

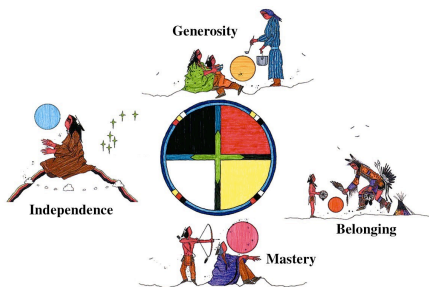


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## THE CIRCLE OF COURAGE

I was introduced to the Circle of Courage, a Blackfoot Indian philosophy on child-rearing, almost 3 decades ago while learning how to better understand and work with [troubled and troubling children](#). It is depicted on a medicine wheel and identifies the four main components of self-worth: **generosity, belonging, mastery, and independence**. The number four holds great significance for the Blackfoot, who see the person as standing in a circle surrounded by the four directions.



They believe that nurturing a child's self-worth is the responsibility of *both* the individual's direct caretakers, *and* the community at large. It's in everyone's best interest to ensure each individual is encouraged and supported in these four areas. The philosophy is *thousands* of years old.

The concept of self-esteem, explored by what we might call modern day psychology, can be

traced back to William James in the late 1800s. Examined from many perspectives since, there is broad agreement that self-esteem is comprised of one's sense of security or self-confidence, one's identity, which is developed with feedback from others, a sense of belonging, and feelings of competence. The Blackfoot clearly had this figured out long before "modern day" psychology.

I was recently reminded of the Circle of Courage during a conversation about how we might support our community's efforts to re-engage. A colleague referred to our Office of Mission, Diversity, and Equity's [Blue Book](#). In it, we are asked, as members of the Lasallian community, to explore several important questions within the context of faith, service, and community: To whom do I belong? To whom or what do I give my life? What is my responsibility to my neighbor? Who is my support group? Who challenges me to be a better person?

In many ways, being engaged in any community comes down to **motivation**. While I had considered the classroom implications, [Daniel Pink](#) and behavioral economist [Dan Ariely](#), helped me broaden my view. Their central question is: what motivates people to be engaged and productive in the

workplace? What tools do employers (or teachers, or leaders of any sort) have at their disposal? The *most often relied upon* strategies used to motivate are tangible rewards in the form of bonuses, badges, grades, gold stars, stickers...what we might call *perks* to inspire and reinforce performance.

However, it turns out we've known for quite some time that **extrinsic reinforcement is problematic** when we are trying to develop intrinsic motivation, thanks to the foundational work of [Deci and Ryan](#). Many experiments since validate their basic conclusion. If you want people to be intrinsically motivated, engaged, productive, and happy, *you need a different set of tools*.

So, what works? In his book on motivation, [Daniel Pink](#) settles on three concepts, supported by decades of research, sparked by the foundational work of Deci and Ryan: **autonomy, mastery, and purpose**...do I hear echos of the Circle of Courage?

As educators, and as Lasallians, we have a significant responsibility to support the development of our students' self-esteem and motivation...and we have known what works for a very  
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long time.

We can begin with nurturing a sense of **belonging in our classrooms and academic spaces**. It starts on the first day of class, if not before, by learning the names of our students, and using introductory activities that allow them to express the strengths, abilities, and/or talents they can bring to our work together. Then, by making use of those assets during the semester.

Learning takes place in small increments, over time. Take advantage of every opportunity to provide feedback that is educative and encouraging, celebrating progress toward **competence and mastery**. Normalize and welcome questioning and help-seeking behaviors. Consistently encourage and reinforce cognitive effort.

Show students that they have a **purpose** in contributing to the work of our courses and life at La Salle. Make it clear that we are in this with and for them...and that **we all bring value to the experience** each time we we are together. Use, and thank them for, their contributions.

Whether you approach motivation from the perspective of the Christian Brothers, psychology, behavioral economics, or the Blackfoot concept of the Circle of Courage, it should be clear that creating an environment that nurtures self-worth is critical for everyone, and necessary for learning. We each possess the appropriate tools. Using them is in our collective best interest.



## Recharge. Reunite. Renew!

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## ENGAGING PRACTICES ON CAMPUS

**Pat Coyle, Assistant Professor of Management and Leadership writes:**

Early on in our careers, the ability to lead a meeting is an invaluable skill. Unfortunately, misconceptions regarding this skill permeate the workplace. Leading a meeting does not mean presenting, dominating the discussion, or giving a TED talk. On the contrary, leading a meeting requires one to set expectations, guide the flow of the conversation, keep people on track, and highlight the value of the discussion.

In order to teach this skill, and keep my class student-centered, I use a series of five "roundtable discussions" throughout the semester, which connect course topics to student experience. On each of these days, two topics are covered. For example, we typically cover communication and teamwork, following our

coursework on organizational behavior at the interpersonal level.

Each student volunteers to lead a discussion for one topic during the course. More than one person may sign up for a topic. Students introduce their topic, ask interesting open-ended questions, and lead the class in a discussion, while connecting the issues to real-world examples and experiences.

Before the day of their discussion, students write a paper where they critically assess the topic, take a stance on the content, and lay out what they hope to accomplish during the roundtable. They also bring one-page handouts, featuring their questions, to class, so that classmates can follow along.

Beyond leading a meeting, these discussions allow students to build **community** and collaborate. They learn the value of taking a critical stance and listening to the perspectives of others. This also builds **retrieval practice and elaboration** into my instruction, and students gain experience establishing a social dynamic. As a result, their education is personalized, and students feel more connected with the course material and their classmates.



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Now is the perfect time for an “[after term review](#)” of your courses. In 30 minutes or less for each class, you can make significant improvements for next semester.

### WHERE'S WALDO?

Children and adults have been trying to find Waldo amid a sea of other similar looking characters in crowded and chaotic scenes since 1987. To locate Waldo, one must focus on the salient details of his striped shirt, hat, and round glasses.

I often use Waldo to help me explain **salience** as a critical concept for teaching and learning. If we want our students to learn effectively, we need to be explicit about the most important concepts, or the most relevant details of what we are teaching. This allows the learner to focus their attention in the right place, which is often a challenge for students. Just watch them as you are teaching, using presentation slides, or after you've assigned a reading. As in Where's Waldo, their note-taking and highlighting can be a sea of chaos, crowded with excessive information that often clouds the most salient information.

One way to help is with a strategy that some are calling “retrieve-taking” (as opposed to note-taking). During instruction, explicitly tell students to put their pens down and close their notebooks. Ask them to simply focus on the conversation for the next 5 to 10 minutes, thinking about the most important aspects of what is being said. Acknowledge that this will be uncomfortable, but encourage them to work at it. After a few minutes, stop and ask them to pick up their pens and write down the most important concepts they've heard. Have them share with a peer to compare and add to their notes. While they are sharing, move about the class to learn what they have recalled, and assess the situation. Do you need to explain further, clarify, or reinforce? Do they grasp the most salient concepts? Can they add detail?

We can also encourage this sort of focus when assigning readings or other homework activities by supplying students with guiding questions, outlines,

or even our slides, to which they can add detail, protecting them from clouding the salience of critical information. Guidance will probably be necessary.

Focusing on the most salient content also allows us to create targeted assessments that accurately measure students' comprehension, as opposed to those that include a plethora of insignificant details, which can confuse and mislead students. So, as we prepare for next semester, let's keep Waldo in mind, and ask if we are ensuring that our students are focused on the most salient points each time we meet.

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### STRENGTH IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

**Br. Don Alger, Instructor, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry**

This semester was a tough one for me. My students demanded accommodations and flexibilities more than I anticipated. They resisted being challenged: “Why do I have to do this your way when what I learned in high school could work just as well?” “How is this course relevant to a job I want?” Overpowering odds were about to do me in; it was a fight, and I felt pushed and pushed some more. How does one find strength within to probe beneath ugly behaviors and realize that they are manifestations of mounting stress on top of family and societal dysfunction?

Lasallian instructors are classroom teachers, yes, but also ministers of God's manifold grace (c.f., MTR 1.1), and it is when we are weak that God is strong (c.f., 2 Cor 12:10). One digs even more deeply and counts on God's love for all. “There is no failure or humiliation the Lord's love cannot reverse, no anger He cannot dissolve, and no routine He cannot transfigure” (CSC Constitutions, 118). Notwithstanding the odds, we must continue to be bearers of hope, consistency, attentiveness, generosity, compassion, and light – the very things our students are demanding from us because their usual avenues leave them unfulfilled.

*CSC Constitutions courtesy of Br. Benj Rossi, CSC.*

The DLSI Newsletter is written, edited, and curated by

[Frank J. Mosca, Director, DLSI](#)

Pres Feden, Professor Emeritus