

We Ain't Come Here to Play School

Brad Cooley – *School Matters* – September 22, 2017

Do you remember the infamous tweet from OSU quarterback Cardale Jones back in 2012? “Why should we have to go to class if we came here to play FOOTBALL, we ain’t come play SCHOOL, classes are POINTLESS.”

There is nothing quite like hearing those ‘real time’ thoughts from a student-athlete at a prominent university who has an aversion to going to classes. While some people laughed and appreciated the frankness, others were disgusted by the negative light that was shed on the football team and the university as a whole. Those words still appear on most online lists as one of the worst and most stupid things ever posted for the world to see.

Needless to say, Cardale’s life as a Buckeye finished in decent fashion – having earned both a degree and a national championship. However, those same fortunes will not necessarily appear for the millions of others who recklessly use their online presence to speak their mind.

The hottest, yet most ignored, subject for students in high school and college pertains to social media and building one’s own personal brand. As a kid growing up on a farm, branding to me meant putting a mark on an animal for identification. As an undergrad at Ohio Wesleyan University, the branding term was used primarily in my economic classes to define how organizations create a name, symbol, or design to stand out in a competitive market.

Personal branding – that concept never did cross my airways, but it definitely does today!

No longer is your life story contained within a strong resume, a transcript, your appearance on game day, or how others have evaluated your character. Social media sites have enabled virtually anyone who wishes to venture into its fray to spew words, emotions, digs, and opinions at a breakneck pace. While some comments may be quite positive, other lines fall well short of that mark. Oh, and those pictures, they are worth a million words.

Most high school students don’t realize it, but they already have a personal brand, some that are firmly established and others still in the developmental phases. Do you know how your child has branded him or herself? What does your own brand look like?

High schools and universities alike are designing classes and workshops to focus on the topic of social media and personal branding. What is it, and why should I care? A personal brand says who you are, what you are known for, and what you have to offer. Admissions officers, recruiters and future employers are looking at your brand and making six-figure plus decisions based on that breadcrumb trail that was excreted from your past.

Mr. Schlotterer and I have taken our Trucker students to leadership conferences in Columbus and Bowling Green, and this topic is always on the agenda. Mr. Kania, with his extensive technology background, presented this very item to all of our high school students on day one as part of our orientation process. Additional reinforcement will come this year through our new

Trucker Time intervention period which will allow our teachers to work with their students on the proper use of social media and the great ways to build a personal brand.

Is anyone even listening? Will our students heed the advice? Would we be better off banging our heads against a block wall? In my experiences, students absolutely love viewing the idiotic posts and pictures offered up by celebrities. It is very simple to identify the mistakes of others and it appears that there will never be a shortage of real-life examples to show our kids what NOT to do. Are we equally adept at identifying our own mistakes on social media? Are there enough illustrations to show our kids what to do and why it matters?

There are good people that lose jobs, scholarships, and promotions every day because their online record does not match their professional, day-to-day personas. If I was a teenager today, would I be that guy who couldn't grasp this concept? Would I have said horrifically bad things about my coach who spit in my face when he was yelling at me for not being in the right position? Would I have used multiple expletives to describe the police officer who gave me a ticket for speeding through a work zone where neither work nor traffic was present? Would I have posted those hilarious pictures from our Friday night party? Would I have taken a picture of that girl and posted it without her knowledge?

The scenarios are endless, and the points are real. Our children (and us) need to be cognizant of those unfiltered thoughts and pictures that reach so many people through our online presence. Today's audience will not be the same audience that reviews our posts in the future, and it takes only seconds to see if you're a hardcore partier, an angry antisocial loner, or a Debbie Downer.

Fortunately, if you live a good life and your positive qualities are reflected in your social media posts, you and your brand will be wanted by many!