

Bridging the GAP

Recruiting for the Future—Theirs and Ours

—by Guy M. Marzano 100754 Vicegerent Snark, Twin Cities Club 12

At a Twin Cities Club 12 Board meeting, one of our directors, Paul Boehmer 88436, shared an article about some industry people in the southeast taking young people camping to learn about the forest. He added that he was given the article by a former member of the club who said that he would rejoin our club if we offered a similar program.

Our board members discussed the idea and decided not to go forward with the idea as presented for various reasons. However, further discussion led to three pertinent observations:

1. Intercity schools in the Twin Cities had low high school graduation rates (Minneapolis had a 47% rate—with much lower rates in certain demographic groups),

2. The Lumber & Building Materials (LBM) industry in our area had an aging workforce with many employees nearing retirement age, and

3. Local LBM companies had difficulty recruiting dedicated, reliable workers to replace those retiring despite offering excellent pay and benefits.

To address these issues, Club 12 developed the GAP (Graduate and Prosper) program. Our mission was to inspire students to stay in school, graduate, and possibly explore a career in the LBM industry. The thought was to take students on a day long field trip on a luxury motor coach to see three different aspects of our industry—retail, wholesale, and specialty LBM facilities. Our board of directors formed a consensus on this approach and also agreed that it was important to provide excellent

(and school-approved) lunches and snacks throughout the day.

Thanks to information from S9 Dave Siwek 93438, Club 12 approached Carla Steinbock, the principal of Edison High School in (Northeast) Minneapolis with the idea. Dave had suggested Ms. Steinbock based on her reputation for doing progressive educational programs.

Ms. Steinbock referred us to Eryn Warne, assistant principal, and Nora Guerin, senior career and college center coordinator at her school. After explaining we could take up to 48 students and pay all the expenses for the entire day, these school officials were overjoyed and overwhelmingly embraced the idea. They volunteered to obtain permission slips and photo releases as well as recruit students for the trip. The school also agreed to provide chaperons.



GAP Day was scheduled for Thursday, May 7. Mary O'Meara Moynihan 96820 took time from her duties as the Snark of the Universe to spend the whole day on the tour. Board member Guy Marzano planned the event; Denny Felicetta obtained all the snacks; and club president John Gerlach 100500 and Paul Boehmer arranged for the motor coach and lunches. Later John and Paul, along with other senior managers, facilitated the tour of Weekes Forest Products. Pat Hegseth, with the assistance of another manager, organized and conducted the tour of Seal-Rite Doors.

The day went smoothly for the 21 students and five staff that went on the tour. The students (and school staff) were impressed by the professionalism and enthusiasm of people they met at the facilities they visited. They were also surprised at the technology employed. They heard from key people about the importance of graduating from high school. Best of all, they got to meet and get inspired by high level managers and successful sales people who started working at entry level in the yard or driving delivery trucks. Importantly, they met and were inspired by women in key positions as well.

At the beginning of the day, students were told there were hazards where we were going. They were given packets of information including safety information. Safety, was emphasized repeatedly during the tour.

A brief survey at the end of the day showed awesome results:

1. Eighty-two percent of the student participants "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" that they were more likely to stay in school and graduate as a result of this initiative. The other 18% circled "No Opinion" and wrote in that they planned to stay in school and graduate anyway.
2. Fifty-four percent "Strongly Agreed" or "Agreed" that they would now consider the LBM industry as a career option.

The cost to Club 12 was \$1,500 total. This included lunches, snacks, motor coach transportation, and printing of information for participants. Several people have concluded that it would be a great return on investment (ROI) if we got just one reliable, effective employee out of this project.

Although the Twin Cities Club 12's board of directors were extremely

pleased with the results of this pilot program, we'd like to do it even better the next time.

Some lessons we learned:

1. It may be better to conduct this program in the fall as students are busier in spring with events like prom.
2. It would be a good idea to "sell" the field trip in advance to fill the motor coach as renting one is one of the biggest fixed expenses.
3. It would be a good idea to notify media in advance of the event to obtain better press coverage.

We hope this gives other clubs an idea of what can be done in their local areas. What started as a small idea grew because interested people were interested in making it happen. With the declining number of trade classes offered in secondary education, many young people who may not be destined for a four year college are stymied in choosing a career path. This pilot program allows these high school students an opportunity to start planning for a career now. Our industries can only be better served by their talents.

For details on the GAP program, contact
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