

23 Dos and Don'ts for Presidents



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Get off to a fast start and keep the momentum going all year long with our list of essential dos and don'ts for leaders.

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1. Do learn people's names and use them often.
Don't assume everyone knows who you are. Introduce yourself.
2. Do respect the principal's role as CEO of the school.
Don't surrender the HSAs authority to the principal. Work together as partners.
3. Do get to know the school secretaries, custodians, and other support staff.
Don't treat them like the HSAs hired help. They work for the school and your kids; they aren't there to do your HSA grunt work. Treat them with respect, and they can help the HSA in many ways.
4. Do set a good example by following school policies.
Don't park illegally just because you know you'll be in and out of the school quickly. Always sign in and wear the proper visitor badge even if everyone knows who you are. Follow protocol even when you use the photocopier.

****Wording was changed in this article to support HSAs****

5. Don't reinvent the wheel.
Do learn from the past. Defer to and share the old project binders. Talk to previous HSA leaders. Talk to teachers who have been on staff for a while.
6. Don't disregard the knowledge of your past president.
Do approach them as your mentor. Better than anyone, they know the challenges you face. Listen to what they say. Ask for advice.
7. Do train your committee chairs and lay out the expectations for each committee.
Don't micromanage the committees or your fellow officers. Let them apply their time and talents, even if it means they don't do things exactly the way you would have done it yourself.
8. Don't put all the emphasis on fundraising.
Do focus on parent involvement first. A community that feels connected to the school will step up to support the fundraisers when asked.
9. Do repeat longstanding, successful events.
Don't ignore the value of tradition; it gives your HSA an identity in the community.
10. Do run efficient meetings.
Don't treat people's time carelessly. Use an agenda, prepare minutes, start and end on time. Clean up after yourself. Listen to the members.
11. Do familiarize yourself with Robert's Rules of Order.
Don't get bogged down in layers and layers of parliamentary procedure. Use it to keep your meetings running efficiently, not to overwhelm your members.
12. Do read your HSAs bylaws.
Don't give up if there are no bylaws—creating them can be one of the most important things you do for your HSA.
13. Do become familiar with your HSAs formal organizational status.
Don't assume everything is in order simply because your group has been around for years. Find out whether your HSA has a tax ID number (EIN, or employer identification number, in IRS-speak), whether you're incorporated with the state, and whether you're registered as a tax-exempt charity with the IRS under section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code.

14. Do seek out information. Reach out to HSA leaders at nearby schools to share experiences. Attend parent group conferences and expos. Visit the message boards at ptotoday.com.
Don't assume you know it all. There are loads of HSAs with great ideas and experiences you can use for your group.
15. Don't be afraid to make the tough decisions.
Do accept responsibility for unpopular but wise decisions, such as canceling an event due to lack of volunteer support.
16. Do say thanks.
Don't lump every "thank you" into one blanket statement at year's end. Work hard throughout the year to thank individuals by name for their contributions to the HSA.
17. Don't let the stress level get too high. It's HSA to scale back to avoid burnout, and it's OK to hold purely social events to boost morale and teamwork.
18. Do have fun. Being a HSA leader can be a very rewarding experience. Even small steps to create a supportive community really make a difference for schools.

Additional Dos for New Presidents



Communicate

Be mindful of communicating in ways that will present you as someone who's approachable, proactive, and reachable.

Stay Organized

Whether you use binders, Google Drive, or something else, find a system that works for you and spend some time each week

keeping up with things.

Breathe In, Breathe Out

Try not to worry too much about every little thing, and allow yourself to make a few mistakes. You're only human; no one's expecting you to be perfect.

Accept All Help

Get out of the mindset that people have to commit to a certain level of volunteering. If someone wants to help, let her—find a way to plug her in that works for her.

Talk to the Teachers

Find out what they really want from your group. You might be surprised at what they would actually find helpful.

Meet the Principal Where She's At

Email, text, phone—determine how your principal prefers to communicate and be willing to adapt.