

Report on Educate Plus Conference 2016

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At the start of September, the biannual Educate Plus conference was held at the Marriott Hotel, in the Gold Coast, Queensland, Australia. Delegates from around Australia and New Zealand convened in Surfers Paradise for a week of discussion regarding the advancement in the education sector. As a scholarship holder and recent member of Educate Plus I had the fortunate opportunity to attend this absorbing event.

The conference began with over 200 people participating in pre-conference workshops. These covered a wide range of subject areas. Over 630 people then attended the main conference, which included over 80 speakers. Presentations focussed on a wide range of topics including admissions, alumni and community relations, fundraising and marketing & communications.

It was brought up time and time again, by presenters' from across not only differing fields, but different countries it's all about 'relationships'. Each presenter spoke with consistency about this vital part of building education relations.

I attended the pre-conference workshop on my brilliant career in advancement and I took away from the session three things;

- Invest in myself, work on my own plan
- Decide on whether I want to be a manager or specialist
- Keep a record of my accomplishments

Fantastic keynote speaker, Dr Simon Breakspear covered three main areas

- What sort of futures do learners face?
- What does the future of learning look like? (especially in a digital world)
- How do advancement managers respond to change?

Simon's presentation was lively and engaging and a great way to start the conference! His evidence informed ideas and breadth of knowledge provoked a lot of thought and discussion afterwards.

The remaining conference days I wanted to attend many of the sessions and many at competing times. I needed to clone myself for some sessions but had to make some decisions about where I am now what would be of most value. So I attended the Alumni and Fundraising streams.

When it came to the topic of fundraising, there were many messages I learnt but the ones that resonated with me were;

- Building relationships with donors requires genuine engagement. It is important to get to know donors on a personal level and interact with them in a way that shows you value them and can help them achieve their personal goals through their support

- Work towards all board members as donors and donor stewards. The Board giving sets the tone of the school and fundraising is not the job of only one person in the school
- Make time for major gifts and be honest and engaging when 'asking'
- Be careful of event fatigue
- Be wary and thoughtful regarding technology – right tool, right time
- Possibilities of donations are brought to life with impactful stories

When it came to the topic of Alumni, there were a couple of key messages that I have taken away from the conference;

- Engaging younger Alumni has to be meaningful, constant, age appropriate and mutually beneficial
- Listen to younger Alumni, beware the assumption trap

Michael McQueen keynote speaker on the second day was as equally as inspiring as Simon covering trends and shifts in education. He highlighted that education is evolving at an unprecedented rate, it is more important than ever that those of us engaged in education and schools keep pace with change. Simply relying on conventional wisdom and established practices is no longer enough. Students are becoming

1. Increasingly switched on
2. Increasingly plugged in
3. Increasingly grown up
4. Fragile
5. High maintenance
6. Increasingly desperate for role models

I learnt so many things, was able to meet so many colleagues from different schools and listen to experts who have a wealth of experience in advancement. There are a number of learnings and reactions but these are the short to medium term I will work to implement;

Things to implement post conference

- Develop a volunteer workforce to help one-person development office
- Consider a major gifts committee / contractor for major projects
- Consider event fatigue v more direct fundraising
- Be brave and 'Ask' donors
- Investigate a phonation as a fundraising initiative
- Include storytelling in fundraising campaign's

I would like to say thank you to Educate Plus NZ Chapter for giving me this opportunity to attend the Educate Plus conference in Australia it has left me inspired and motivated, but has also left me pondering about how to move forward in my new role with really modest assistance.