



# JERRY CAMMARATA IS SUPERPOP

## Less 'I' and more 'we,' please

**O**NE OF THE SMALLEST words in our language is "I." It possesses such prominence both in its orthographic presentation as well as in its verbal usage. After all, you can control the I—you are the I: I want this... I want that... I'm fed up with it all... now I'll do it my way. If only we could get rid of that "I" and exchange it for: us; we, together, and even you, him, her.

Wielding such a strong "I" has caused a unique remedy of life's circumstances—if it doesn't work, get rid of it. Who needs the aggravation. This attitude has even been responsible for an upswing in divorces. As adults, continued use of the "I" concept in a home clearly sets the stage for the children to act in a similar vein as they get older.

An effort should be made to create interdependence by all. This can only occur if the conversations that ensue in front of the living room fireplace include less of the "I" and more of the "we."

### A rat race

I can remember back to the early '70s when I was working virtually 24 hours a day and quite successfully—as a speech and language pathologist. We had everything we wanted in life *except* a family. I was never around. After all, I was too busy out making a killing in the job market. It took my older daughter, Elizabeth, to set me straight. One morning as I performed my ritualistic routines of washing, dressing, rushing around the kitchen table, giving away goodbye kisses and dashing out the door, Elizabeth stopped me as I was about to set foot outside. I annoyingly told her to hurry with her inquiry. Obediently she told me in a hurried voice, "Daddy, when you come home tonight bring me a rat." Just as I was ready to give an agreeing yes, I caught myself and realized that the request was unusual. I asked her why she wanted a rat and her reply was quite rational to my amazement: "Well, daddy, you are always saying you are off to the rat race and you run out of the house. I thought maybe I would enjoy the rat race too, so I want to see a rat." As I departed, I told her we would speak about it when I got home.

### No more "I"

Elizabeth got me to think and, indeed, I was concerned more about my career and upward mobility and not enough in "us" as a family. It was at this juncture of my life, supported by the fact that my wife was pregnant and our second child was to be born, that my commitment would be to the family. Work would be an outgrowth of the family, not a selfish venture.

History has recorded quite well that I received the first paternity leave in this country from the New York City Board of Education in 1974 through an unprecedented decision handed down by the Federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commissions; dads throughout the country today can take a paternity leave (legally) if they wish and spend more precious time with their kids and still return to a job that is secure.

Now, whatever is done by any of the Cammaratas is done as a family and often in consultation. It is important to note individuality has not taken a back seat in our family. Man, woman and child have a clear understanding that personal pursuit of careers, recreational activities and the like must be addressed. It is because of the support and enthusiasm we give each other and a complete understanding of reaching our full potential that the personal gains made are reflected back upon the family—its stability and integrity.

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