

Church Staff Health Group— Sharing ways to build a harmonious church staff, Part 2:

As I reflect over almost forty years of serving on church and associational staffs, I remember an illustration I heard an itinerant pastor tell my first year in full-time ministry. He said, “There are two ways to stroke a cat. You can stroke the cat from its head to its tail, and it will purr. Or you can stroke the cat from its tail to its head, and its hair will stand on edge.”

My best staff experiences occurred where there was positive affirmation. The worst experiences occurred where there was a lack of genuine affirmation. It is common (and easy) to say to a colleague, “You did a good job but....” Praise, and when needed, criticize performance. But go beyond, and seek to affirm one another’s personhood.

To affirm one another’s personhood takes a lot of time and effort. To do so, you have to make the effort to know, understand and identify with one another. You have to affirm one another’s gifts (and weaknesses) for ministry. You have to accept and be accepted.

My experience is it takes many different approaches and events for all of this to happen, and when you get a new colleague, you have to begin again. Our staff uses anniversaries (both work and birthdays) for lunch together, fun events and sometime just staff meetings to know what is going on with one another. And we really pray for one another, both for the celebrations and for the tough times.

It is fun and a joy when the cat is purring.....!

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