

Resisting the Urge to Compromise... ...and Knowing When to Yield



TOM WORKS FOR THE CREDIT AND COLLECTIONS department of a fairly large credit card operation. With consumer debt increasing exponentially, and credit card use playing a major role in this new debt, more and more customers are falling behind in their payments.

At the same time, caller ID has made it increasingly difficult for the workers in his department to get in touch with the people who are behind in their payments. While written correspondence alleviates some of the bottleneck, a number of customers simply choose to ignore even this form of communication.

His bosses are not pleased, and they're demanding he raise his contact and collection quotas immediately. Tom's at a loss for how to do this without violating the protections afforded consumers under the law.

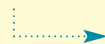
On his desk is a marketing package for a new device that offers him one solution. The device enables his collection department to enter a false name and telephone number to be displayed in the caller ID box, heightening the chance the person on the other end will pick up the phone. For example, when calling a customer

in Tucson, Arizona, the collection specialist can program the device to show up as an elementary school where the call-recipient's children attend, or, using information from the credit applications, they can input a relative's name and telephone number instead.

Tom's a little uncomfortable with the ethics of this new device, but he knows from talking to other collection managers around the country that it is having a significant impact on their quotas. He's also frustrated with the customers who refuse to allow his company to be in touch with them.

What is your opinion of the new device Tom is considering? What are the ethical questions it raises for you?

Should Tom make use of the device to meet his boss's demands? Why or why not?



Scripture Passage

Daniel 1:1–2:49

Study

The moment we step outside our quiet times with God, we are bombarded with opportunities to compromise our relationship with Him. Whether it's patience with our children, squabbles with our neighbors or conflicts with our extended family, every area of our private lives is invaded by moments that stretch our ability to adhere to the standards of Scripture.

The same is true of our workplaces. Our tempers get challenged; our patience gets challenged; in some instances, even our ethics get challenged. How do we resist the urge to compromise? Especially when compromise makes life easier, how do we find ways to be steadfast?

The Old Testament prophet Daniel, and his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (maybe you know them by their Babylonian names Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego), can teach us much about our spiritual journeys, and not just the times when we're in the lion's den or the fiery furnace.

Let's dispense with one myth right away. Many Christians feel like they can't serve God because they're not in the right circumstances. They're discouraged because they think they picked the wrong job or because they've compromised so often before that they can't be useful to God anymore. Or they realize they picked their careers and jobs because it served them, so it's likely they're useless to God. Others feel like life's dealt them hard times and they've merely had to take what they could find, meaning it isn't a godly service location. Wrong, wrong, wrong! God wants our service right now, regardless of where we are or how we got there. Certainly there are times when change is necessary, but for most of us the first step is serving where we are, not looking for someplace else to go.

Want evidence of that? Read Daniel 1:1-6. If anyone had a right to beef about their circumstances, it was Daniel and his friends. Carried away from their home and their loved ones, they were dumped into King Nebuchadnezzar's management training program. No choice in the matter. They went where someone else decided, not them. What does that mean for you and your job?

So, we understand now that like Daniel and his friends, we don't always get to choose where we're going to work or serve. The next question we must confront is: Can we withstand the pressure to compromise?

What are some examples of times at work when you feel pressured to compromise your faith?

Before we deal with resisting compromise, let's address the casualties of too hard a stance. Pay close attention to Daniel 1:8-13. Many Christians in the marketplace practice "scorched earth Christianity." We are so intent on never being compromised that we're oblivious to the damage it causes in other people's lives. In this passage, Daniel sought to be sensitive to his supervisor's fears that he (Daniel's supervisor) might suffer for Daniel's stands. In the space below, recall some times when others have paid the price for stands you've taken.

Were the stands necessary? If they were, what steps did you take, if any, to be sensitive to the effect your stands had on others? Remember, being right is never enough; how we behave when doing the right thing is as important as doing the right thing. (To answer the question before it's asked: Yes, we still must do the right thing, but always with a demeanor and respect that honors God. Few things damage the image of God in our coworkers lives more than smug Christians.)

Reading Daniel 1:9-21, how was Daniel sensitive to his supervisor's fears? What did he do to allay those fears?

How could he strike this bargain? The answer, of course, is that Daniel knew that laws laid out by God were as practical as they were spiritual. He had an absolute confidence that if he and his friends obeyed God's instructions, God would control the outcome. Notice, too, that Daniel didn't guarantee an outcome. What he did was trust God for an outcome that would be appropriate, and that trust also included letting Daniel's supervisor see the results.

The laws of God often don't make sense to people who don't know Him. They must be gently guided to an understanding that they make sense, not force-fed that realization in a showdown. Certainly in matters of ethics and morality God's laws supersede a boss's instruction. However, in the course of nearly twenty years of human resource management, I observed that many of the hard-line stances taken by Christians were on petty rather than important matters. An attitude of submission is a vital part of a Christian workers' life.

Now read Daniel 1:17. What does the Bible say here about the source of our gifts, abilities and talents?

If even the very skills and knowledge we use at work are a gift from God, then surely they are tools to be used for more than merely getting our share of the pie. Certainly they are tools for serving His redemptive plan. Name the tools God gives you in your job.

If you're having difficulty answering the question above, it's likely because you're so busy that you don't have time for the kind of relationship with God that enables you to see them. If this is true in your life, why?

Unfortunately, we humans have a quid-pro-quo mentality, even in our relationship with God. We think to ourselves: Okay, if I'm faithful and refuse to compromise, God will bless my actions in material ways, with success, victory, power, or at least absence of consequences.

Not necessarily so, as our experience has surely taught us.

Just when things seemed to be going their best, danger and even unreasonable demands hit Daniel in the face. See Daniel 2:1-5. In this situation, not only did Daniel have to interpret the dream, he had to first describe it! And with no hints from the king!

List times when you've faced unreasonable demands in your job. How did you respond?

How did Daniel respond? Read Daniel 2:1-30.

Daniel 2:16-18

Daniel 2:26-28

Daniel 2:30

What is the progression in the three passages above?

Daniel follows a process all of us can use in difficult circumstances: Seek God's wisdom, humbly acknowledge our own limits and God's vast abilities, and credit God with the results.

We don't always get to see the results of God's work through us, but sometimes we get a glimpse. See the effects of Daniel's humility on Nebuchadnezzar. Whom did Nebuchadnezzar praise in verses 46-47? What does that say about the ultimate goal of any of our actions at work?

The art of compromise (and knowing when to take a stand) is built on a close relationship with God that helps us seek His wisdom, and keeps the effects of our actions on other people as a key factor in guiding our attitudes and behaviors. We must never fail to take a stand when it's necessary, but we must always take those stands *because* they're necessary, not because we want to do so.

One more note: Examine Daniel 2:49. What does it say about our obligations to fellow Christians in the marketplace?

In this day of networking, discuss ways you are helping out other Christians.

For further consideration

The verses below are placed here as continuing reflections on this study. While groups are certainly invited to use them in their sessions, we hope that you will go home and read these passages as an exercise in encountering your Bible in private.

Galatians 6:2 and Matthew 28:20

Jot down ways you can encourage other Christians in your workplace.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- God expects us to serve right now—in the jobs where we are at this moment—regardless of how we got there.
- We can do the right thing in a hurtful way, and that doesn't honor God.
- We must reach the place in our spiritual journeys where we understand that God's laws are as practical as they are spiritual.
- Our gifts, talents and abilities are tools given to us by God to be used for His purposes.
- We must be sensitive to the fears and worries of our coworkers at all times, even in those instances where we must refuse to compromise.
- Doing the right thing doesn't guarantee positive outcomes. Sometimes doing the right thing carries a price.
- Even the things we do on the job must bring glory to Him and not ourselves. One of the most joyful moments in any working Christian's life is when coworkers see their success as being the result of their faith, and not in spite of it.