



# ENGAGING VIRTUALLY

HOW TO INCREASE EXCITEMENT,  
PARTICIPATION, AND RESULTS FOR YOUR NEXT  
VIRTUAL MEETING OR VIRTUAL EVENT

GUIDE  
BY HOAN DO

# Dear Student Affairs Professional,

Many changes have and will continue to take place due to COVID-19, a major one being the shift to working remotely. Transitioning from in-person to virtual meetings and events may have its challenges, but this is the new normal that we are faced with. Some SA Pros have described this rapid change like someone pushing you out of an airplane as you try to create a parachute while free-falling. Creating something on the fly can be intimidating and frustrating but is an opportunity to embrace change and focus on what you can control versus what you can't.

Whether or not your school has decided how it will safely reopen for the next academic year, virtual engagement remains an important factor. Below are some examples that highlight its significance:

- [Zoom's daily users ballooned to more than 200 million in March](#) from a previous maximum total of 10 million reported by Reuters.
- According to a [Harvard Business Review study](#), two-thirds of remote employees consider themselves to be disengaged.
- The Chronicles of Higher Education has been tracking colleges and universities plans for the upcoming school year. Of the 1000 reported, [35% are still undecided, shifting to all online, or a hybrid](#).

Over the last few months I was overwhelmed and thought, "I don't know how to do what I normally do, virtually?!" Realizing that I was not alone in this, I decided to focus on progress over perfection. Since that time I've made plenty of mistakes and learned some valuable lessons on how to have more engaging virtual meetings and virtual events.

As we continue to navigate through uncharted territory, my hope is that the practical information in this guide can support you in increasing excitement, participation, and results in your virtual meetings and virtual events so that you can better serve those on your campus.

Your Friend,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H. D.' with a stylized flourish.

# A GUIDE TO ENGAGING VIRTUALLY

If your goal is to increase participation and engagement in your virtual meetings and events, to incorporate fun interactive tools to keep attendees focused and involved, then keep reading!

Connecting virtually has its fair share of challenges, including issues with technology, people talking over one another, and people becoming distracted and disengaged. Inspired by John Chen, the CEO of Geoteaming, we created The ENGAGE Model™ which describes six ways to increase engagement in virtual meetings and programs.

## THE ENGAGE MODEL™

- **E**nsure that everyone feels connected
- **N**ever begin a meeting or event without establishing rules
- **G**et prepared by practicing before your meeting or event
- **A**lways enlist support
- **G**et familiar with your Virtual Tools and utilize them
- **E**nd with a call to action

### **E**nsure that everyone feels connected

Being together on a virtual platform makes it much more challenging for people to feel connected, and just because we are all remote does not mean we cannot have similar connections as we did in person. Interacting with each person and engaging everyone as a group can still happen in a virtual setting.

Ok, you might be thinking, “sounds easier said than done, right?”

Acknowledging and engaging with every person brings everyone together and creates a connection that is often missing in virtual platforms. When we begin our online programs we like to incorporate a fun icebreaker to introduce everyone to each other; this immediately gets every person to participate and interact with one another from the very beginning. Also, I like to start a meeting off on a positive note by asking everyone to state something they are grateful for. This gets people in a positive mind frame going into a meeting. This also sets the stage for a meeting or event to be more interactive and less like a lecture or one-sided presentation, and attendees will feel more open to participating, which leads to greater connection.

### **N**ever begin a meeting without establishing rules

Have you ever been on a flight that arrived early to your destination but it took forever to get parked at a gate and off of the plane in a timely manner? Maybe you had to wait what felt like hours to move an inch. It takes many people involved for a smooth and timely landing and de-boarding, and this cannot happen without clear communication and a team of people.

For your virtual meeting or event you are essentially the air traffic controller. It is important to establish and navigate how the communication will flow.

A very important factor in having an effective and successful virtual meeting or event is establishing rules for communication at the very beginning. The goal is to make sure everyone is on the same page in knowing what the rules are so that your meeting can run smoothly and seamlessly. Have attendees raise their hand or use the “raise hand” feature if they want to speak or have a question. Use the chat box to type questions or comments. Give a thumbs up or use the “thumbs up” feature to have attendees communicate when they are finished with a certain activity. Knowing the expectations for how everyone will communicate leaves little room for error and interruptions and starts your meeting off with good communication skills!

## **G**et prepared by practicing before your meeting or event

Pictures speak a thousand words and your background tells a story. What do you want your background to say about you? Everything in your picture tells or represents who you are and this is front and center during a virtual meeting or event. What pictures are on your wall or desk? What books or awards are visible? How cluttered is your space? Where are you positioned in your screen view? What is the backdrop? Other things to pay attention to are the lighting, the image on the screen, and to make sure your audio is working and that you sound nice and clear.

Practice! Once your background is set up the way you want it, it can be incredibly helpful to do practice-run with your supporting team members before hosting a meeting or event. Working out all the kinks and making necessary adjustments will make for a much more successful meeting or program.

## **A**lways enlist support

There are so many components to having an engaging meeting or event that to do it all by yourself can be overwhelming. When a host or speaker has to handle problems with sound or video, or has to keep looking down to read comments in the chat box, it can be very distracting for everyone and people can quickly lose interest. When we partner with a college for a virtual student program or virtual professional development we delegate tasks to different team members. One person focuses on speaking with attendees while another team member focuses on the chat box and answers questions. A third team member can be on point to address any technical difficulties with sound, audio, or lighting. When roles are established among supporting team members and communication is clear, engagement is higher and the meeting or event more successful.

## **G**et familiar with your virtual tools and utilize them

There are many great features different platforms offer that allow attendees to participate and engage with each other to make the meeting more interactive. Become familiar with all the features of the platform you are using, for instance, the chat box, interactive polls, the raise your hand button, the thumbs up button, and breakout rooms. All of these tools are there to help increase participation, engagement, and communication, and can be integrated into all of your team meetings and virtual programs.

## **E**nd with a call to action

If you want people to be excited about your virtual meetings and events and leave on a high note, there are several ways to incorporate a call to action. Towards the end of our online programs I invite all participants to do a gesture, such as everyone making hearts with their hands and holding them up, or to share something valuable they learned during our time together. You can also end a meeting by asking everyone to fill out a brief survey to let you know how they felt about the meeting or event. Ending with a call to action is a great way to wrap up with something that brings the group together as a community.

# INCREASING EXCITEMENT, PARTICIPATION, & RESULTS

## EXCITEMENT

One thing about excitement--it sure isn't boring! Vocabulary.com defines excitement as a feeling or situation full of activity, joy, exhilaration, or upheaval. Unfortunately many people have experienced a boring virtual meeting, conference, or event at some point. The great news is that yours does not have to be this way.

There are two ways you can create excitement online:

### **1) *Creating Variety***

Starting your meeting with a different ice breaker or fun activity each time is a great way to add a little excitement. People are more engaged and look forward to meetings and events if they know there is something to look forward to. Being creative and adding a variety of activities throughout your meeting keeps people excited and focused.

If you are hosting a meeting where the attendees are meeting for the first time, one exercise you can do is what we call Rename Introduction. Have each participant click on their name in Zoom and choose "rename." Ask them to type in their first name, what organization or town they are calling from, and one word to describe how they felt when they woke up that morning. This not only gets everyone to engage and share but gives you an idea of where everyone is at, physically and emotionally. To see the Rename Introduction in action go to [www.HoanDo.com/virtual-programs](http://www.HoanDo.com/virtual-programs)

Another great, proven way that we've seen create excitement, retain engagement, and address the concern of people losing focus and logging off, is giving out gift cards as prizes. At the beginning of an online event, that included a client presenting a one-hour slideshow with a break, I shared that there would be opportunities to win prizes based on how engaged people were throughout the event. Before and after the break I shared that we would be giving out 10 Starbucks gift cards and that the 10 selected winners would receive the gift card via email.

The result? We had a 90% retainment of attendees by utilizing this strategy! Now, I realize that every institution has different rules regarding budget and whether or not they can provide gift cards. If you don't have the budget to include the gift cards, a great way to work around this is to ask whatever artist, entertainer, or presenter you have if they would be willing to donate the cards. Another way is to increase your contracted price based on how many gift cards you want to provide.

### **2) *Involve everyone***

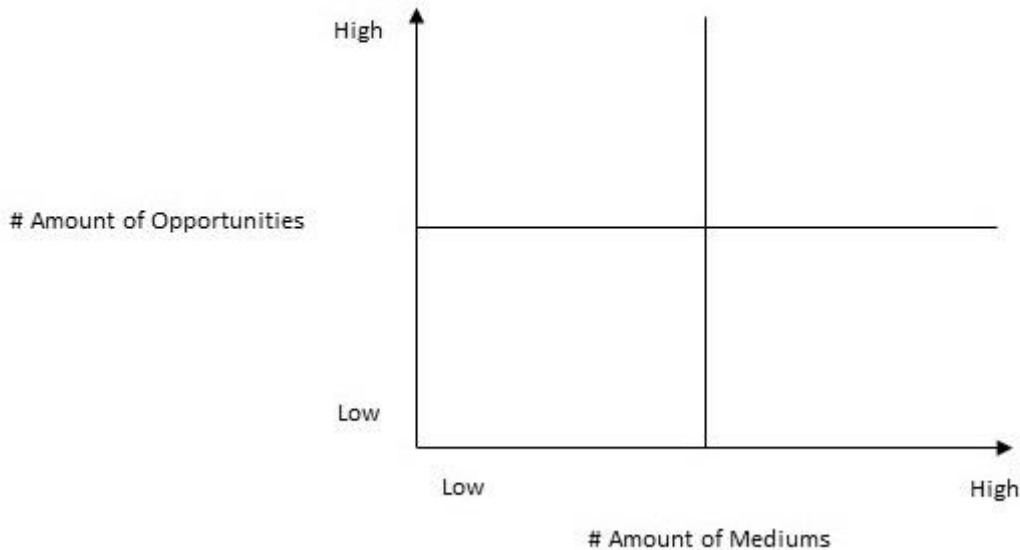
Create opportunities for others to get involved. People like being part of and contributing to something, to feel connected. One way to get everyone involved is to ask a question and have everyone type their answers into the chat box. You can also incorporate gestures and live shares (I describe this later). During one of our events we had everyone write something on a piece of paper and hold it up for all to see, this was a great way to include a physical activity and have everyone share. As the host you can thank every person after they share so everyone feels acknowledged.

# PARTICIPATION

With an increased number of people in the country working remotely, I'm sure you have experienced your fair share of uneventful, boring, or dry virtual experiences where the meeting host or presenter spoke the whole time with little, if any, participation from the attendees.

To increase participation in your virtual meetings and events it is important to understand what we call The Participation Matrix™.

## The Participation Matrix™



## # Amount of Opportunities

The more opportunities you provide for people to participate, the more likely they are to get involved. During our virtual programs I let attendees know that this is less of a lecture or virtual presentation but more of a conversation that involves everyone. Throughout the program I not only provide ways in which people can participate, but continuously provide opportunities for them to do so. I make sure to ask for team members' opinions and feedback so that they are actively involved and engaged throughout our time together.

## # Amount of Mediums

In addition to giving people many opportunities to participate, it is also equally important to provide different mediums to do so, recognizing there are many different ways people like to engage. While one person might prefer to relay their thoughts via chat rather than speaking out loud, another might prefer to speak and not write. You can also give options for how people give feedback i.e., using the applause or thumbs up features. Utilizing various tools to cater to different personalities, engagement styles, and preferences is important for everyone to feel that they can comfortably participate.



# Maximize Participation

To reach the highest level of participation involves giving people opportunities to participate throughout your virtual meeting or virtual event as well as giving them different ways to participate.

## FIVE TOOLS FOR INCREASING PARTICIPATION

As we mentioned earlier on, there are many great features to take advantage of in virtual platforms that will help you to increase participation and engagement.

### 1) *The Chat Box*

Utilizing the chat box feature, whether you are using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or other platforms, is one of the best tools you can use to increase participation and communication, and to keep everyone focused and engaged. You can also use the chat box to ask questions, share ideas, relay contact information, and share helpful links to resources. This is all too often an underutilized tool and yet very accessible and easy to incorporate throughout your meeting or event.

Every spring the Washington Healthcare Authority hosts an annual in-person Spring Youth Forum to celebrate the accomplishments of over 150 youth and adults, who, through local projects, have had a positive impact on the health and wellness of youth, families, and communities in Washington State.

When COVID-19 hit, I was hired to help turn their in-person event into a virtual one. Serving as the emcee and keynote speaker, I was tasked with hosting a 3-hour long online event to acknowledge their mission and provide an inspiring message while keeping attendees engaged.

The chat box was one of the most powerful tools I used to engage the attendees as they were watching and listening in. At the start I shared that even though this event was different than connecting in person, it did not mean that we could not create a similar connection with one another virtually. I informed them that throughout the event I would be asking questions that they could provide answers to by typing in the chat box. This was one way to allow for a more interactive and engaging event.

Below are some examples of different ways you can incorporate using the chat box feature:

- Go ahead and share in the chat box where you are logging in from right now
- If you can relate to what I am saying, go ahead and type “yes” in the chat box
- I would love to hear your thoughts regarding (fill in the blank) go ahead and let me know what you think in the chat box

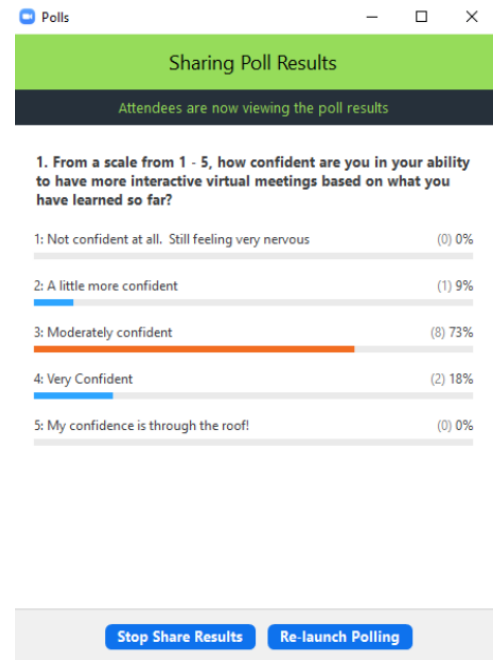
## 2) Interactive Polls

Polls are a fantastic way to gather information from and engage the whole group. It is also a great way for people to share their experiences, perceptions, views, and opinions and to contribute to meetings. You can launch polls at any point during the meeting, and by sharing the results with everyone and it can help share valuable information and create productive dialogue.

Here is an example of a poll we recently conducted, asking how confident each attendee felt in their confidence level leading a virtual meeting.

This poll allowed us to engage everyone, reflect on and discuss what was helpful in our program, and gave us a general idea of where everyone was at. It also allowed attendees to see where their colleagues were at in regards to confidence levels in running virtual meetings.

Following the poll we asked attendees to write in the chat box one thing they wanted to take away from our time together to make it worthwhile. Both of these activities allowed everyone a chance to participate, receive acknowledgement, be an active team member, and create a successful and engaging meeting together.



## 3) Gestures

Gestures are a fun way to unite a team or group, and get everyone to participate, and they almost always make people smile. An example of this is asking people to give a thumbs up when they are done with an activity, or having everyone wave both of their hands when they are excited about something. In one of our [virtual programs on diversity and inclusion](#) we share an exercise on empathy. Towards the end, we had everyone create a heart with their hands to show a sign of unity. Here is an example:

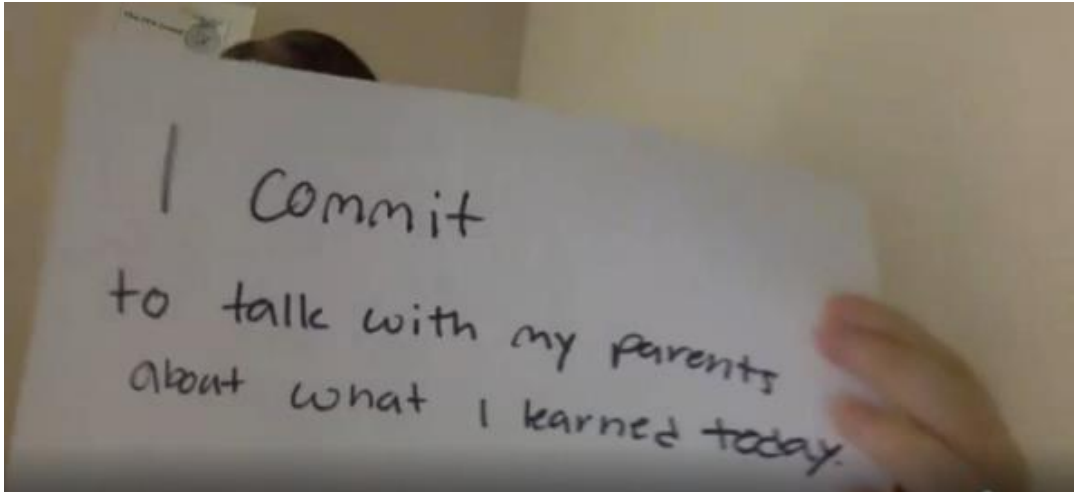




#### **4) Live Shares**

This is another fantastic tool for kickstarting a meeting or event and setting the tone right away. Live shares give us a way to recreate some of the in-person connections we have in meetings and events in a virtual environment. It also gives people a chance to share and keeps everyone engaged, involved, and gives attendees an opportunity to be part of the discussion not just watch a video.

In one of our recent programs I asked everyone to take turns introducing themselves and share what they were grateful for. This gave everyone a chance to speak and have their voice heard and also set the tone for the program. At the end I asked them to each take a moment and write down on a piece of paper what they were willing to commit to when the program was finished. Everyone gave a thumbs up when they were done, so I knew when to proceed. Then one by one each person held up their piece of paper for everyone to see as they read aloud what they wrote. Here is an example of what that looks like:



Exercises like these engage people on multiple levels, a physical exercise to do, a visual to share, and speaking to the group. This can increase focus and participation and attendees can feel like they are part of something interactive versus a passive presentation or lecture.

#### **5) Breakout Rooms**

This is a great feature to help to create more opportunities for live shares when you have a lot of attendees. This also gives other colleagues or student leaders the chance to step into leadership roles during your virtual meeting or virtual event. When utilizing this feature make sure you communicate your goals and objectives with the breakout room host. Their primary role is to ask questions and make sure that everyone has an opportunity to speak.

To increase engagement, after everyone shares during the breakout room, elect a representative from your group to share the main ideas which was discussed to the larger group.

# RESULTS

## **Communicate your Goals**

ClearCompany, a talent management platform, shares that only 5.9% of companies communicate their goals daily. A key component to a successful meeting, event, program, or team, is to consistently communicate what your goals are. It is important for everyone to be on the same page and understand what it is you are striving for as a team and what the end result is, so that you can work together to achieve the goal. At the beginning of my programs I share what my goals and objectives are in our time together so that everyone has a clear picture of what to expect moving forward. In meetings with my team we regularly review and communicate our goals in order to ensure we are all on the same page and everyone knows what their roles are and what needs to happen to reach our end results.

## ***Assessment***

Know what it is you are measuring and how. Getting clear on the methods and strategies for what information you need, how you will gather it, and what you will do with it is imperative to being able to know if you are on track towards reaching your goals.

An easy way to measure outcome is to create a survey on SurveyMonkey and share the link in the chat box so people can fill out the survey right away. Keeping it short and simple with 2-4 questions will increase the likelihood that everyone will fill it out. You can also incorporate polls throughout a meeting or event to check in on where people are at and make sure everyone is still on the same page, address any questions, and keep everyone on track. This gives you valuable feedback and data to determine the effectiveness of your program, and will also give you insight on how often your team may need to review goals.

## ***Call to Action***

You want people to leave a virtual meeting or event inspired and motivated, but you don't want them to lose that motivation once the event is over. End a meeting by giving people a call to action, something they can do either immediately or soon after the meeting or event.

At the end of our programs I ask everyone to take turns, state their name, and say one thing they learned from or will take away from the event. This keeps people engaged and reflecting on the value of the meeting or event. Adding a survey at the end is also another way to engage people. Another example is, if you are hosting an upcoming virtual event or meeting, or there are other events to attend, put the links to register in the chat box for people to sign up right away.

Asking for action before leaving a meeting is a great way to keep people motivated and involved after a meeting is over.

# CONCLUSION

Having interactive, fun, and engaging meetings and events is not impossible. Virtual doesn't have to mean dry and boring meetings are not a given. With a few simple tools and strategies you can clarify your goals, encourage and increase participation, all while making your team meeting or event a great success!

The big takeaways to increase virtual engagement are:

**1) Know and communicate your goals up front in your virtual meetings and events**

- What are your goals
- How often do you review them
- What tools do you use to measure progress

**2) Don't lead a virtual meeting or event alone!**

Have your event or meeting be a team effort to ensure everything runs smoothly.

- One team member speaks
- One team member supports technical difficulties
- One team member monitors the chat box and mute button

**3) Utilize all the available features on your virtual platform to engage and excite attendees**

- Chat box
- Interactive Polls
- Live shares
- Gestures
- Break out rooms

**4) Incorporate fun, interactive, and creative exercises to keep attendees engaged, focused, and involved**

**5) Have methods to assess your progress and review goals and results**

**6) End your meetings and events with a positive message or live share and a call to action!**

By integrating these simple and easy-to-use strategies and tools, you can create an interactive, fun, and engaging meeting or event that involves everyone and is not just another experience where people are passively attending. People will walk away feeling inspired rather than drained. They will leave feeling like they were given an opportunity to participate, have their voices heard, and a sense of connection.



**It was a pleasure working with Hoan as we transitioned our Spring Youth Forum to a Virtual Conference. Serving as our emcee and keynote speaker, Hoan kept all 135 attendees engaged throughout our three-hour event. He exceeded my expectations and positive praises are still rolling in!**



— Antonio M. Edwards, MPA, CPP  
Prevention System Manager  
WA State Health Care Authority  
Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery

# ABOUT HOAN DO



**Hoan Do** is a student success coach, author of *Succeeding in the Real World*, and city finalist in NBC's hit show, [\*American Ninja Warrior\*](#).

## **From Humble Beginnings to a Bright Future**

From an early age, Hoan was conscious of the sacrifices his parents had made in their escape to the United States during the Vietnam War- in pursuit of the American Dream. Feeling indebted to his parents for their courageous pursuit of a better life, Hoan vowed to ensure that one day, he would be able to take care of his parents. Hoan's hard work took him to Malibu, California, where he attended Pepperdine University, fully engaging in the academic rigor and array of opportunities that the school offered.



## **Stressed Student to Successful Speaker**

With the tremendous pressure Hoan placed on himself, in addition to the stresses of demanding classes, extracurricular responsibilities, and important life decisions, Hoan found himself overwhelmed. His self-esteem reached an all-time low. He even contemplated suicide. Refusing to settle and give up on life, Hoan used this experience as a turning point to learn the practical skills that was necessary to succeed in school and in life.



After graduating from Pepperdine University, Hoan beat out candidates who were considerably older and vastly more experienced than him to work with the #1 personal development company in the world. As a national speaker and corporate trainer, Hoan conducted training sessions for distinguished audiences that included: 21, Bank of America, Honda, Toyota, UBS Financial, Chambers of Commerce, and the U.S. Army.

## **How Hoan Can Help You**

Recognized as the best youth mentor by the [International Examiner](#), Hoan travels the world speaking at companies, colleges, and conferences sharing practical strategies to develop resilience and mental strength.

Since COVID-19, Hoan has been facilitating engaging virtual programs and teaching clients how to increase excitement, participation, and results in their virtual meetings and online events.

**Learn more about Hoan** and how he can help you **by going to** [www.HoanDo.com](http://www.HoanDo.com)



# HIRE HOAN FOR A VIRTUAL OR LIVE PROGRAM FOR YOUR SCHOOL, EVENT, OR CONFERENCE

## Hoan's virtual and live programs are perfect for

- New Student Orientation & Welcome Week
- First Year Experience Programming
- Leadership Conferences
- Leadership & Team Building Retreats
- Speaker & Lecture Series
- Greek Panhellenic Events
- Staff Development & Professional Training
- RA Training
- Multicultural Events & Conferences
- Asian American Heritage Month (May)
- Life Skills Programs
- Convocations
- Graduations
- Stress Awareness Month (April)
- Assembly Programs
- GEAR UP and Trio event

Book Hoan for your next virtual or live event by going to [HoanDo.com/contact](https://HoanDo.com/contact)

## WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT HOAN

### *COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES*

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"It was amazing to see how much the students connected with what Hoan had to say. When he spoke, it didn't feel like a speech, it felt more like an experience. *The event was so successful that we exceeded seating capacity!*

*Melissa Uyesugi, Asst. Director for Student Engagement and Leadership, Edmonds Community College [Lynnwood, WA]*

*"Hoan went above and beyond what we asked for. After Hoan finished speaking, his time with us was technically up. Most speakers would have packed up and left. He stayed throughout the day to take pictures, sign books, and connect with every person that wanted to speak with him."*

*Goeffrey Grigg, Asst. Director of Multicultural Affairs, Baylor University [Waco, TX]*



***“Hoan’s message was perfect for the incoming first year class. His story resonates with all students. He was one of their favorite parts of the New Roo Weekend. We brought Hoan back because of the overwhelming positive response from our students.”***

*Fedearia Nicholson, Asst. Vice President for Students Success,  
The University of Akron [Akron, OH]*

## **ASSOCIATIONS & ORGANIZATIONS**

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***“Hoan was the keynote speaker at our annual TEACH Conference. When Hoan started speaking, he immediately captured the attention of all 400 of our teachers. The standing ovation Hoan received when he finished was a testament to how much our embers enjoyed his message.”***

*Rosa Soto Thomas, President, AFT St. Croix Federation of Teachers*

***“I had SEVERAL teachers come find me and tell me that Hoan was the best speaker we have had at HOSA. One told me that God sent him with a message that she needed to hear. She was on the verge of leaving teaching (she is a first year teacher and that is stressful). But the message that it was okay not to be okay hit home with her and she is renewed.***

*Dana Stringer, Health Science Education Specialist, Alabama HOSA*

***“Hoan facilitated a fun experience that **brought our diverse staff together**. I enjoyed watching our teachers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, and custodians collaborate together. **It was impressive to see Hoan weave in all of my goals from our conference call into all the activities we did.**”***

*Doug Johnson, Superintendent, Dayton School District*

## HIGH SCHOOLS & MIDDLE SCHOOLS

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***“Hoan’s message made our students’ think while also making them laugh.*** I appreciate Hoan’s professionalism, uplifting energy, and genuine desire to make a difference in our students’ lives.”

*Judy Martinez, Assistant Principal, Rocori High School (Rocori, MN)*

***“In my 18 years of teaching, this was the first time a motivational speaker requested a phone conference to learn more about my goals and our campus culture.*** Using the information from our call, Hoan personalized his message for our school.”

*Erica Robledo-Dickens, Director of Student Activities, Rancho San Justo Middle School (Hollister, CA)*

“The connection Hoan had with our students was universal. ***I was amazed by the differences in the kids lives that were impacted by his message.***”

*Wes Paul, Principal, Oliver Ames High School (North Easton, MA)*

