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Relationships and Congeniality – It’s Just Not Good Enough

Much has been written in recent years on the enormous strides made by CPCO in engendering a spirit of congeniality amongst our many partners. In my past-president’s address at the 2009 CPCO gala dinner, I took the opportunity to reflect upon the fact that this development, while an important step in our association’s evolution, simply is not good enough anymore. Noted educator and author, Thomas Sergiovanni, points out that congeniality only works where there exists a common set of values and beliefs. Without common values and beliefs, congeniality can lead to friendly relationships but without common focus and purpose. Congeniality alone misses the point.

Sergiovanni and others point to the need for collegiality if there is to be a shared purpose and commitment. Collegiality is born through collaboration, cooperation and mutual respect. Collegiality is essential if Catholic principals and vice-principals are to overcome the seemingly needless power struggles in which we often find ourselves, and enter into an era of multi-level partnerships and shared decision-making.

CPCO has been very fortunate to have experienced first hand the rewards that come with moving a partnership beyond congeniality to one of true collegiality. The work of the Benefits Advisory Committee on behalf of those members covered by the CPCO sponsored LTD plan with Johnson Inc. has worked for many years under an umbrella of mutual care, respect and empathy. Similarly, our new Legal Benefits Review Team works with representatives of STERLON and Curtis Insurance Ltd. to provide optimal service to our members. When conflicts do arise, we trust that the voice of Catholic principals and vice-principals will not fall on deaf ears. Our members report an incredible satisfaction rate with these services largely due to the relationships that we have carefully nurtured.

On the education front, mutual needs and respect have combined to foster an ever growing collegial relationship with our principal and vice-principal colleagues at the Ontario Principals’ Council (OPC) and l’Association des directions et directions adjointes des écoles franco-ontariennes (ADFO). While we are each careful to celebrate our differences, we have worked hand-in-hand on such important issues as principal/vice-principal performance appraisal, terms and conditions, and professional learning to the benefit of all principals and vice-principals in Ontario. CPCO, OPC and ADFO are also part of the Institute for Education Leadership, an excellent example of tri-level leadership where principals, directors and superintendents, and Ministry representatives work to promote leadership at every level of education.

Collegiality does not mean that there is always going to be tacit agreement, but authentic dialogue and cooperation leads to a common focus. The tri-level consultations that led to the recently released *Terms and Conditions Guidelines* proved to be not only purposeful but a great listening exercise for all parties present. The document that resulted, while not perfect, is more than we ever could have imagined a few short years ago.

To the point of my original comments, however, there is much work left to be done on building relationships. I believe that it is in the best interest of Catholic principals and vice-principals to maintain an open mind and an open hand in seeking to move from congeniality to collegiality with all of our partners. With that in mind:

- CPCO welcomes the opportunity to work with government officials to remove any barricades that currently impede the successful implementation of the *Ontario Leadership Strategy*. We are well aware of the potential impact of declining enrolment and the many other challenges to leadership succession.
- CPCO shares the concerns of all education leaders as to the future of education funding. We have witnessed the negative impact on student learning, school safety and leadership succession when dollars meant for school leaders are redirected elsewhere. We are willing to work at both the provincial and local level to assist in bringing about the necessary changes to ensure that our Catholic schools remain great places to learn.
- CPCO is prepared to work with senior administration, trustees and union leaders to review board policies and procedures covering staffing, transfers, health and safety, and workplace harassment to name a few. The amount of dollars being diverted from student learning into legal fees is all too often unwarranted.
- CPCO is prepared both locally and provincially to actively consult in the next round of collective bargaining with union groups. We will bring to that table first-hand experience on the impact of contract clauses on all aspects of school life including student achievement.
- Most importantly, CPCO awaits the invitation from our Catholic partners to work in a spirit of collegiality with one voice to actively promote and protect Catholic education. Let us not forget the lessons learned in Newfoundland and elsewhere.

To be congenial but do nothing is just not good enough anymore.