

W-3: Sustain energy to reach ambitious goals

Build meaningful relationships with your colleagues

Building meaningful relationships with your colleagues is one of the most self-evident, yet undeniably powerful ways to sustain your energy and take care of yourself. Of particular importance among the many relationships you develop are those with colleagues who have experienced their share of struggles in the classroom, but who have emerged from their darker days. These individuals (alums, veteran educators at your school, even administrators) can help you see that there is light at the end of the tunnel. Just like these colleagues, you can and will persevere in the face of challenges, and emerge to lead your students to academic success.

As well as helping you build faith in your own abilities, relationships with colleagues can be an unparalleled source of emotional support. Sharing stories and listening to your friends recount the various highs and lows of the life of a teacher can provide the comfort and camaraderie you need to keep going. Matt Snyder (New York City '05) reflects: "A group of my colleagues and I made a routine of going out most Fridays after school. Whether we vented about work, shared funny stories, or chatted about anything *but* school, being with my coworkers in a relaxed environment was a great way to end the week on a positive note. Just having the chance to commiserate and hang out with friends really helped me unwind and always reminded me that, no matter what happened at school, I was never in this alone."

Outside of your closest circle of friends, fellow teachers at your school, counselors, janitors, and secretaries, all can be important sources of support. These individuals can offer a welcomed different perspective, advice rooted in experience, and some insight into students you might particularly be struggling with. Their experience and perspective can make these colleagues the ideal people to speak with about your struggles, as a simple reassurance of "you are going to make it through this" received from them can be especially comforting.

Additionally, in the company of fellow teachers, crucial yet oftentimes tedious tasks such as grading and planning can become enjoyable and even energizing. As Josh Biber (Phoenix '04) reflects:

"I distinctly remember one particular learning team meeting in the fall of my second year. It was a Thursday night and all of the other 5th grade teachers in the Phoenix Valley got together to work on how to incorporate more kinesthetic games and activities into math instruction. This, clearly, was all very par for course. We would get together almost monthly to collaborate, work together, pot luck, and generally have a good time. But something about this night struck me, as when 10:00 PM came around, there we all were, still together after three hours, more deeply engaged in the details and minutia of Coordinate Geometry Battleship than people our age should ever be. At one point, some good-natured debate over the merits of competing fraction games got pretty heated. And at that moment, in what felt like a mini-epiphany, I said to myself: "It's Thursday night at 10:00 PM. We are all 23 years old and relatively good-looking people. I can't be positive what all of my friends who took jobs on Wall Street are out doing right now, but I can pretty much guarantee it is as far from Math Bingo as you can get. And it turns out there is no where else I rather be, no one else I rather be doing it with, and without question, nothing else I would rather be working towards than this. In fact, this is exactly the kind of 23-year-old I hoped I would turn out to be, and this exactly the community I only dreamed I could be a part of – enthusiastically bonded together at 10 o'clock on a Thursday night to improve the learning of our kids"

And this was just from a formal Learning Team meeting. There was truly never a day that went by that I didn't turn to my fellow corps members, at my school, at my apartment, or in my community, for the personal and professional support I needed. Next to my students, there was nothing that did more to sustain my energy than corps members around me. They are the best friends, and most inspiring people I have ever known."