

The Business School Apprentice: A New Form of Experiential Learning

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In 2009, I helped to design an MBA leadership immersion class at the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School. I asked 12 MBA students to clear their schedules for 48 hours, as if they were preparing for a case competition, and informed them that they would be participating in a team competition modeled after Donald Trump's NBC reality show *The Apprentice*. On a Monday morning in March, I introduced the challenge. The students would be raising money for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, one of the most popular charities in America, to grant wishes to give hope, strength, and joy to children with life-threatening medical conditions. Each team was responsible for selecting a leader, creating a vision, choosing a wish child to sponsor, developing a strategy, and implementing the strategy. Each team had three undergraduate volunteers to manage and motivate.

Some teams focused on soliciting donations from university faculty members and students on campus. Others obtained signed memorabilia from local athletes and auctioned them off, held raffles, and convinced local restaurants to donate a portion of their proceeds to the cause. Less than 48 hours later, I brought the students back into the board room to debrief.

My hope was that the 21 students would raise a total of \$6,500, which would grant the wish of one child to go to Disney World. I was astonished to see that together, they raised over \$33,500, granting six wishes. In the debriefing, leading and managing the undergraduate volunteers under time pressure turned out to be one of the most valuable learning experiences for the MBA students. Other debriefing topics included leveraging professional and personal networks, delegation and coordination dynamics, and utilizing persuasion and influence techniques to convince individuals and companies to make donations. At the end of the debriefing, each team conducted a 360-degree feedback session.

When I joined the Wharton faculty, I adapted the Make-A-Wish challenge to an MBA negotiation class. The students had a month to hone their negotiation expertise by bargaining for corporate sponsorships, and they raised over \$25,200 while practicing distributive, integrative, and coalitional techniques. Together, these were two of the most gratifying moments of my professional life. Three years and three Make-A-Wish challenges later, my students have raised more than \$118,000.

In 2012, I gave 35 Penn Law students a week over spring break to fundraise in teams, focusing on group decision-making, motivation, persuasion and influence, networks, and team effectiveness. The following month, a group of 36 Wharton undergraduates volunteered to partner up with Harvard MBA students in a team fundraising competition for Make-A-Wish. It has been quite inspiring to watch colleagues design and implement similar challenges at other universities. At the University of Michigan, students have competed in teams to fundraise for Make-A-Wish and a soup kitchen. In 2012 at the University of Utah, Harris Sondak led the inaugural Make-A-Wish challenge for executive MBAs. In the span of a month, these students set a new record, raising \$160,000.

Instead of relying solely on role-plays and simulations for experiential learning, I believe that we have the opportunity and responsibility to engage students in activities that allow them to apply, hone, and reflect on course concepts in ways that make a difference in the lives of others. From the perspective of positive organizational scholarship, experiential activities like the Make-A-Wish challenge may enable

students to develop, express, and sustain prosocial identities as giving, caring, helpful, or compassionate individuals. The activities open up pathways for connecting with potential beneficiaries in need, mobilizing collective efforts to help these beneficiaries, and embedding these efforts in a visible, domain-specific role that translates the abstract notions of caring and compassion into more vivid, tangible behavioral acts.

Here is a list of best practices that colleagues and I have accumulated over the past three years:

1. *Invite liaisons to give a short presentation about the organization.* When I introduce the challenge, the CEO and development director of the local Make-A-Wish chapter attend my class. They describe the cause, provide advice on effective fundraising techniques, and answer student questions. In my experience, their visit is instrumental in motivating the students to support the cause and providing them with key task-relevant information.
2. *Offer a reward for the winning team.* Since students vary in their attachment to the cause and fundraising can be a challenging experience, at the outset of the challenge, I have found it useful to announce a reward for the winning team. At Penn Law, the deans took the winning team to a celebration dinner. At UNC, the winning team was invited to a Make-A-Wish ball, where their contributions were recognized, and received career coaching from a senior executive. At Wharton, Comcast has invited the winning team to attend a Philadelphia Flyers or 76ers game in the company suite and receive career advice from executives. These types of rewards are typically facilitated through members of the local Make-A-Wish board of directors. I have also offered an “above and beyond the call of duty” prize to teams that continue fundraising substantial amounts of money after the official challenge is complete, typically taking these teams to lunch or dinner.
3. *Structure a live pitch.* In the Penn Law challenge, I invited three lawyers from the Make-A-Wish board of directors to serve as a panel in class at the midpoint of the activity. The panelists were a judge, a partner at a Philadelphia law firm, and a general counsel for a local company. Each team made a pitch to the panel in front of the whole class, and the panel made a donation to the team with the most compelling pitch. The following day, a Penn Law alumnus visited the class. The teams met with him individually to pitch, and he donated to the most persuasive teams. In both cases, the visitors gave feedback to each team on their strengths and areas for improvement. I recommend these types of live pitches for four reasons. First, it gives the students a concrete task on which to focus some of their energy. Second, it allows students to learn from each other’s task strategies, in the interest of enhancing collective success in fundraising. Third, it levels the playing field, where teams naturally differ in their connections and resources, providing each team with an equal opportunity to gain donations. Fourth, it provides students with the opportunity to test their skills and learn from role models who hold positions to which they aspire.
4. *Engage coaches for each team.* At UNC, each team was assigned a faculty coach, an executive coach, and a fundraising professional. The coaches gave advice throughout the task and participated in the debriefing session. Where possible, this is an excellent way to enrich the feedback.

Here are links to media coverage of this type of experiential learning exercise:

- The original Make-A-Wish challenge at UNC:
<http://abclocal.go.com/wtvd/story?section=news/local&id=6728301> and <http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/News/DetailsNewsPage.cfm?id=4236>

- Penn Law students:
https://www.law.upenn.edu/blogs/news/archives/2012/03/penn_law_students_raise_36000.html
- Wharton negotiation MBAs:
<http://philadelphia.wish.org/2010/12/09/wharton-mba-students/>
- Wharton undergraduates and Harvard MBAs:
http://www.thedp.com/index.php/article/2012/04/wharton_and_harvard_business_students_fund_raise_for_makeawish
- University of Utah executive MBAs: <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865554026/U-students-help-grant-wishes-of-children-with-life-threatening-conditions.html>
- University of Michigan MBAs:
http://www.bus.umich.edu/NewsRoom/ArticleDisplay.asp?news_id=22704
- University of Michigan undergraduates fundraising for a soup kitchen:
http://www.ur.umich.edu/0809/Apr27_09/09.php
- University of Ottawa students promoting fair-trade cocoa: <http://www.telfer.uottawa.ca/en/latest-news/2180-telfer-students-promote-the-fair-trade-of-cocoa-in-haiti>

Below are documents and slides that I have distributed to students in the Make-A-Wish negotiation challenge at Wharton. If I can be of help as you consider designing a similar challenge, feel free to contact me.

The Make-A-Wish Negotiation Challenge



The Make-A-Wish Foundation (MAW; www.wish.org) exists to give hope, strength and joy to children with life-threatening medical conditions. Since 1980, MAW has granted the wishes of over 199,000 children. Today, MAW grants a child's wish in the U.S. every 40 minutes, divided into four types:

- "I wish to *be*" (a princess for a day at Disney World, a weather girl)
- "I wish to *go*" (to Yellowstone, on a European cruise, to Hawaii, to ride in a NASCAR car)
- "I wish to *meet*" (Iron Chef Morimoto, artist Madlib, LA Ink's Kat VonD, the Red Sox)
- "I wish to *have*" (a man cave, a media room, a personalized golf cart)

The Make-A-Wish Foundation of Philadelphia and Susquehanna Valley (www.philadelphia.wish.org) is one of the most successful chapters in the nation. The chapter has granted over 4,100 wishes since 1986, receives annual public support of approximately \$3.6 million, and contributes 87.3% of funds raised directly to wishes.

However, in the current economy, granting wishes is proving more challenging. Your task is to use your negotiation skills and expertise to bring in new corporate sponsors, helping sick children make their dreams come true. The objective is for your team to raise enough money to fund at least one wish, which has an average cash cost of approximately \$7,000. You will use the Adopt-A-Wish program, which gives companies the opportunity to sponsor a specific child with a life-threatening medical condition.

1. The Task

You have been divided into teams of six students each. Each team has selected four potential corporate sponsors from a list generated by Make-A-Wish. Starting _____, you have until _____ to negotiate with these sponsors about adopting a wish. Note that negotiation skills will be relevant both for gaining access to the relevant contacts and for convincing them to sponsor a wish.

In addition to the four potential sponsors that your team has drafted, you are welcome to identify additional potential sponsors through your network and resources. Before contacting these potential sponsors, you must seek approval from the Director of Development.

This will ensure that no two teams contact the same company, and that your efforts are not redundant with those being conducted by Make-A-Wish staff members. All outreach to corporate targets must remain within the following Pennsylvania counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Cumberland, Dauphin, Montgomery, Philadelphia, Lancaster, Lebanon and Perry. If you contact a national or international company, you need to work with the local office in one of the above counties.

2. The Rewards

Negotiation performance will be assessed in terms of the total dollars committed to each team by corporate sponsors. If these results do not provide a clear winner, the secondary metric will be the total number of unique corporate sponsors signed on.

The team that wins the challenge will be rewarded with the following prizes:

- Attending a Philadelphia 76ers game in the Comcast SportsNet suite
- Taking an exclusive tour of Comcast
- Viewing a live taping of a show

In addition, the winning team will have the opportunity to participate in the send-off party for a wish child and family, in the spirit of experiencing the joy that you help to create.

Finally, there will be a prize for the team that raises the most additional funds after the challenge is complete. If you like, you can continue to negotiate sponsorships and/or create a “Friends, Family and Fans” Online Individual Giving Page: Here is a sample page from 2009 used by Board Chair Micky Dominick: <https://secure.wish.org/ourfriends/051-000/mickydominick.htm>

3. The Process

- Learn about the interests of the sponsors that you drafted
- Brainstorm about additional potential sponsors
- Devise a negotiation strategy for reaching and persuading potential sponsors
- Apply course concepts
 - Distributive techniques: anchoring, identifying compatible issues, concessions
 - Integrative techniques: building trust, asking questions about interests, sharing information, packaging issues, expanding the pie and creating value
 - Persuasion principles: authority, scarcity, consistency, social proof, liking, reciprocity
 - Group negotiation strategies: developing roles and signals, choosing a spokesperson, forming coalitions
- Divide up roles and responsibilities
- Set goals and create an action plan, timeline, and deadlines

4. The Resources

- Wharton faculty
- Make-A-Wish development staff
- The Adopt-A-Wish Program
 - www.wish.org/help/fundraising/adopt_a_wish
 - Webcafe: adoptawish.ppt and adoptawish.doc
- Make-A-Wish videos and promotional materials
- The alumni database (with approval from the MBA Program Office)
- Your personal networks

America's Favorite Charitable Cause



The Task

- Negotiate corporate sponsorships for wishes for children with life-threatening medical conditions
 - ~ \$7,500 per wish
- Deadline: Thurs. 12/1



Rewards for the Winning Team

- Attending a Philadelphia 76ers game in the Comcast SportsNet suite
- Exclusive Comcast tour
- Live taping of a Comcast show
- Participating in the send-off party for a wish child
- Resume line item



Dwight Prize

- Mystery reward for going above and beyond the call of duty
 - For the team that brings in the largest number of corporate sponsors or raises the most money outside corporate sponsorships



The Process

- Brainstorm about additional potential sponsors
- Devise a negotiation strategy for reaching and persuading potential sponsors
 - Identify their interests and figure out how you can meet them
- Divide up roles and responsibilities
- Set goals and create action plan, timeline, deadlines



Adding Potential Sponsors

- Starting at 9am on _____, you can add potential sponsors to your list
 - The sponsor needs to be local and can only be contacted by one team; first come, first serve
 - Email _____ and me with the name of the potential sponsor
 - _____ will send an approval, and I will keep a running list of companies that have been selected

Course Concepts

- Distributive techniques: anchoring, identifying compatible issues, concessions
- Integrative techniques: building trust, asking questions about interests, sharing information, packaging issues, expanding the pie and creating value
- Persuasion principles: authority, scarcity, consistency, social proof, liking, reciprocity