

About the author ...

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Sister Carol Cimino is a Sister of Saint Joseph of Rochester, New York. In June 2018, she retired as the Superintendent of Schools for the Diocese of Buffalo, New York, where she oversaw 50 elementary and high schools. Sister Carol has served in a variety of positions in Catholic education, as teacher, principal, development director, and consultant. A revered, national speaker and the author of several articles, pamphlets, and books, Sister Carol is proudest of the fact that she is still the only religious woman to have been a three-day champion on "Jeopardy!"

The "I" in Team

Invite
Intimate
Imitate
Implicate
Integrate
Instigate

TEAM

There it is!

The "I" in TEAM

All of us, at one time, have heard from a coach or a teacher, "There's no 'I' in 'team'!" It's a reminder that, as a member of a team, one focuses on the performance and the results of the work of the group, and not the individual. Yet some aspects of "I" are integral to highly engaged and effective staff.

The importance of building and maintaining a team should be of primary importance to school leaders. Both formal and informal surveys of teachers about their motivation for teaching, especially in Catholic schools, is their sense of belonging--being a part of a community or team.

Teachers and parents will often describe the school as "a family."

The isolation that teachers felt during the COVID lockdowns was debilitating for many, and it has become even more vital that teamwork, and the sense of community, be prioritized.

So, how do school leaders create and maintain a team? Here are some "Is" that leaders might wish to consider.

INVITE

Members of a team are aware of the mission of the organization and their obligation to further that mission. Each member of the Catholic school team, not just the leader, is responsible for the furtherance of the mission of the school: preservation and dissemination of the mission of the Catholic Church.

Of course, the model for the Catholic school administrator is Jesus himself, who did not consider that he would complete his mission himself, but put together a team of varied individuals, and then worked very closely with them to invite them to mission and to clarify that mission daily.

School leaders would be wise to initiate new teachers into the mission of the Catholic school, and to continue to orient veteran teachers in a focus on mission.

When teachers understand and commit to the school's mission, many other things fall into place: how they relate to students and their parents, how they comport themselves, and how they fit into the school community itself.

INTIMATE

As teachers begin or continue their awareness of their place in the school community, their loyalty to the school grows. Like a family that keeps “family business” within the group, team-oriented teachers likewise transmit positive aspects of the school.

That is not to say that challenging aspects of the school are swept under the rug, but that teachers’ public assessment of the school emphasizes the commendable things that students and others do, while being committed to make the school as good as it can be. Since teachers are considered by parents and others to be authorities on what happens during the school day, the school leader should strive to support teachers publicly as much as possible.

Likewise, real school teams understand it when a member is unable to fill a role or complete a task due to varied circumstances. They rush to fill the vacuum left, so that service to students and parents is seamless. They become, like skilled acrobats, able to make the hardest tricks look easy.

IMITATE

The school leader is aware of the fact that his/her actions are scrutinized constantly. Many Catholic school administrators report that their every move is public, and subject to assessment.

But real teams look to the leader as a model they should imitate. When teachers praise their principal, often it is in terms of “she would never ask us to do anything she wouldn’t do herself.”



In times of stress or crisis, the leader is tried. Certainly, the sudden shutdown of schools in the spring of 2020 had no precedent, no blueprint for leaders to read and follow.

Catholic school leaders contacted their teams immediately, and began planning with them how to continue teaching students, and, especially, how to preserve the school community for the sake of students. Those leaders who worked with their teams brought out the best in teachers.

Innovative means of maintaining relationships with students, preserving school traditions and rites of passage, and, most importantly, teachers’ sense of mission, meant that the school community survived and thrived during that difficult time.



Catholic School Management Services

Assessment	Advancement	Planning	Leadership
LIA – Limited Institutional Assessment	Fundraising Development	Strategic Plans	Board Development
Audits	Alumni	Goal Setting	Governance
Evaluation	Communications	Mission, Vision, Values	Staff Coaching
Administrative Structure	Planned Giving	Programs	Training
Staffing	Marketing	Departments	Search
Programs	Enrollment	New Initiatives	Facilitation
Departments	Student Recruitment	Partnerships	Workshops
Satisfaction	Campaigns		Seminar Series
	Feasibility Studies		Conference Presentations

IMPLICATE

Father Patrick Peyton, founder of the Family Rosary Crusade, which went public in 1945, is credited with the phrase: “the family that prays together, stays together.” That idea is true among school communities as well.

While Catholic schools provide students with liturgy, sacraments, and daily prayer, the Catholic school leader should consider how important it is that their teachers have healthy, active prayer lives. Regular teachers’ retreats, or days of recollection, offer faculty in Catholic schools what no other kind of school can.

Leaders who scoff at the use of time for prayer miss the power of communal prayer as the “glue” that keeps communities together. Catholic and non-Catholic teachers alike benefit from time for reflection, introspection, and supportive group prayer.

Educators’ lives are so hectic, that a pause from the quotidian tasks and pressure is a real blessing to the faculty and staff.

While material gifts are a challenge to a bare-bones Catholic school budget, time off for development of a spiritual life is priceless.

Implication also means pointing out, frequently, that the school is a microcosm of the larger Church. It is not a separate entity, a *sui generis* body that exists for itself; it is a part of something much larger. An effective leader constantly draws a line that connects the school with the Universal Church.

INTEGRATE

Just as communal prayer has an adhesive effect, so, too, does fun. Real teams know how to enjoy a good time, and Catholic school leaders should be mindful of the “all work and no play” adage.

Birthday celebrations, Christmas parties, and family picnics all invite people who are already comfortable with one another to relax and enjoy the company. Teams and communities understand that the bond that holds them together is the friendships and relationships that they make in the workplace of the school.

The happy memories of celebrations past help the team to integrate the hard work that they are expected to do, with the pleasures of relaxing with each other. The shared joke, or funny story, helps to cement the team with a shared experience that solidifies their relationship with each other, so that a word or a gesture reminds them of how they have shared their gift of laughter.

INSTIGATE

Time and time again, it has been shown that a cohesive team is able to overcome huge obstacles, get through difficult times, and achieve greatness. The wise leader instigates those steps toward the formation of an effective team. Little by little, the successful leader devises ways for the people with whom she/he works to see their co-workers as collaborators.

Teams are made, and not born.

They are purposely created and nurtured by visionary leaders, who know they cannot bear the mantle of leadership alone. This is true for organizations large and small and, most notably, our Catholic schools.



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