

# TAKING CARE OF CO-WORKERS

## Taking Care of your Co-Workers

vincent-life-lessons-series-facebook

By John Freund, CM on September 3, 2016

This is Labor Day weekend in the United States and the weekend that will celebrate the canonization of Mother Teresa. As I was seeing the many articles related to these two events, I found myself thinking about our co-workers in ministry and those we live with.

J. Patrick Murphy writes in Mr. Vincent. St. Vincent wrote to one of his managers that he had heard complaints that he was serving bad food and cheap wine. He told him to serve good food and wine to those doing the work of serving the poor.

### **Lesson: Take care of your people; celebrate small successes.**

First, in what I was reading I was reminded about how often Mother Teresa, known for her care of the abandoned, also spoke of taking care of our closest neighbors and co-workers, the members of our own family.

Spread love everywhere you go: first of all in your own home. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next door neighbor . . . Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting.

Do we know our poor people? Do we know the poor in our house, in our family? Perhaps they are not hungry for a piece of bread. Perhaps our children, husband, wife, are not hungry, or naked, or dispossessed, but are you sure there is no one there who feels unwanted, deprived of affection? . . . We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.

Secondly, I recalled a moving article about the humanness of St. Vincent that listed many instances in his life in which he expressed his concern for his co-workers.

In 1637 he wrote to Anthony Coléee, the superior in Toul: "I've heard that your bread isn't properly baked; please get it done by a baker, if you can find one, for it is essential to have good bread. It will also be well to vary the menu from time to time to cater for poor human nature which gets sick of always seeing the same thing. You will also do well to recommend to the brothers cleanliness and tidiness in kitchen and refectory." (I, 387-8)

On November 9, 1649 he wrote to Mathurin Gentil, the treasurer in the seminary in Le Mans. He writes as though he were referring to another house of the congregation, though, in fact, he was referring to Le Mans; he used this device on other occasions as well:

"I've heard of one of our houses where the bad food served is having a detrimental effect on bodies and minds. Now, if the bursar, who goes to this extreme of economy under the pretext of cutting down expenses, does not manage things better after my warning and the letter I sent him, I'll be forced to replace him by someone who has a proper idea of how to feed the community, as is done in Saint Lazare and elsewhere; because otherwise many confrères fall ill. Since you're in the same sort of job, Father, I tell you all this so that you'll be careful to avoid such an abuse and will serve good bread and good meat, and won't sell off the good wine and serve the worst, and in this way you'll give the community no reason to complain of miserly treatment". (III, 504-5)



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A representative excerpt on this subject is one from a letter he wrote to Louis Serre in Saint Méen in January 1650: “I’ve been very pleased indeed at your letting me know how things are in your house, but what you say about Fr Thibault worries me; he’s endangering his health too much; he hasn’t been well, yet he went off to work; I’m afraid this will lead to a breakdown. In God’s name, Father, take care of him; make him take a rest, and see to it that he takes better care of himself; you’ll be doing a good turn both to the Congregation and to the large number of people who should receive spiritual help from him. That goes for the others, too, who need to ease up a bit”. (III, 532)

In November 1642 he wrote to Bernard Codoing in Rome: “I’m worried about your heavy work-load and I’m afraid you’re overdoing things mentally and physically. In God’s name, Father, take care of yourself. (II, 315-6)

One of Codoing’s successors in Rome was René Alméras and he too, apparently, tended to overdo things; Vincent’s advice to him is along the same lines, but with some more detailed instructions:

“Don’t overdo things, don’t be in a rush, don’t take things too much to heart, don’t stick too long at the same thing with too much concentration, and lastly, give up all activities apart from your duties as superior and whatever you’re able to get in the way of relaxation.” (IV, 139)

Finally, Vincent celebrated successes.

Vincent was good at letting confrères know how pleased he was to see them, particularly when they were taking a break after a spell of hard work. In August 1646 he wrote to Louis Gallon:

“Thanks be to God for the good news, the hope you give us that you’ll be coming here soon for a rest after your hard work. You’ll be very welcome, Father, and I’ll be more than glad to receive you. Come along, Father, without delay; I promise you we’ll take special care of your health and you’ll be master of the house, saying and doing whatever you please, and I’m especially at your service, having always loved you with more affection than my own father”. (III, 32)

## **Further thoughts:**

- Do we ever think of the needs of our co-workers and those we live with?**
  
- Do we take time to celebrate our successes?**

