

Finding God in the Office

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TONY SAT STARING OUT THE WINDOW OF HIS OFFICE. From the fortieth floor, Boston's night-time skyline was marvelous. He let the view distract him from the devotion on his desk. A janitor appeared in the doorway and knocked. Tony waved him in and they exchanged small talk as the elderly gentleman did his work. At one point, the janitor stopped and looked at the Bible on Tony's desk. "I didn't know you were a Christian," he said.

Tony smiled ruefully. "That's the problem. I'm not sure most people know I am. I was just reading this devotion where it says I have to talk about Jesus, and I have to admit I don't know where to start. In fact, I'm not sure I want to..." his voice trailed off as he spoke.

"Isn't about a want-to, Mr. Tony. It's a need-to," said the janitor.

"That's easy for you to say, Olaf. You aren't surrounded by people who make fun of Christians. Most of my coworkers; they've got no interest in God at all. They think its talk for the weak. The only time they

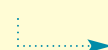
mention God is when it's part of a swearing tirade," Tony shot back, a little put off with the janitor.

Olaf stroked his chin and grinned. "You haven't been in the basement with the workers if you think I'm surrounded by Christians. There's language there I haven't heard since I worked the docks. There's no place I know where it's easy to be a believer. You just gotta do it."

Tony's tension eased a bit, waving his hands in defeat. "I know, I know. That's what's bothering me tonight. I was sitting here thinking I've kept my faith a secret unless somebody asks me. Don't ask, don't tell, that's my motto. Or at least it was until tonight." Tony sighed and looked at Olaf. "But how do I start?"

Olaf stuffed his rag in his pocket, looked at his watch, and took his break sitting with Tony.

If you're Olaf, what would you say?



Scripture Passages

Matthew 10:5-16

Introduction

If we're in a new setting, there may need to be a huge time frame between the first study in this set and this one. That's because, in most workplaces it really is vital for us to establish ourselves as competent and compassionate before we introduce the language of faith in intentional ways into our job conversations.

If we've been in a job for awhile, our reputation is likely set. If the reputation is good, and we're known for our competence and our compassion, then we're ready to take intentional steps towards introducing faith into our workplace conversations. If we've missed one of those elements, though, we've got to remedy our reputations before we seek to be active ambassadors for Christ.

Often, we're good at one, but not the other. We demonstrate terrific leadership skills or a diligent work ethic or quality output, but we could care less about the people around us. Such a platform will not make our faith message interesting to most of our coworkers. (In fact, such a demeanor probably means we're legalistic and spiritually arrogant, or our faith is lip-service only.)

Other people have a heart of gold, but spend little time trying to improve the way they do their jobs, satisfied with "good enough". Colossians 3:23 teaches us "good enough" is not a term that fits into a Christian worker's vocabulary.

That doesn't mean new workers don't have a story to tell. Each of us is called to "be ready to give an answer for the hope that is in us" (I Peter 3:15), and that is true whether we're the founder of the firm or the newest worker in the mailroom. When asked, when given an opportunity to express an opinion that is affected by our faith, all of us are expected to reveal our Christianity in our day-to-day conversations. The idea faith is a private matter is a myth authored by Satan and endorsed by those who don't know Christ.

That said, there's a second level of faith-talk best left to workers already established in their work setting. Their reputations and value set, they're now able to move forward looking for ways to add evangelism-introducing others to the hope of Christ-into their purpose at work. This study is targeted at those workers.

In Depth

We should start by establishing some ground rules. Describe some times when you think it is *not* appropriate to talk about your faith on the job.

****(See our list at the end of this study.)

Think about your recent conversations at work. Describe some incidents when it would have been possible to introduce your faith into the discussions.

Lunch room discussions, casual conversations about personal matters while working, commuting chats, answers to personal questions, answers to what our weekend plans might be—these and more offer us chances to introduce our faith into the sphere of our workplace.

When I first wrote this series, fans of the Boston Red Sox were driving toward what would become their first World Series title since 1918. Workplaces all over New England were drenched in discussions of the latest batting stats, Pedro Martinez and Curt Schilling's pitching feats, and, of course, the Yankees. Passion for baseball runs deep in this region of the country, and nobody's bashful about their baseball. Our faith must be just as passionate as our sports fancies. If it is, it bleeds over seamlessly into our discussions at work.

Examine Jesus instructions to His twelve disciples in Matthew 10:5-16 the first time He sends them out. What do you think Jesus means in verse 16?

What do you think that verse says to you if He said it before He sent you off to work?

So how should we organize our thinking as we introduce our faith into the workplace? First, it must not be about ethics only. Why would others be offended if we make Christianity about doing the right thing?

What other danger might result from our giving the appearance faith is about doing the right thing?

While faith at work isn't really about ethics at all, most people think that way. Even pointing out to them it's not just Christians who do the right thing offers a terrific opening for discussing the idea of grace with coworkers.

Second, we need to recognize we can't *just* quote Scripture to coworkers who don't know Christ. Why?

Third, people are more likely to listen to us talk about what faith does for us than what it can do for them. Why?

Fourth, people are much more likely to hear us talk about faith when they're troubled than when things are going well. What does this suggest as a strategy for being "wise as serpents, gentle as doves?"

Fifth, we can't talk naturally about things we haven't taken the time to understand ourselves. We also can't talk naturally about them unless we've practiced those discussions. What does this imply is a necessary element of preparation for introducing the language of faith into our workplace?

Where do we go to learn about God?

Where do we go to learn how to talk about God to others?

Where do we go to practice talking about God?

Here's a small list of moments when we can intentionally introduce our faith into our jobs.

“What are you doing this weekend?”

“Why do you pray before lunch?”

“I've never heard you swear before.”

“What's that you're reading?”

“Why are you bothering to try to keep that worker?”

“I think people are basically good.”

“You don't get something for nothing.”

“Why does God let bad things happen to good people?”

“How can you be so calm when your job's on the line?”

“So what's life all about?”

“Nobody cares about me, anyway.”

Can you think of others?

In the coming week, listen to your workplace conversations and begin to write down the moments when you could have introduced your faith into those discussions naturally. Then begin to think and pray about what God would have you do with those moments.

WHEN WE SHOULDN'T TALK ABOUT OUR FAITH AT WORK:

1. When talking about our faith distracts us or our coworkers from the task at hand.
2. When our coworkers aren't interested or ask us to stop.
3. When faced with ridicule or insincere challenges to our faith, not because we're afraid of ridicule but because such a discussion would not be productive at this time
4. When an answer to a question moves us down a rabbit trail and away from a focus on the Gospel message, as in a debate on a hot moral issue, unless we know how to move from the hot moral issue back to the Gospel message.

Common Sense and Eternal Principles

- The priority of workers in new situations or with new groups of people should be to establish themselves as competent and compassionate. They should not be intentionally introducing faith into their discussions, but should always be ready to give an answer when asked.
- Workers who have damaged or absent reputations in either competency or compassion should first look to repair these voids before adding evangelism to the purpose of their work.
- Workers who already have established themselves as both competent and compassionate are now ready to introduce evangelism as another element in glorifying God through their labor.
- There are times when it's not appropriate to talk about God at work.
- Introducing faith at work involves carefully and intentionally understanding what we're communicating and how we're communicating.
- We must never make faith in Jesus Christ about doing the right thing. Ethics is a by-product of faith and not a central tenet. Faith in Jesus Christ is about grace. Anything else leads people to believe faith is performance-based and that it's legalistic. It also leads them to believe good people go to heaven just by being good.
- Most of our coworkers have never read the Bible, so Scripture doesn't have the impact on them it does on us. Plus, many of them don't believe the Bible is true. That means we must work harder to express Biblical truths in ways they can understand.
- We can't understand God if we don't read the Bible.
- The Body of Christ, the local church, is supposed to exist to equip us to live and share our faith in the culture. Specialized parachurch ministries augment this activity of the local church by providing expertise in reaching certain segments of our culture.
- The best way to be prepared to talk to our coworkers about Christ is to practice those discussions in small group and discipleship settings.