover all the types so that one way or another, they will be returned."

Try one or more of these solutions

Encourage a rewards system so that the children take responsibility for returning them the next day – an end of term tally perhaps? (NO punishments though).

Mention what is required in the weekly newsletter, with a due date. Replies then become as important as the actual event (and it's a further reminder in case people didn't receive the original notice).

Offer the opportunity to have essential information sent via email at work. If the care-giver or parent is working late they may miss the notice, but if they're at work, they will get it.

For the emails generated from the school office, create groups for each class and a separate one for the whole school.

Start the good habits early. In the first year of school, give gentle encouragement in person to people who 'forget' (or send a reminder note).

Keep the format the same, school wide – for instance a correspondence wallet, a notebook for each child, a school diary – something that has a note and a completed part as a constant record.



Perhaps money is the issue

Also from Sue:

Be understanding with late payment

'Be understanding with late payment. Sometimes finances are tight, so returning instantly is not easy. A cash total at the beginning of the year, from which funds are allocated each time a reply is returned, will save the hassle of constantly collecting, counting and processing payment. For instance, you collect \$50, deduct each time an excursion is made, advise when down to \$10 and request the next instalment. End of year balances can either be donated to the school or returned.'

Communicate in the preferred medium of the recipients

Let's dig a bit deeper on Sue's comment about matching the distribution and receipt methodology to the personality preferences of the families. I learned this the hard way.

Some years ago, when I was living in Sydney, the HR Manager of one of my legal clients left when we were part-way through a series of workshops. She introduced me to the new guy. He was keen to continue the program as soon as he'd settled into the job and promised to be in touch in a couple of weeks. Well over a month rolled by with no contact from him so eventually I decided to follow up. Over the next few weeks I phoned about three or four times. Each time it only went to answer phone. Courteous messages were left but never returned.

Clearly this method of communication was not working. It looked as though the work opportunity was slipping through the net!

Eventually I decided to try an email. It went something like this:

'Hi John, I figure you must still be pretty busy getting into the swing of things. This is just a quick note to see if you've received my phone messages.'

'I just wanted to check if you're nearly ready yet for the rest of the training that's been agreed by the partners? No rush, but I didn't want to be the one holding you up.'

Within about 30 minutes a rapid response came back via email.

'Sorry I've been ignoring you. Yes, I've been very busy but I appreciate the prompt. Back to you next week.'

Within a month the follow up training was rolled out. He later mentioned that he ignored phone calls and really only responded to emails.

It might take a little more research to find out how your parents and care-givers like to be communicated with, but match delivery to preferences and your results will be far better. world.

ET



Robyn Pearce is known around the world as the Time Queen, helping people discover new angles on time. Check the resources on her website <http://www.gettingagrip.com>

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