



INSTITUTE OF SCHOOL & PARISH DEVELOPMENT

Bringing People, Process, and Ministry Together to Build the

Kingdom of God.

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Development Directions

Effective Communication Skills in Our Catholic Schools and Parishes

by

Frank Donaldson, President

One of the schools that ISPD has had the wonderful opportunity to work with over the past 5-10 years is Archbishop Alter High School in Dayton, Ohio. Led by Father Jim Manning, Alter is a school that has undergone many tough changes since Father Jim took over as president, but today the school stands strong in all areas of quality Catholic education. Tough decisions had to be made; teams needed to be formed; boards needed to understand the value of collaboration; the Advancement Office needed to gear up for a major Capital Campaign; and a new president-principal structure needed to be integrated throughout the school. In 2011 – 2012, Alter High School is led by a President's Leadership Team (President, Principal, Business Manager, Advancement Director, and Plant Manager) that "gets it." They are a pleasure to work with.

Recently, at one of their Leadership Team meetings, Marty Grunder, an alumnus and a present parent, presented a session on effective communication. Marty is President of Marty Grunder! Inc. in Miamisburg, OH (www.MartyGrunder.com). He is a leading business consultant and motivational speaker.

In many Catholic schools and parishes, communication is always a challenge. How many times have we heard the statement, "The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing." Or, a question that we also hear: "When did they decide to do that?" With all of the many groups, boards, ministries, councils, organizations, teams, activities, and different "publics" that make up our Catholic institutions, it is a major job to keep up with the day to day communication.

While mass communication of e-mails, direct mail, web sites, newsletters, flyers, parish bulletins, and other methods are important, Marty's presentation to Archbishop Alter's Leadership Team focused more on personal, one-on-one communication. This is where we, as Catholic leaders, need guidance. In fact, in our December 2011 newsletter we are going to devote the entire publication addressing the importance of personal relationship building, and how many, many Catholic institutions shy away from building those one-on-one relationships. We keep going back to the same old people who have done things for us over and over again. ISPD has said it hundreds of times, and we have been quickly dismissed by some; however we still believe that if our Catholic schools and parishes are going to move forward then one statement bears notice and recognition. *The ability of a Catholic school and parish to put processes in place that will allow those leaders to meet with the families who make up their Faith Community at least once per year – face-to-face/one-on-one/eyeball-to-eyeball – will mean the difference between that Catholic institution prevailing or simply surviving over the next 10-15 years.* We cannot state it any clearer, and we will spend the December newsletter exploring rationale and methodology.

So, Marty Grunder's comments on Effective Communication – especially person-to-person -- could not have been more timely. Here is one of his major themes: Communication takes place when information is exchanged between individuals. *Effective communication takes place when information is exchanged between individuals and the expected outcome is achieved and both parties are satisfied.*

As we look at the ability that Catholic leaders have to improve communication, here are ten tips that are applicable to building individual relationships and also team relationships.

- ***Do not assume anything.***
 - I remember the Senior Ring ceremony when, as an administrator, I assumed the senior teachers knew we wanted alphabetical line up but they had put 110 seniors in order by height!
- ***Turn down the volume (and hit the delay button if you have to).***
 - “Right way, wrong way, my way or the highway” just does not go far in building relationships.
- ***Be specific.***
 - The devil is always in the details. It is great to tell that Advancement Director that the Board wants \$100,000 more

in the Annual Fund for 2012-2013, but how is that going to happen? Specific direction is needed.

- ***Make eye contact.***
 - “Take an interest in others, and they will take an interest in you.”
- ***Do not interrupt.***
 - Why is your idea more important than mine?
- ***Listen, listen, listen.***
 - Do you ever meet people and they simply do not have the ability to allow you to tell your story? Within minutes (sometimes seconds) any story you tell is quickly diverted to their experience.
- ***Be blunt and to the point, but . . .***
 - Sometimes “sugar coating” does not work. Straightforward, no holds barred, with meaning and understanding, plus respect will go a long way.
- ***Recap all conversations.***
 - My first year of teaching, my mentor used to say: “Frank, in any conversation or teaching lesson, tell them what you are going to teach them, then teach them, then tell them what you taught them.” Same principle.
- ***Focus on a “No Surprises” mentality.***
 - Outstanding advice!!! Don’t we all hate to dodge those bullets or do the “dance” around the mess up?
- ***Be personal.***
 - Build the relationship(s).

Thank you, Marty Grunder. Excellent tips. We look forward to writing next month on such an important topic: *The Building of One-on-One Relationships with Our Parents and Parishioners.*