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Best Practices/Tom W. Many, Ed.D., and Susan K. Sparks

Take Me Out to the Ball Game!

It started right after the National Anthem. The field announcer explained that the Red Sox took great pride in Fenway's Code of Conduct. He reminded us that everyone was responsible for adhering to the nine items listed on the lineup card and following the 'ground rules' was essential to a successful experience. In a big booming, yet welcoming voice he began, "Ladies and Gentleman, here is your lineup card for tonight's game."

Leading off, please avoid balls in play.

Second, never trespass onto the field.

Third, drink responsibly.

In the clean-up spot, help keep Fenway Park clean.

Fifth, watch your language.

Sixth, respect all other fans.

Seventh, keep cell phone conversations private.

Eighth, sit only in your own seats.

And in the ninth spot, do not smoke in Fenway Park.

The Announcer continued, "Violators are subject to ejection and other penalties. If someone is detracting from your enjoyment of the game, please call the security hotline number printed on the back of your ticket. On behalf of the Red Sox and our fans, we thank you for observing Fenway's Code of Conduct."

At that moment, we thought to ourselves, "WOW, Fenway Park has NORMS!" As we reflected on the message of Fenway's Code of Conduct, it became clear that the

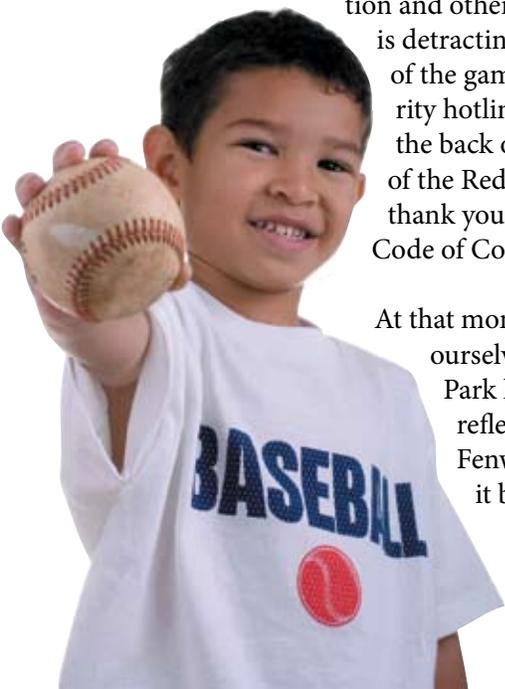
Announcer was promoting a positive experience by describing certain behaviors that were expected. The expectations were clear and explicitly stated—a positive experience was not left to chance.

It is the same in schools. Teams that achieve results are focused on the right work—they are clear about *what* is important—but they are also clear about *how* they work. These teams set explicit norms that describe exactly how they will work together so that just like Fenway Park, the success of a team's collaborative experience is not left to chance.

Explicit Norms Promote Success

As facilitators and trainers of collaborative teams, what the Announcer had done caught our attention. In schools, Fenway's 'Code of Conduct' is called norms and represents the "ground rules or habits that govern a group." (Goleman, 2002) Some schools call norms "the standards of behavior by which we agree to operate while on this team." Others like Kegan and Lahey describe norms as "commitments and public agreements among members of a team." Anyway you define them, norms are meant to enhance productivity, promote collaboration, and create the environment for a successful experience among adults in the school.

There are lots of resources that describe how to write team norms. There are even lists of recommended topics teams should consider. It is an accepted practice that teams should have norms but even on the best teams, a list of norms is just another list unless teams are willing to reinforce their norms and confront behaviors that violate expectations. At Fenway, the management clearly stated that violators risked being ejected from the game. In schools, we do not 'eject' colleagues from team meetings but effective teams enhance their effectiveness by regularly reviewing, revisiting, and reinforcing team norms.



Review, Revisit, and Reinforce Team Norms

Strike Three! It was top of the fourth inning and suddenly the most popular Red Sox players were on the scoreboard reminding fans of Fenway's Code of Conduct. In articulate and credible voices, one player after another came on the big screen and restated an item from the Code of Conduct. Not only did the Red Sox have norms, they reinforced their norms!

Teams should be careful not to spend too much time on "how" they work together—it is better to focus on the work—however, it is imperative that teams regularly revisit, review, and reinforce the values and commitments made to the team and each other. Reinforcing norms does not have to be complicated but it is important to understand that once norms have been created, teams must reinforce their norms. Here are a few simple strategies.

Storytelling: One strategy works well at the start of a new school year or when a visitor attends a team meeting. A "storyteller" provides an overview of the team norms. When he or she is finished, others add their own comments or describe which team norms were most important to them and why. This simple activity reinforces shared expectations and reminds team members of how they want to work with one another.

Artifact Hunt: In this strategy, team members are asked to share an example of a norm in action. Teams use a chart to capture the examples and ask themselves if there were any norms they did not have evidence of? What would the evidence look like if they had it?

Elevator Ride: At the beginning of a meeting, the team co-creates a one or two minute presentation on the strengths of the team and what behaviors contribute to the team's effectiveness. The presentation must be succinct—short enough that you could present it on a short elevator ride!

Tools: There are a number of reproducible culture and effectiveness surveys available online (www.allthingsplc.info). Many teams commit to using the same survey two to three times per year to gather data on the effectiveness of their team norms.

Intentional Feedback Loops: Some teams remind one another of their norms by engaging in quick, quarterly reviews during which each team member is asked to rate which norms the team excels at and which ones need attention. Other teams complete Plus/Delta charts or ask principals to observe team meetings and provide feedback on how teams are doing with their norms.

While all of these strategies help to keep norms meaningful, it is imperative that teams pause from time to time throughout the school year and reflect on 1) what they have been doing that the team should do more of, 2) what they have been doing that the team should do less of, and 3) what new norms should be created to improve the team's effectiveness.

Explicit Norms Promote Success

Whether at the ballpark or in the schoolhouse, explicit norms promote a successful experience. Just as Fenway's Code of Conduct was explicitly stated and reinforced, it is crucial that principals not overlook the importance of teams developing and reinforcing explicit norms to guide their work together. Play Ball! ■

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