



Ignatius Loyola's Management Style Might Work for Your Service to Others

The “manager” part of a person’s role in an organization can be a taxing challenge, especially now as we are “regathering the troops” for our various *post-covid* parish and society missions and activities. Our memories of being “in charge” means we are called to help those who participate in our endeavors achieve their group’s lofty goals, always of course with limited resources. It sometimes means dealing with people who often do not behave or cooperate in the way you want them to. And it always involves compromise, tough decisions, and juggling conflicting interests. And, ultimately, managing means meetings. Lots of meetings!

Just to complicate matters, most heads of groups (whether in a local church or an area’s association) value the potential of teaching and learning for their associates much more than budgets and administrative details. For many, perhaps most, *program management* is not what they had in mind when they got involved in the management of local or church-based leadership opportunities.

Since, when we get stuck in life, we Catholics like to look to saints for inspiration. Happily, there is a man who could be called the *patron saint of directors, managers, administrators, and group conveners*. He is St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits.

Ignatius spent the last 15 years of his life as the first Superior General of the Jesuits, mainly praying and doing administrative work in a cramped suite of rooms in the middle of Rome. He did not want the job. He was a teacher, evangelist, preacher, and spiritual director and Ignatius would have happily spent his life teaching catechism to children — the first work he did as a serious Christian. Instead, he was asked to direct a newly conceived, far-flung, rapidly growing religious order. And he did his job brilliantly, leaving some important management insights from which we can all benefit in this service.

One important quality which Ignatius possessed in abundance was *firmness*. “His steadfastness amazes everyone,” said Fr. Gonçalves da Camara, one of his close assistants. People were impressed because in his hands the Jesuits were a work in progress in the early years. Their mission shifted with the demands and dreams of all the various members involved. Basic procedures had to be established to guide the group. There were no precedents. People had many different views about what the Jesuits should be and what they could and should do. Ignatius had to make many tough calls to bring his dream of a “working” society to fruition.

How was he able to be effective as a leader? Fr. da Camara saw some core reasons at work: First, he carefully considers each matter in multiple ways or perspectives before deciding it. Second, he prayed on each subject and invited and followed God’s illumination in each decision. Third, he made no decision without hearing the opinion of those who were competent in the matter, and he inquired about the circumstances affecting the matter at hand, with the sole exception of those of which he was fully cognizant. He was accustomed also, very often, when he did not have full knowledge of the matter, to postpone the question until he felt best able to know God’s will for the good of those involved and to let “what is” on the topic suffice until better insight might be achieved. Some things could best be left to “simmer.”

From these principles a portrait of a leader emerges. Ignatius was deliberate. He took his time. No snap decisions. No decision at all if he did not have the facts he needed. He was aware of and comfortable with his limitations. He did not know everything—and he knew that he did not know everything. He listened carefully to the views of other people.

Most critically, he listened to God. For the most important questions, he would undertake a process of prayer and discernment seeking God's mission to be achieved in the consideration.

This might look like a portrait of an overly cautious leader, even a procrastinator. But that is not the impression Ignatius made. "His steadfastness amazes everyone," said Fr. da Camara. Ignatius was clearly a bold visionary. The boldness is related to management style. Ignatius could be daring because he was deliberate. He could be firm because he consulted widely. People trusted him because they had been asked and heard, because the facts had been unearthed, and because nothing was rushed.

There are lessons here for all leaders. Whether the mission is running the Jesuits or a religious education program or parish society. In many ways some core tasks are more similar than they might seem. Ignatius's management style can contribute to outlining and achieving well the mission of the group.

Following his approach, ask yourself these key questions to help the process achieve its mission:

- What about the upcoming decision is "troubling" me most right now?
- Have I heard from everyone who has a stake in the decision?
- Has there been adequate discussion among the members and others affected?
- What issues are looming for the group to address after the decision is made?
- What more do I need to know about the situation to make a good decision?
- How might I get the facts I still need?
- Who else do I need to know and talk to?

Every day, spend some time praying over the decisions you need to make, asking God to guide your decisions, so they benefit those involved and affected and always serve others well and give God the glory!

Good insights from the last 500 years to help make benefits happen for those whom we guide and serve.