



The Career College Information Source

Improving Admissions Performance by Focusing on APPS – Part 3 of 4

By Dr. Jean Norris, Managing Partner and Elizabeth Wheeler, Director of Training & Development, Norton | Norris, Inc

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Norton | Norris, Inc.

When you think about successful admission professionals, one thing stands out – they have to be good at working with people. Yes, some possess natural talent in this area, but how do you define People Skills? As we continue to look further into the **APPS (Attitude, Product Knowledge, People Skills, Sales Skills)** acronym, this article will focus on the People Skills competency and provide insights on how to further develop skills in this key area.

An article published by Forbes Magazine online, “The 20 People Skills You Need to Succeed at Work,” states that People Skills are the most important skill to have. It is also more than just being likable – it comes down to being an effective, accurate, and persuasive communicator. These are all necessary skills for the expert admission professional.

Connor (2003) also includes People Skills amongst the four key competencies for success in sales. In fact, he weighs this competency at 25 percent over Product Knowledge at 10 percent and *Sales Skills* at 15 percent. Let us review some basic people skill attributes that are commonplace in higher education.

The basics

There are several elements of People Skills that are necessary for success, but here are eight of our favorites:

1. Strong communication skills
2. Awareness of body language and learning preferences
3. Patience
4. Empathy and active listening
5. Genuine interest and honesty
6. Flexibility
7. Persuasion
8. Knowing your audience

Stepping it up



DR. JEAN NORRIS began her educational pursuit in a 10-month medical assisting diploma program. In the 26 years since, she has served in the role of admissions rep, dean of admissions, faculty member, dean of admissions, vice president of marketing, vice president of enrollment, and vice president of organizational development. Currently Jean is a managing partner at **Norton | Norris, Inc.**, a Chicago-

based marketing/consulting/training firm focused exclusively in the higher education sector. Dr. Norris is often called upon to speak at national conferences, commencements, and organizational retreats. Her research, articles, and interviews can be found in many well-known publications serving the sector.

Jean is the developer of **EnrollMatch®**, a comprehensive admissions training program offering proven results to balance compliance and performance. **EnrollMatch® is the FIRST and ONLY** admissions training program legally endorsed for alignment with accreditation and admissions related standards.

Dr. Norris has served as faculty at Robert Morris University, teaching leadership courses in their MBA program, as well as the University of Phoenix, teaching in their Organizational Leadership program. She received a doctoral degree from the University of Sarasota, a MA in Communication and Training from Governors State University and a BA in Management from National-Louis University. Dr. Norris is also a Licensed Master Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP™) Practitioner.

Jean also serves on the Executive Board of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) Illinois. In 2012, Jean and her son, Mike, authored and published an awarding winning book entitled, “No Sugar Added – Straight Talk From Those Living With Diabetes” with all proceeds to benefit the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) in their search for a cure.

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In a field filled with skeptical prospective students, People Skills remain among the essential tools to possess. According to Lynn Taylor (Forbes), “Having good People Skills means maximizing effective and productive human interaction to everyone’s benefit.” For those working in admissions, this can mean individual success but also great value for the institution. Let us take a detailed look at eight People Skills that are necessary for success in the workplace:

1. Exercising strong communication skills

Strong written and verbal skills in today’s technology centered world are critical. It is important to articulate what you are communicating in a way that is understood by the person that you are speaking to. It is also important to customize this communication. With an increasingly vast array of technological methods including text, chat, email and phone, it is important to understand the preference of each prospective student.

Generally, people tend to explain things based on their experiences and preferences. Having the ability to communicate to others in the way they learn best is an important characteristic of a relatable person.

2. Demonstrating an awareness of body language and learning preferences

Beyond the words used, one can often ascertain the true meaning or feelings of another through observation of body movements. Great sales people are able to gain additional information by looking for congruence. In other words, does the language someone is using match their body language? Odds are the body language represents the “truth.” Those with exceptional People Skills are often credited with truly understanding others because they recognize body language cues.

3. Having patience with others

Having patience with others and keeping a level head in stressful situations allows one to maintain control of the situation, and this behavior will not go unnoticed. Once control is lost – so is credibility. Additionally, having patience with a student can also mean allowing them the time they need to process questions and information. Going to college is a big decision that impacts everyone in the student’s life. Putting undue pressure on prospective students may result in poor decisions that have negative impacts on student persistence and outcomes.



ELIZABETH WHEELER has 8 years of experience in the higher education industry holding positions including admissions counselor, student advisor, director in the student affairs office, host on YouTube news channel, cross country coach, and dean of graduate success. Elizabeth has served as a faculty member at Robert Morris University, teaching career management, writing and business courses for the College of

Liberal Arts and the School of Business Administration. Also at Robert Morris University, she was successful in building and implementing the Passport Chicago program for all students, as well as the Graduate Success program, which focused on alumni engagement and participation. Currently Elizabeth is Director of Training and Development for Norton|Norris, Inc., a Chicago-based marketing/consulting/training firm focused exclusively on the higher education sector.

Elizabeth attended the University of Illinois and earned a bachelor’s degree in History and Secondary Education. She went on to earn her MBA with three concentrations: Management, Leadership, and Human Resources. Her vast experience has taken her around the world speaking at different universities, as well as on public television. Elizabeth serves on the Morris Graduate School Graduate Alumni Advisory Board, and is also an avid runner completing a half marathon to raise money for St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital.

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4. Showing empathy and being an active listener

There is a fine line between empathy and sympathy. According to Dictionary.com (2014), sympathy is “the fact or power of sharing the feelings of another,” and empathy is about understanding the feelings of another person without taking on those feelings.

In the world of college admissions, it is important to note that showing empathy leaves room for a solution, where sympathy draws more people into the problem or situation making it difficult to resolve. Being able to differentiate your behaviors will allow you the opportunity to connect at a deeper level with your student. This is where improved listening skills come in, too. Active listening is something worth focusing on to improve in the People Skills category. This does not only mean nodding and making agreeing sounds throughout a conversation, but rather being fully present in the conversation.

How does one become an active listener? Start by becoming aware of what might be getting in the way of hearing what the other person is saying. Limit your distractions, and really focus on the person in front of you. To let the student know you are listening, repeat what you heard them say. Even better – reflect on what they said as well as what their body language is telling you. This demonstrates true listening.

5. Exuding a genuine interest in others, and being honest

Others know when you are being authentic and if you really care about your role - especially in admissions. Many students are first generation students that may or may not have support. Some may have never spoken to someone with a genuine interest in their passion to go

to school. Getting in touch with your purpose as an admission professional is a great first step in building sincerity. If you find your values or purpose do not align with your job or position, there may be noticeable stress.

Additionally, as we have spoken about in the first two articles in this series, students are less likely to trust in today’s environment. Honesty truly is the best policy when it comes to tuition, credit transfer, enrollment fees and placement rates. Honesty is also much more than just staying compliant; it involves telling the WHOLE truth so students can make an informed decision.

6. Applying flexibility

The most effective sales people also understand the value in being flexible. Being flexible not only has to do with the daily ebb and flow of the admissions office, it has to do with being able to adapt to different needs of the many students coming in for an interview. According to a study conducted by researchers at Aequus Partners (2010), flexibility is the mutual decision to make changes to when, where and how a person will work better to meet individual and business needs. The way one goes about their job, presentation or even a tour could work for certain people but maybe not others. Apply flexibility to adjust to each individual.

7. Utilizing persuasion

In higher education, we know that persuasion plays a large role in moving a prospective student towards a decision. When you speak about a school’s attributes and benefits – persuasion is happening. Having the confidence to present your school’s information in a professional, ethical way, does not make you “sales-y,” it is all part of the People Skills competency.

8. Knowing your audience

The ability to truly understand key information about your prospective students is critical for many reasons. First, this information will help present your school and programs in a way that is easy for the prospective student to understand. Secondly, customization has become the norm in so many other facets of marketing and social media already (Allbusiness.com, 2000). Think about an account with Amazon.com that sends the user custom suggestions based on past searches or purchases. There are video games that allow for customization down to the eye color, while Facebook allows ultimate control in what one chooses to “Like..”

So why should it be any different for higher education? Meeting the student where they are in their model of the world will help them build better rapport with you as the admission professional, and help them make better and more informed decisions. Know your audience and know how to deliver or market the information in the way your audience wants to receive it.

Some admission professionals have a natural talent to communicate and connect with prospective students while others may find great value in learning how to implement these

skills. At the end of the day, there is value in practicing and refining *People Skills*.

Join us for the final article on APPS which will focus on the most critical competency of all – Attitude!

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