

The Christian's Witness in the Workplace Workshop

10th IBC Jarvis Street Baptist Church

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I worked for five and one half years at Brink's Canada before entering full time into pastoral ministry two years ago. Previous to this, I had had a short stint as a security guard at an apartment building just up the street here on Gerrard Street across from Ryerson University.

During the course of my employment at both of these places, I was very conscious of the fact that I was a Christian and that I wanted to offer a consistent and persuasive witness to the people with whom I worked. Of course, I also had few opportunities to observe other Christians in their attempts to wrestle with the same task.

Underlying the assumption of all that is said is that as Christians we are witnesses. This *de facto* claim is not qualified in any way. Our behaviour, speech and ideals are immediately on display with every move, decision, conversation or action that we take.

One of the most difficult things that I have struggled with, and still do, even as a pastor of a conservative evangelical church, is to start conversations on spiritual things with those who are not already predisposed to talk about them. You know the struggle I'm talking about: how do you begin to tell your fellow co-worker about Jesus and how do you do so in such a way that is persuasive.

I. Rules in the Workplace

Most workplaces are either by necessity or by legal imposition equal opportunity employment workplaces. This means that not only are both genders to be represented, but that all forms of non-work related discrimination are forbidden. And so you may find yourself, as I did, having to rub shoulders with people who come from many different nationalities, who have radically different religious traditions and who share very divergent views of human sexuality and relationship commitments than you and I do. In the department in which I worked, and eventually supervised, I had 30 employees, six of who were female. Only one claimed overtly to be a born again Christian, and he was the biggest womanizer, the laziest of the bunch and was suspected of helping himself to things that did not belong to him. My employees held to Islamic, Hindu and Krishna religious backgrounds. Some were overtly atheistic and others were nominal Christian or to put it in plain terms, secular Canadians.

There are no rules specifically forbidding proselytizing in the work place, but I can assure you that it would not have been tolerated either. In fact as a supervisor, I would have acted against any aggressive evangelism among my employees whether by a

Christian or by any other religious group. And so the atmosphere is not necessarily conducive to such things and nor should it be expected to be.

The rule of the work place is to be inoffensive and accepting.

II Hypocrisy

This is probably the most overworked word that non-Christians use in their charges against Christians. I say this, not because we aren't often hypocritical, the fact is we are. The problem is that we are being charged with inconsistency not to our own standards but the standards of those who don't know what standards are. So the problem is real, but often misconstrued.

The first story that came to me when I was at Brink's was how previously there was a Christian who worked in our department, but he used to take regular trips to the US and on each trip he offered to pick stuff up for others. The charge was that he was helping others avoid duties and was illegally smuggling goods back on their behalf. They thought this was rather inconsistent.

In my own experience I found myself caught very often between competing ideals. A responsibility to an employer who was not asking me to do anything illegal and a union that was seeking the best treatment for its members. Often the lines were clear, someone had violated significant safety and security rules and had endangered himself and others or exposed liability to undue risk. As a supervisor you often find yourself maligned and misquoted in attempts to win favour or grievance and character slander is not uncommon.

I took great pains to live every minute what I believed. Not only because I had every intention of going into the ministry, but because I wanted people to know where I stood. I wanted my life to represent something that was different from those around me and I wanted it, as much as was possible, to reveal that to them. I have to admit that lifestyle evangelism has a place, but at the end of the day actions speak louder through inconsistency than in agreement. People didn't often notice when I was consistent, but the moment I was off the mark, they knew it.

So what we can see is that our actions can undo anything we say in a minute, but they provide at best a silent support to our confessions and claims.

III Friendship

In the course of time I have found that friendships created the best possible opportunities to share my beliefs. On one or two occasions I had the opportunity to speak to everybody about a particular belief, but generally these conversations were more about curiosity satisfaction than anything else. People really didn't seem to care

or need to be instructed in doctrine or in a particular Christian way of understanding something. However in personal conversation, matters of religion became much more interesting and personal. People were more interested in how God affected me. And it was primarily with those who were friends that I was able to enter into these intimate conversations.

Of course, through my identification with the ministry and the Christian faith, opportunities arose when people just desired to have a thought clarified or in some cases needed help to address really personal problems. There was a sense that if I had trained for the ministry, than problems at home would not be viewed by me to be matters for joking or opportunities for ridicule. Occasionally advice was sought on these kinds of matters.

Most often, however, I was perceived as something of a “priest.” And what most looked for was sanction or justification of their way of doing things from me. Like gays getting married in the Church, it was a way of getting “religious approval” for their way of life.

IV. Honesty, Integrity

T.T. Sheilds remarked in the January 25th, 1914 in a sermon entitled “Christian Business Men” that “men say business is business, as though religion had nothing to do with it. To the true Christian his religion is his life’s business, and his business is an expression of his religious life.”

Many people who learn that I am a Christian expect that I will mirror these attributes. They are simple human values, but Christians preach these things and we are expected to practice what we preach.

To be an honest person is to be truthful. It is to be without duplicity. It is to make statements that are clear and straightforward rather than loaded with double entendre or to live in away that is simple and above reproach. It is a high calling, but one that Christ has called us to and one by which the world judges our faithfulness. There can be no shortcuts. It is to be marked by integrity.

Jesus claimed to be the truth. We have been called to be the people of truth.

Ecc. 9:18 Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.

Wisdom is in my opinion, a marker of integrity and honesty. Sometimes we need to be wise to ourselves and the complexities of life in order to live honest lives. As the verse from Ecclesiastes emphasizes, wisdom enables us to avoid war and thus much harm. The wise person is a do gooder, and by definition, righteous. Obversely, sinners are destroyers of good. They are foolish, not wise.

Micah 6:10-13

- 10 Am I still to forget, O wicked house, your ill-gotten treasures and the short ephah, which is accursed?
11 Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales, with a bag of false weights?
12 Her rich men are violent; her people are liars and their tongues speak deceitfully.
13 Therefore, I have begun to destroy you, to ruin you because of your sins.

Honesty and integrity major themes in the Bible. The idea of ill-gotten gain is spurned. Resting behind this injustice is the judgement of God. It is viewed as a form of oppression by the rich over the poor.

Our witness in the workplace must be marked by integrity and faithfulness. We must model the values of our faith and live out the grace of our salvation. We must oppose falsehood, deceit and oppression.

Integrity and honesty mean that we will not tolerate evil whether that be in ourselves, among the rank and file of the work force or trickling down from the upper echelons of power. Integrity, honesty, faithfulness—a good Christian work ethic is one that seeks righteousness in all the many relationships of life. It is not narrow, pedantic, provincial or fundamentalistic.

I don't mind work
 If I've nothing else to do;
 I quite admit it's true
That now and then I shirk
Particularly boring kinds of work;
 Don't you?
But, on the whole,
 I think it's fair to say
 Provided I can do it my own way
 And that I need not start on it today —
I quite like work!

Quoted by J. Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 154-55.