

Our Sunday Visitor's

The Priest

MAGAZINE



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6 Leadership Habits for Priests

Confidence and conviction are keys to inspiring others

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Now, maybe more than ever, we need priests who demonstrate leadership through confidence, competence and compassion, and who are role models for one another and their parishioners.

We are living through turbulent times, in which we as a society seem divided on so many fronts. What are we teaching the next generation? Do we have the ability to unite our flocks in order to build up the kingdom of God?

We all need to be cognizant of what constitutes an effective leader and try to incorporate these habits into our daily lives.

No. 1: Be Organized

The first task of priests and parish leaders is to ensure their work is organized to accomplish daily, monthly, quarterly and yearly goals. It is essential to have well-thought-out and organized plans that are effectively communicated and flexible to meet changing parishioner and diocesan needs. Being unorganized is a flaw that a priest cannot have, because it is a sign to parishioners that expectations are not clear. There is no way for parishioners to know what is being asked of them if you are unorganized and not ready to achieve goals each and every day. Priests and parish leaders need to demonstrate organizational skills and behaviors that have the potential of achieving success.

Action: *Create a monthly plan with specific measurements so you and parishioners understand what is expected and can measure each month's accomplishments.*

No. 2: Have a Team Approach

When playing in an orchestra, on a football team or soccer team, being in a Broadway musical, an ecumenical team or a leadership team, one quickly learns to rely on self and others. We give a great deal of lip service to working as a team; however, many dioceses and parishes lack the continued and consistent measuring of team performance (we are in this together).

A priest and parish leadership should be focused on what is in the best interest of the parish and the diocese, but what we generally see are silos based on functional or geographical affiliations. We see this in many parishes and Catholic schools that are in a process of consolidation. This consolidation is confusing for many. Priests were trained in religious studies to lead a flock, and they might not be equipped with the skills to tackle certain duties, such as a major consolidation.

Action: *Prayer, meditation and the realization that you are not going through this alone is your new approach. Consolidation and change is not personal; it is business! Leaders need to be flexible and able to transition to new challenges, leaving the old and moving to the new. Why should parishioners follow priests the way the disciples followed Christ? Understand that when Christ was building his Church, it was new and had no structure until he died. Priests are role models of faith and need to exhibit that faith daily for others to follow. Their job is to keep casting the net in all directions to find disciples for Christ and build a team. Too often leaders believe decisions and the burden that comes with decisions is a solitary process with the onus only on them. Jesus built the Church by bringing others in, by casting a wide net. Priests should do the same.*

No. 3: Have the Will to Succeed

Having the will to succeed is a correlation between confidence and inner strength. The combination of confidence, inner strength and conviction — “I know this is the right action” — drives priests to

have the will to succeed. Priestly leadership inherently has an ebb and flow of success and failure. Why? Because the excellent priests try to do more, risk more often and drive to achieve the unachievable. A priest must have the inner conviction to drive toward success for the sake of the parishioners. Stand for what you believe with strength and inner confidence. Christ overcame a great deal of adversity, but he never lost sight of the vision despite going through great personal agony.

Action: Stay focused on Christ's promise, not the particular problem in front of you.

No. 4: Keep Moving toward the Goal

It's incumbent on the priest and parish leaders to ensure that their personal energy continually is put toward goal accomplishment. Priests can advance a parish through personal energy, clarity of the goals, expectations, recognition of achievement and measurement as to what was achieved. The priest must be the person who demonstrates continual momentum toward achieving goals and strategic objectives. One of the worst things a priest can do is to write a plan and take no action toward achieving that plan.

Action: The priest needs to clearly outline professional and personal goals for himself and develop a parish plan. It would be refreshing to see church leaders establish personal learning goals for themselves and parishioners and openly communicate them. If the ultimate goal is heaven, then stop and ask, "What have you done this month to advance parishioners to achieve that goal?" Why get frustrated if the promise is a focus on everlasting life? Listen to your inner truth and not the noise of the false prophets who write programs without understanding the human condition.



No. 5: Develop Personal Resilience

Resilience is the ability to physically and mentally recover quickly from setbacks. Priests need to be role models for the ability to overcome obstacles and keep moving toward success. Please understand that there is political power within each and every diocese. Great leaders may fail because they take more risks, but they continue to fight the challenges to win. Do you have the inner strength to keep moving forward? There is a lot of wisdom in the understanding that great leaders are going to have adversity and setbacks that will push them to their limits. Because of continual change, parishioner and diocesan demands, and parish realignment, priests must realize that there will be setbacks. Remember that a setback can be a setup for the better; it is all in how you interpret it. There are things in and out of a priest's control, but momentum needs to be focused on moving forward. Accept the quiet confidence within oneself to overcome the many obstacles that face priests in today's religious life.

Action: *Being a leader entails being able to have the resilience to overcome obstacles and setbacks, and resolve emotional difficulties along the way. Can you imagine the resilience of Christ, as he continually had to explain himself, guide his disciples and go through humiliation and torture? Create a journal and write your thoughts as to the situation, your emotions and the best possible outcome for you. Writing your thoughts and being objective with them will help you to be resilient.*

No. 6: Understand the Complexity of Technology

There are many factors that lead to the complexity of leadership, including continual change and demanding requests from parishioners and church leaders. In conjunction with those, we have had to add policies and procedures to govern technology and all that it brings to parish life.

Twenty years ago, priests did not worry about having school and parish consolidations and a social-media policy. The digital age has changed the entire scope of what goes on — and the speed at which that goes on — within the parish. I've seen kids at Mass texting one another from a few pews away. Welcome to the new digital world of communication. Priests need a plan to deal with these new realities.

Action: *Nearly every parish uses a wealth of technology these days. Most announce at the beginning of Mass for attendees to turn off their cellphones; yet people sit in church and text. Christ was a leader; he had followers and clear vision and mission statements that he left for us to follow. The technology of his day was word of mouth. Learn technology and have people who can teach you to stay current in the latest aspects of the digital world. It is an important tool in the New Evangelization.*

Leadership Is Relational

Priests need to be organized and present themselves in an organized way. They need to build a parish team, work effectively with that team, have the quiet conviction to succeed and keep moving toward goals. Being able to develop resilience within oneself to overcome obstacles while meeting the challenges of risks that are present in the parishes is an essential leadership quality. Motivating parishioners who want to struggle together to overcome difficulties through the tough times is a present-day challenge. Finally, we all need to understand the complexity of leadership.

Priestly leaders cannot just dictate. It is not about overpowering parishioners, but about the humanistic relationship between priest and parishioners that is needed.

Humanistic leadership may very well be the new direction of Church life to engage parishioners.

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