

# The most important part of admission has nothing to do with efficiency

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Most admission professionals didn't get into this work because they love managing funnels. They got into it because they love students and families, because there is something genuinely meaningful about helping a child find the right place to learn and grow. That instinct, that relational pull, is exactly what makes a great admission professional. It is also, I'd argue, the most powerful strategic asset a school has, if it is given room to do its work.

The challenge is that schools often feel pressure to build efficient systems: group tours, parent-led visits, streamlined processes. The efficiency is understandable. Admission offices are busy, calendars fill up fast, and there is always more to do than hours in the day. But when efficiency becomes the organizing principle of the visit experience, something important gets crowded out. Families deserve more than a well-run process. They deserve someone who will take the time to truly know them.

Where a parent chooses to send their child to school is one of the most deeply considered decisions they will ever make. It is wrapped in hope, anxiety, past experience, and enormous love for their child. Families are looking, often without knowing it, for someone who will take that seriously, who will ask real questions and actually listen to the answers. When they find that person, something shifts. The process stops feeling like an audition and starts feeling like a partnership.

I think about a tour I gave years ago to a mom and her fourth-grade son. The boy was hesitant when they arrived: quiet, guarded, doing his best to look like he'd rather be anywhere else. As we walked, I kept asking questions, looking for a way in. Eventually he told me that his favorite thing about school was when it was over so he could go home. So I asked what he did at home, and his whole demeanor changed. He told me about his Legos, and specifically about a replica of Notre-Dame he had just finished building. I mentioned that I used to teach European History, and he lit up completely. He started talking about Epic History on YouTube, his favorite periods, the things he found fascinating. For the rest of the tour, he wasn't a reluctant fourth grader. He

was a curious, engaged, genuinely delightful kid who had simply needed someone to find the right door.

At the end of the visit, he waited in reception while I spoke with his mom. She started crying. She explained that he was dyslexic and had developed a real fear of school, so much so that getting him through the door of a new one had been a significant undertaking. She couldn't believe how engaged and alive he had seemed during our 45 minutes together. And in that conversation, I learned things about his story and his educational journey that no application would have surfaced on its own. He enrolled, thrived with some targeted language development support, and the whole arc of that experience traced back to a conversation that happened because someone took the time to ask and to listen.

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*“In the admission process, our starting point is not yes or no. It’s how.”*

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That is something I used to say to prospective families directly, and I meant it practically, not just philosophically. The goal of the process isn't to evaluate whether a child fits your school. It is to understand how your school can best serve that child. When you say that out loud, it changes the room. It demystifies the process, lowers the anxiety, and signals clearly that you are on the family's side. When families feel that, they open up in ways that make you far more effective at the actual work of matching them to your community.

A parent-to-parent tour can be a wonderful thing, as current families are some of your most authentic ambassadors. But it is worth thinking carefully about what it asks of prospective families in that moment. A parent who is worried about their child's learning difference, or who is carrying the weight of a difficult experience at their last school, is unlikely to share that with a stranger on a group walk. They need a quiet moment with someone who has made it clear that it is safe to share, that the information will be received with care, and that the school genuinely wants to know. Creating that moment is one of the most important things an admission professional can do, and it is exactly what great admission professionals are built for.

I have believed for a long time, across every role I have held in independent schools, that **the most important work we do is rarely the most efficient work**. In admission especially, the slow conversation, the one that runs long because a family had more to say than you expected, is often the most valuable one. Those moments are not a deviation from the process. They are the process at its best, doing exactly what it is supposed to do.

The admission professionals I have admired most over the years are the ones who never lost sight of why they got into this work. They stayed curious about students. They made families feel genuinely seen. They understood that every visit was an opportunity to extend trust, and that trust, once built, is the foundation everything else rests on. That instinct isn't inefficiency. It is the whole point.

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