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THE MINUTE BUSINESS CHALLENGE:

Connecting Undergraduates and the Community Through Critical Thinking

Shannon Kane, *Krannert School of Management*

ABSTRACT

In spring 2015, Melissa Evens, Director of the Undergraduate Communication Studio at Krannert, asked Shannon Kane to design an activity to be showcased at Purdue's Annual Spring Fest. Having been given quite a bit of creative freedom, she hoped to develop an event that would not only create awareness of management careers among the local youth, but also encourage Krannert undergraduate students to become more involved in the local community. With these goals in mind, she developed the Minute Business Challenge (MBC), an activity that presents community members of all ages with real-world business problems and gives them the opportunity to create innovative solutions with the help of Krannert undergraduates. In this article, she describes her experiences developing, executing, improving, and analyzing the effects of the Minute Business Challenge she also stresses the importance of community involvement, promoting critical thinking skills and motivating her peers to engage in similar community building efforts.

KEYWORDS

Minute Business Challenge, Krannert, case competition, community

INTRODUCTION

I began working with Melissa Evens, Director of the Undergraduate Leadership Communication Studio and Undergraduate Scholarships in the Krannert School of Management, after meeting her at a Krannert Leadership Speaker Series event in the fall of my freshman year. She offered me a position that involved developing the Leadership Communication Studio and expanding its influence through various services, events, and other professional opportunities. I gladly accepted her offer and was eager to begin. One of my first assignments was to develop a program for Purdue's Annual Spring Fest (Purdue University, 2017).

Spring Fest is largely focused on Purdue's School of Agriculture. Agriculture-related organizations host the majority of activities during the two-day event, which include things like cockroach racing, cricket spitting, a

petting zoo, and making ice cream using liquid nitrogen. These events attract many families from the local community, as they are tailored to entertain children, are hands-on, and are generally very fun. Other schools, such as the College of Engineering and the College of Veterinary Medicine, host events as well. At the time, Krannert's only involvement in Spring Fest was handing out leaflets. To make Krannert's presence stronger at Spring Fest, I created an interactive, fun activity for children and families and distributed informational materials about Krannert and management careers.

Having been given creative freedom for this assignment and having gained inspiration from recent case competition involvement, I developed the Minute Business Challenge. This activity presents community members with real-world business problems and the opportunity to create innovative solutions with the help of Krannert undergraduates. They then present their ideas to a panel

Figure 1. Shannon Kane assists a young innovator in developing her solution to the following case: “The M&Ms Company wants to make a new color of M&M next year. Which color should they choose and why?”

of faculty members and students (Figure 1). There is a catch: they have one minute to present their idea. This format resembles an elevator pitch or a case interview. I hosted this event at Spring Fest for the past three years, making small improvements each year. Most recently, I developed the event into a scalable activity suitable for the classroom. My goals were to create awareness about management careers and improve critical thinking skills in local youth, while also encouraging Krannert undergraduate students to become more involved in the local community.

DESCRIPTION

The first Minute Business Challenge took place during Purdue’s 2015 Spring Fest in the Krannert Drawing Room. I promoted the event using flyers, emails, social media, and local news stations. I wrote cases organized by age group and provided small, spring-themed

Figure 2. Judges Pei Kai Xia, Joshua Groh, and Charlene Sullivan (Krannert’s Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs), proudly sporting the Minute Business Challenge pins.

prizes for participants. Unfortunately, attendance was lower than expected. While reflecting on the event with Melissa, we concluded that the distance between the Krannert building and the rest of the Spring Fest activities likely contributed to this. Those who did attend seemed to enjoy the activity, based on the praises of those involved. That year, the Minute Business Challenge was listed as one of the *Journal & Courier*’s “Top 5 Things to Do at Spring Fest” (Paul, 2015).

In 2016, we hosted the Minute Business Challenge in the Purdue Memorial Union to mitigate the distance from the rest of the Spring Fest activities. I put more consideration into the room setup to improve logistics. I also began planning and advertising the event a month earlier to increase awareness, volunteer participation, and attendance. That year, I better understood the types of people who might attend and enjoy the event, and I could more effectively target those demographics with marketing. I also designed an event logo and printed it on buttons to hand out as prizes (Figure 2).

Figure 3. Jasica Twardus at the case table for Spring Fest 2017.

In 2017, we booked a classroom in Lilly Hall, a building in which many other Spring Fest events take place. Our rationale was that the increased foot traffic would attract a larger crowd. Due to our previous successes, I did not change much other than adding more, relevant cases, introducing play-dough as a presentation supplement and labeling the cases based on difficulty level instead of age group to be more inclusive (Figure 3). I attempted to quantify the impact of the event by distributing feedback surveys and interviewing key players and some participants.

We also had the opportunity to conduct the Minute Business Challenge at Mayflower Mill Elementary School in late March. With the help of Jay Petrie and Courtney Farrell, I presented a brief introduction to management and managerial careers before the activity. The children

worked in teams of three to four to develop solutions to their respective cases, presented their solutions to the class, and then voted to determine the winning team (Figure 4). The activity coupled well with the class's entrepreneurial unit, and their teacher assured us that the event was well perceived.

Figure 4. Winning Team at Mayflower Mill's Minute Business Challenge.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

In a Rutgers Cooperative Extension article, Keith G. Diem (2014) lays out a framework called Knowledge, Attitudes, Skills and Aspirations (KASA) that assesses the impact of educational programs such as the Minute Business Challenge. The KASA framework asks participants to disclose their knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations about a specific subject matter before and after being exposed to a program, thus qualitatively measuring the impact thereof (Diem, 2014). Inspired by KASA, I conducted a similar analysis during my trip to Mayflower Mill to better understand how the children's impressions of management careers would change after having participated in my activity. Before the presentation on management, I asked the children, "What do managers do?" and wrote their answers on the board. At first they said managers do things like hire, control, and supervise people, frequently referring to managers as "the boss" (Figure 5). After listening to my presentation and acting as managers themselves during the Minute Business Challenge, I posed the question once more. The students then responded with answers like make decisions, set goals, empower people, and solve problems. They were also able to make connections between the duties of managers and the objectives of the Minute Business Challenge.

In today's modern business world, over 81% of employed people work in the services sector (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Given that statistic, it is likely

that many students in the Mayflower Mill classroom will become managers or face one or more of the managerial duties discussed in the activity. The Minute Business Challenge increases awareness of these careers at an early age in order to foster a positive and more realistic attitude toward careers in management.

At the 2017 Minute Business Challenge, I distributed a voluntary, four-question survey to the parents of every participating child to quantify their collective opinion of the need for such an event. From this survey, I concluded that, in their parents' judgement, children in the local community are unfamiliar with managerial careers. Further, the overwhelming majority of parents think it is very important that the community becomes more aware of careers in management (Figure 6).

The Minute Business Challenge is a nonthreatening, welcoming space for youth to practice thinking critically. All of the parents surveyed at the 2017 event responded positively when asked about the importance of developing these strategic thinking skills in the community. The event's invitation to innovate benefits the children by improving their critical thinking skills through a challenge that requires them to creatively solve problems within the confines of the cases.

Figure 5. Results from survey of parents.

I also conducted interviews to qualitatively evaluate the event's effectiveness, the need for the event, and suggestions for improvement. When asked how the Minute Business Challenge benefits the community, one participant and local mother, Mary Merchant Tinkle, responded eloquently, "I think engaging [the youth] with current issues is a great way to start a problem-solving dialogue." Her opinion, along with others, aligns with the goals of the activity and helps validate its impact. The goals of the Minute Business Challenge were achieved and the event was well perceived by those involved.

Figure 6. Students' initial responses to the question, "What do Managers do?"

STUDENT IMPACT

It has been immeasurably rewarding to see an idea grow into an annual tradition commended by Krannert's faculty and other community members. Seeing how much the children enjoy designing their solutions and how their creative minds come alive when given the space to think strategically is an incredible thing to observe.

The Minute Business Challenge allowed me to apply marketing principles learned in my coursework to manage a large-scale project. For example, each year I made decisions concerning the relevant elements for the event's marketing plan. Planning the Minute Business Challenge required me to be intentional about the target market, marketing strategy and other promotional strategies while confined to a relatively small budget. Though I do not plan to enter the field of education or youth development, I now have a better understanding of how to develop and advertise an activity like this from start to finish.

In the future, I intend to expand the event through additional classroom visits and collaboration with other local, youth-oriented groups. I will consider new marketing strategies and outlets for expansion since attendance was the most difficult hurdle. I hope the tradition continues after I graduate.

CONCLUSION

Building relationships is important for personal and community development. The Minute Business Challenge provides Purdue students and community members

a space to do just that, while improving strategic thinking and problem solving skills. With this article, I hope to inspire other students to be positive leaders in their communities and illustrate the process that goes into developing an activity like the Minute Business Challenge. If you have an idea that addresses an unmet need in your community, I strongly recommend you act upon it. Melissa Evans has continued to be an invaluable resource, and I advise that you reach out to your mentors, advisors, professors, and administrators and take their advice. Boiler Up!

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AUTHOR BIO SKETCH

Shannon Kane, a fourth-year marketing student in the Krannert School of Management, reflects on the Minute Business Challenge, an activity she developed as part of Purdue's Annual Spring Fest that increases awareness of management careers, encourages community involvement, and improves critical thinking and problem-solving skills in local youth.

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