

Regent University School of Business

A Magazine for  
Christian Leaders  
and Managers

# REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

ISSUE 14



## THE POWER OF AN ACCOUNTABILITY GROUP

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**Wycliffing the Workplace**

**Making Righteous Judgments**

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*Regent Business Review* is an electronic magazine published by the Regent University School of Business. The mission of RBR is "to equip and encourage Christians to be more God-honoring leaders and managers." As such, we offer practical guidance about what it means to be an authentic Christian in the workplace, as well as tools for better communication, for character development, and for other building blocks of leadership excellence. Driven by a calling to make disciples in the marketplace, we seek to exhort and coach Christians to "excel still more" (1 Thess. 4:1) in their roles as leaders and managers.

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# The Power of an Accountability Group

Michael Zigarelli

The year was 1992. Buck Jacobs, a successful Christian businessman, had recently left the corporate world to help lead an organization that brought together Christian business owners to sharpen one another, professionally and spiritually. The owners gathered in a city near them for monthly events that included a meal, a guest speaker, and fellowship, with the hope of being equipped and encouraged to reveal God more consistently through their businesses.

The organization had grown steadily since its inception in the late 1970s, and now boasted about 100 chapters in 30 cities. But, although this donations-driven model was viable from a financial perspective, Buck discerned few results that he thought really mattered. Individuals' attendance was patchy, as was their financial support, and more importantly, there seemed to be little sharpening of either business acumen or spiritual maturity. According to Buck, constituents left the group meetings unchanged, applying few or none of the principles being taught in those meetings. To him, "success" was not measured by the number of cities with groups; rather, it should be measured by the purity of members' hearts, by their consistent practice of the faith in business dealings, and by their ministry fruitfulness.

There was a lot at stake, Buck thought, because when leaders change, so do their organizations. A leader's growth multiplies exponentially, as employees, customers, suppliers, creditors,

**At the meetings,  
one could expect to  
be asked  
penetrating  
questions about his  
mistreatment of  
employees, his  
questionable  
accounting  
practices—even his  
lust for his  
secretary.**

and others increasingly see God through seeing this leader in action. So the question nagged him: what was missing? What would effect real transformation? Buck's answer was that, among other things, *accountability* was a critical missing piece.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This anecdote compiled from personal communications with Buck Jacobs, May 2004.

Why might he think that? The Book of Proverbs, as well as other Scriptures, offer some insights.

## Proverbs on Accountability

To walk in Jesus' steps is to travel an arduous road—a narrow, sometimes lonely road replete with potholes, foggy conditions and tempting exit ramps. It's a journey that requires doing the most unnatural thing possible: giving up who we are in favor of being the person God wants us to be. Moreover, it requires walking against the steady wind, a brisk cultural current that assures us that since God is not really knowable, we should live for ourselves and for today.

So, both our nature and our cultural nurture work against our sanctification. And it's always been that way. Perhaps that's why this 3,000 year old verse sounds like it could have been written yesterday:

Many a man claims to have  
unfailing love,  
but a faithful man, who can  
find?  
(Proverbs 20:6)

The couplet exposes the gap between what we say and what we do. It reveals a dubious inauthenticity—even a hypocrisy—that marks every believer from time to time. We say we love God and want to

do his will, but how often do we really walk that talk? When was the last time we enjoyed even 12 hours of consistently reflecting Jesus Christ? Was it today? Last Sunday? A month ago?

The term “who can find” is noteworthy in the verse, suggesting that, for many of us, it may actually have been longer than a month. The wisdom books of the Bible use “who can find” to indicate the rarity or even the impossibility of something occurring. In that light, this otherwise ordinary verse, tucked away in the pots and pans of Proverbs, becomes a subtle but stinging indictment of each one of us, leaving in its wake humility and shame.

But also in that wake is grace. After the apostle Paul admits that even he, late in his ministry, cannot reliably do God’s will (Romans 7), he shares with us God’s lifeline: “there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Roman 8:1). It’s amnesty for those of us indicted by Proverbs 20:6. And it engenders gratitude, fuel to continue the journey against the wind.

...which brings us to the issue of accountability. Given the challenge of living our lives for God, assembling an accountability group—a circle of spiritually mature friends who will keep us on track and moving forward—is indispensable. Proverbs puts it this way:

As iron sharpens iron,  
so one man sharpens another.  
(Proverbs 27:17)

The familiar verse reminds us that God works through others to help us grow. He designed us to become disciples by collaborating with one another, not by pursuing that end on our own. “Where two or three come together in my name,” Jesus said, “there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20).

**To him, success was not measured by the number of cities with groups; rather, it was measured by the purity of members’ heart.**

Indeed, Richard Foster says that “seeking guidance” is a core spiritual discipline,<sup>2</sup> and Dallas Willard rightly observes that: “Christian redemption is not devised to be a solitary thing...The Life is one that requires some regular and profound conjunction with others who share it. It is greatly diminished when that is lacking.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, formalizing the discipline of being accountable to one another just makes sense.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Harper: San Francisco, 1978, 1988, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, HarperCollins: New York, 1988, p. 187.

Whether we rely on a group, a spiritual mentor, or a Christian “coach,” God invites us to make a priority of being sharpened by others.

### **The Rest of the Buck Jacobs Story**

Uneasy about the stagnation of the business owners to whom he was ministering, Buck received permission from his organization to test a new model in his home state of Florida. Rather than hear guest speakers, groups of twelve to fifteen business owners read materials germane to integrating their faith with business at or before each monthly meeting. During the first half of the meeting, they discussed the business application of these principles and how to use their businesses as ministry platforms. During the second half, they shared business, personal, and spiritual challenges, gleaned substantive guidance from this inner circle of consultants who embraced a common worldview.

Importantly, group members were also charged to be transparent and to hold each other accountable to living the Christian life authentically and consistently, similar to how some church cell groups operate. At the meetings, one could expect penetrating questions about his mistreatment of employees, his questionable accounting practices, the lack of veracity in his advertising, his lust for his secretary, or anything else that might dishonor God. Members promised confidentiality, so nothing left the room, but within those

walls, genuine transformation occurred—change that was elusive with the former model.

When Buck returned to present the results to the decision-makers in the larger organization, they declined to adopt his model for the organization as a whole. So Buck, confident in the business and spiritual outcomes of the new model, launched a for-profit business to create groups around the country.

Calling it “The Christian 12 Group”—or C12 for short—Buck formed a board of directors, wrote a business plan, and crafted a mission statement: *The Purpose of The C12 Group is to change the world by bringing forward the Kingdom of God in the marketplace through the companies and lives of those men and women He calls to run businesses for Him.* And what started as a handful of guys in a couple rooms around Florida has now become a nationwide phenomenon. There are currently more than 200 C12 members participating in 29 groups in the United States. Each pays between \$425 and \$825 a month for membership, depending on his company’s size, and the chairman of each local group—essentially a franchise owner—is responsible for growth and sustenance of the group.

The real success of C12 though, is found not in its size or financials, but in its members testimonies:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Testimonies gleaned from the C12 website, [www.thec12group.com](http://www.thec12group.com)

- For the past eight years, participation in the C12 Group has been a compass that has kept me on course as a Christian, a father, a husband, and a CEO. C12 relationships are pure gold.
- C12 members are rather brutally honest in a loving way. This is one of the reasons C12 is such a high priority in my life. There is nothing like it.

**“This way of accountability has kept me from making some incredibly painful and costly mistakes.”**

- C12 has helped me set priorities in my life...Members may ask me ‘Are you spending time with your kids? With your wife?’ C12 reminds me that riches are measured in money, but wealth is measured in my relationships.
- The meetings have consistently been the highlight of my month. Never before in the twenty-one years of my walk with Christ have I experienced the loving encouragement, exhorting accountability, and the practical business insight for my daily journey in glorifying Christ.
- I have never felt so close to God in my entire life and I credit a major part of that to

the inspiration that C12 gives me on a monthly basis.

- C12 has changed the entire direction of my company. We have made the transition from a greedy, profit-centered company to one that is Christ-centered.
- Annually each member is responsible for doing a full presentation of past, present, and future business and ministry goals ... My company is the focus for that day and the members are like my Board of Directors. This way of accountability has kept me from making some incredibly painful and costly mistakes. It also keeps me focused to use this business as a platform for ministry.
- C12 members care enough to hold one another accountable...C12 has become a cornerstone of my business and spiritual life.

Clearly, C12 shapes leaders’ lives as well as their business practices, and it’s now expanded to include groups of “Key Players”—Christians near but not at the top of their organizations.

The central reason for its success? Buck is quick to give God the glory for supernaturally engineering the whole thing. But indeed, Buck deserves his share of credit too, for having the wisdom to defer to one of the most powerful personal growth systems God has given us: accountability groups.

Other Christian business organizations also defer to this approach now. Among them are Connecting Business Men to Christ ([cbmc.com](http://cbmc.com)), a network of business and

professional people in over 80 nations; Christ@Work (christatwork.com), an organization with a strong international presence which, similar to C12, is built around regular meetings of groups of twelve; and Legatus (legatus.org), an organization with thousands of members on three continents that brings “Catholic business leaders and their spouses together in a monthly forum that fosters personal spiritual growth.”

### **Coaching: One-on-One Accountability**

Five centuries ago, the word “coach” referred to a horse-drawn vehicle for transporting people. Today, it’s the latest metaphor being used for a person who helps others reach their potential. More than that, though, coaching has ballooned into a multi-billion dollar industry, with “coaches” for personal fitness, financial management, nutrition, and spiritual enlightenment, among other things. There are even those who take a more holistic approach to the enterprise, branding themselves “life coaches.”

Within the Christian community as well, there is now a cottage industry of coaches—people who are full-time disciplers and encouragers. They’re part pastor, part friend, and often, part accountability partner. When that latter role is practiced faithfully and in love, it can supercharge change.

Coaches often work face to face, but increasingly, they are broadening their practice to include phone-based coaching

and email-based coaching. And at present, they’re in such demand that coaching is fast becoming one of the top home-based professions on the planet. Consequently, “coach training” is also a booming business, with everything from one day seminars to full graduate programs available.

**If you’re not in an accountability relationship, find one either through your church or through an outside group. It will have a profound, permanent effect on you.**

So, if joining an accountability group does not fit your lifestyle—or if you’re simply more comfortable with the one-on-one approach to growth—consider hiring a coach. The best place to start your research might be the Christian Coaching Network (christiancoaches.com).

### **Take the First Step**

Accountability matters, and because it matters, we see it in many contexts. CEOs answer to boards. Elders oversee pastoral performance. Accrediting bodies hold universities and schools to

high standards. Governments guard against excessive power of their branches by maintaining checks-and-balance systems.

The absence of accountability also evidences how much it matters. Abuse ensues when dictators are not accountable. Israel and Judah suffered when their kings did not consider themselves accountable to God. More generally, when a leader in any organization answers to no one, that organization is at risk of becoming at best insular and stagnant, and sometimes even oppressive.

Remember this no-nonsense wisdom: “Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid” (Proverbs 12:1). If you’re not in an accountability relationship, find one either through your church or an outside group. Choose to overcome time constraints, unwillingness to be transparent, and aversion to “correction.” You’ll be surprised by the profound, permanent effects that accountability relationships will have on you.

And, quite possibly, so will everyone who knows you.

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# Wycliffing the Workplace

...and other evangelism lessons from the missionary trenches

Randy Kilgore

John sensed the natives were getting restless. All his gentle attempts to share the gospel were rebuffed or politely dismissed. He didn't speak their jargon and couldn't connect with them socially because most of their social rituals flew in the face of biblical standards. He felt the natives' hospitality wane as they became increasingly uneasy around him, but what was he to do? John knew God wanted him to share Christ with the people around him, but he felt completely incompetent.

No, John's not a missionary in a far-off land. He works as a CPA in a large accounting firm in the United States, and he understands his workplace calling to be a light. But even though John may not be a foreign missionary, he *is* a cross-cultural one.

The experiences of foreign missionaries can teach us much about our own struggles to reach across the cultural divide that separates us from our non-believing employees, colleagues and managers. These "lessons from the missionary trenches" are practices tested across centuries, national boundaries and cultural differences. They offer hope and strategies for working Christians—the cross-cultural missionaries in the world of business.

## The Cross-cultural Missions Framework

Names like Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Adoniram Judson, Lottie Moon—we speak about these missionaries in Christian circles with respect and admiration because their lives were characterized by sacrifice and compassion for the lost. They made conscious

**These four lessons from the mission field work every bit as well in the "foreign" culture of the workplace.**

decisions to be faithful to the Great Commission in places where the Gospel was not a central feature to the culture.

*Ah, there it is! A seven-word sound-bite to capture the imagination: "...not a central feature to the culture."* While Western commercial enterprises remain loosely based on Judeo-Christian ethical standards, many working Christians affirm that Christianity is not a central feature in their work culture. Indeed, more than a few of these same workers describe Dilbert-like anecdotes of how

the cultures at their workplaces are actually *antagonistic* to their faith.

In many ways, Christians at work face the same cross-cultural difficulties that overseas missionaries face, and the rich trial-and-error, practical experiences of foreign missionaries offer keen insight—"best practices" of sorts—about how to reach coworkers. Accepting the premise that evangelical Christian faith is unfamiliar to our workplace cultures enables us to explore new strategies for equipping believers to thrive and minister in their careers. Four traditional missionary approaches in particular, transfer well to our own workplace mission fields:

- "Wycliffing the workplace" (translation of Scripture into readily understood cultural terms)
- overcoming competitiveness and quickly resolving conflicts
- cultivating indigenous believers to do the work, versus outsiders
- excellent service as a powerful pre-evangelism strategy

## Lesson 1 from the Trenches: "Wycliffe the Workplace"

The Wycliffe Organization presents one of the most exciting stories in the history

of cross-cultural missions. By translating the Bible into native languages, they make firsthand encounters with God possible for whole people groups. For centuries, missionaries have understood that to effectively introduce Jesus Christ to a culture they must 1) translate the gospel into the common language of the people and 2) use readily-understood cultural information to transmit the meaning of gospel truth. Imagine what would result if we as workplace cross-cultural missionaries were to find ways to illustrate the concepts of our faith to coworkers too busy to know them, and too busy to work at understanding them!

Once, an executive criticized me for suggesting that Christians need to constantly interact with Scripture, even while at work. I pointed to *The Wall Street Journal* under his arm and asked, “Do you read that every day?” Slightly bemused, he retorted in his best I-can’t-believe-you-have-to-ask voice, “Of course I do. I wouldn’t be ready for my work if I didn’t...” His voice trailed off as he recognized the parallel to my argument. Like a cross-cultural missionary, I used the man’s own cultural experience to relate a spiritual truth. It worked.

To further illustrate the point, consider the concept of Sabbath rest and its use as a culturally relevant tool for missionaries a hundred years ago and for workplace missionaries today. Ester and Roger Winans’ worked among the Aguarunas, a fierce tribe of headhunters who persistently resisted efforts of missionaries

to minister to them, often with fatal and grisly outcomes. Remarkably, Esther and Roger earned the favor of Chief Samarin. In describing God to the tribe, they discussed the concept of Sabbath rest. Samarin was deeply moved that a god would care enough about his people to instruct them to rest. The Winans had appealed to the chief’s desire to care for his people, linking it to the way God cares for his children. The approach was

**Like a cross-cultural missionary, I used the man’s own experience to relate a spiritual truth. And it worked.**

ingenious, and the result was an opportunity to evangelize the tribe.

In history-comes-full-circle irony, many Christian workers today describe how the same concept of Sabbath rest marks them as religious to their own “tribe” (employees and peers) and “chiefs” (managers), and opens opportunities to describe their faith to those who might otherwise be disinterested. In our culture, which decries its own busyness while accelerating it, the idea that God prescribes rest for His children can be a significant introduction to God’s character.

One principle that missionaries have long understood from experience is to resist the “just

give them a Bible” syndrome. Case in point: Adoniram Judson endured incredible hardships as a missionary to Burma in the early 1800s. He translated Scripture into Burmese and produced an English-Burmese dictionary. The former opened the Bible to the Burmese readers, and the latter created a way for English-speaking missionaries to share their years of Bible experience with the Burmese who were now reading it for the first time. The result: Thirty years after Judson’s death, Burma had 7000 Christians and 63 churches descended from his labor. On the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his work, there were 200,000 Christians. Just “giving them a Bible” was not enough to reach Burma—missionaries had to explain to the people what they were reading. So, too, workplace believers need to be trained in tutoring coworkers as they discover God’s Word.

It is important to note when applying the “Wycliffing the workplace” principle to our own jobs, that cross-cultural missionaries seldom see contextual illustrations as gospel presentations in and of themselves. They often view them as exercises to prepare the ground for later witnessing. Or more often, they see them as simple ways to pique the interest of the intended audience. We workplace Christians should be just as comfortable as our missionary brothers and sisters in identifying opportunities to use relevant cultural illustrations to introduce and explain our faith.

## Lesson 2 from the Trenches: Control Your Competitiveness

An employer once commented to me that "...you Christians eat your young." I was offended by his remark, and pressed him for an explanation. He pointed out two workers who recently fell in love, saying "Everyone in this place knows they're dating. There's electricity between them. The way you Christians talk about love, you'd think we'd see the same thing. Instead, all I hear is what you don't agree about." His observation was a stinging reminder that Christians in the workplace are surrounded by a "cloud of witnesses," watching to see if the things we claim to believe really do impact our lives.

Missionaries who have made unity and conflict resolution central to their relationships with each other have not only enhanced their own comfort, but avoided the damage these disputes have on those watching them. In the 1930s and 40s, Bill Wallace was a surgeon practicing in Wuchow, China. A Southern Baptist, Wallace's patients included missionaries from the Christian and Missionary Alliance, Catholic priests and nuns, and workers of other (potentially) competing mission agencies. Not only was he their doctor, but their friend, and the writings of each group after Wallace's death at the hands of Communists reflects not only their deep sense of loss but their awe at his ability to brush aside the competitiveness that fuels many missionary enterprises.

Perhaps as telling are the testimonies of the Chinese residents about the remarkable example Wallace set, highlighted when not even one resident could be cajoled or bribed into giving false testimony against Wallace, even under duress. The same should be said of us by those we work with—that we are adept at resolving conflict and our love for other believers is too obvious to miss.

## Western missionaries learned that the Gospel is more effectively spread by peers than by outsiders.

Unfortunately, those missionaries who haven't controlled their competitiveness with each other and with non-believers forfeit the harvest that could be theirs. Missionary writings often lament that the number one cause for missionaries leaving the field is not financial struggle, physical danger, isolation, or even impatience for results, but *conflict with other missionaries*. During a split in a major Protestant denomination in the 1990s, the rift worked its way through the ranks overseas, tearing apart even long-time coworkers, and causing charges that missionaries were even "outing" other missionaries to the hostile

governments where they were serving.

These illustrations from foreign mission fields highlight how conflict resolution is one of the most fertile territories for workplace disciples to introduce their faith in a meaningful, understandable and useful manner. The late Dan Smick (founder of Marketplace Network, Inc.) wrote: "Most of the principles taught in Scripture about dealing with conflict and difficult people are directly applicable to the workplace. It just takes courage and discipline to use them: Keep your list of grievances short by seeking opportunities to resolve them as soon as possible; don't indulge your ungodly curiosity by participating in gossip; and keep the process of confronting someone as confidential as possible. Not all efforts at conflict resolution are going to have a happy ending, but you can go on with a clear conscience that in as much as it is under your control, you are at peace with all men."

When believers apply these conflict resolution principles to their relationships with other Christians, coworkers get the chance to see the bonds that link us instead of the dogma that divides us.

## Lesson 3 from the Trenches: Churches Should Cultivate Workplace Missionaries

Whether cubicles in New York, merchant shops in Zimbabwe, rice fields in

Thailand or assembly lines in Laos, the largest mission field in any country is its workforce. This field of workforce souls is rapidly becoming an unreached people group in its own right. In the middle of this vast need, sit “indigenous” Christians who are stunned by perceived restraints on their faith and discouraged by the antipathy exhibited by their coworkers and employers.

This problem is really an opportunity, and churches and seminaries are beginning to realize this. They are starting to see the parallel between traditional mission fields and the marketplace mission field—namely that indigenous missionaries are more effective in spreading the gospel. Who better to translate faith into understandable terms, who better able to minister inside an organization, than the believers already familiar with the language and the culture? This explains in large part, the rapid growth of the work/faith movement in today’s Christian circles. Still, workplace Christians often describe themselves as ill-equipped to share their faith with coworkers. So what can we learn from missionary efforts in order to resolve this problem?

History records four major missionary efforts to evangelize China: Alopen and the Nestorians in 635, John of Montecorvino and the Franciscans in 1294, the Jesuits in 1582 and the Protestant Robert Morrison of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1807). Each of these efforts made a fatal error: They sought to curry the favor of the leaders of

China in a trickle-down theory of evangelism (not uncommon among those involved in the work/faith movement today). While Morrison and others experienced more success than the previous efforts, this was largely because they included in their targets the general population and not just leaders.

Western missionaries eventually realized that the Gospel was more effectively spread by peers than by

## People don’t listen when they feel threatened. They defend themselves.

outsiders, and they began *training* these “insiders” to do the work themselves. The success of this thinking is seen in the explosive growth of the Chinese church after the Communists evicted foreign missionaries in the 1950s.

Training is the key for transforming workplace Christians into cross-cultural missionaries within in their own companies. But, what we’ve historically failed to do in the faith in the workplace movement is tap into the vast storehouse of missionary literature and experiences that are useful for equipping workplace Christians.

Many working Christians, and even some work/faith ministries, lament the fact that this training is not occurring in the church, but some of their

expectations are unrealistic. Most churches are small, and populated by people with a wide range of professions and jobs. Their diversity makes useful workplace classes challenging. Plus, there’s a long list of issues and topics demanding time and “shelf-space” in the Sunday School hour and in the pulpit. Parenting, marriage, discipleship, managing money, and learning spiritual disciplines all compete with workplace ministry for time, energy and attention.

Churches are designed for fellowship, and for equipping Christians to live and share their faith in their daily lives, and most do a solid job of that, objections from laity notwithstanding. The unique stresses that work places on us, and the unique opportunities that work offers us to serve God, requires special attention by ministries and by individuals able to bridge the gap between the church and the office. When those ministries and individuals partner with the local church instead of contributing to the complaints that the “church doesn’t understand the workplace,” they give the church access to detailed, timely and specific equipping tools, as well as information to use in the lives of its members. These ministries, in turn, can help disaffected Christian workers understand the important role the church plays in providing foundational teachings for how faith affects their jobs.

For these workplace ministries, the volumes of missionary biographies and training can

become templates for creating their own literature, which is rooted in life-tested, sacrifice-driven, Spirit-filled experiences, and not in the “short shelf life” tomes that use hot buttons and pop references to score quick points (often at the expense of the church).

### **Lesson 4 from the Trenches: Excellent Service is a Powerful Pre-evangelism Strategy**

Missionary biographies are rife with tales of men and women who broke new ground in unwelcoming cultures by making themselves useful to those cultures. The history of medical missions and other humanitarian efforts demonstrates that one of the most effective ways to reach into a culture is to become a useful thread in the tapestry of that culture.

Famed explorer Henry Stanley once wrote when surrounded by Africans wanting to know more about the “white man’s God”, *“Oh (for) some practical Christian who can...cure their diseases, build dwellings, teach farming and turn his hand to anything, like a sailor—this is the man who is wanted. Such a one, if he can be found, would become the saviour of Africa.”*

Along came Scotsman Alexander Mackay whom the Africans called “Mazunga-wa-Kazi,” (White-Man-At-Work). Moved by Henry Stanley’s plea, in 1878 Mackay settled into a land where slave-trading was still common—a tribe of Ugandans ruled by King M’tesa. In fact, M’tesa himself raided other villages to gather

slaves, selling them to outsiders who were offering guns and other items in exchange for human beings.

In the middle of this tragic time in Uganda’s history, Mackay set up his forge and began working. Villagers gathered around to peer at this stranger who worked with his hands. Everyone knew that work was for women (men in Uganda fought in battles or sat and talked with the king, but

## **African missionaries discovered that competency is a precursor to evangelism. The workplace implications are obvious.**

they never worked with their hands.) Yet here was Mazunga-wa-Kazi forging hoes. Already, he had axed and trail-blazed a 230-mile wagon road just to reach this people. “Turning his hand to anything,” Mackay captured the hearts of many of the villagers, impressing even King M’tesa. Then one day, the workplace missionary traded on his reputation and stood up to M’tesa about his slave trading. Confronting the King in the presence of a dangerous slave trader from the Middle East, Mackay challenged the king to be a

true leader to his people. The vicious M’tesa looked first to the slave trader, then to Mackay...and ended the raids and trades.

African missionaries aren’t only ones who understand that competency is a precursor to evangelism. Many working Christians understand this, too, evidenced by the fact that competency and utility have been cornerstones in much of the contemporary work/faith literature.

An emphasis must also be placed on the early selection of the places we choose to work—specifically, *where* we choose to be useful and competent. For many years now, campus ministry organizations have guided some of their brightest members into campus ministry upon graduation. This strategy enabled campus ministries to recruit high-caliber workers, making the university campus a wonderful success story in the annals of Christian outreach. But, the majority of college students who pass through these ministries train for roles in the general workplace. We can help these students view job selection the way overseas missionaries discover their missionary fields. Service and usefulness should become factors in career and relocation decisions. Students leaving college for careers will do so with a renewed purpose and an understanding that their work matters to God, even as they teach others that God matters to their work.

This strategy can be used to grow a network of Christians

who bond and equip each other. Imagine a campus minister at the University of Colorado emailing Marketplace Network in Boston with the names of students leaving his ministry to work in Boston. Think of the preparations Boston workplace Christians could make to welcome them. And, imagine the impact this could have on the newer generations of workers if they enter their fields not only as a means of worshipping God and fulfilling the Cultural Mandate, but also as a means of fulfilling the Great Commission in purposeful passion.

### **The Natives Don't Change Until the Missionary Does**

Let's conclude where we started—with John, our CPA cross-cultural missionary

friend. What does all this advice mean to him? John finally realized that the natives at his company were restless because they felt *threatened*. People don't listen when they feel threatened—they defend themselves.

So, John applied field-tested tactics of more experienced missionaries: He served his supervisors and colleagues with excellence using his accounting skills. He consciously set aside divisive theological discussions with his fellow Christians and quickly resolved conflict with coworkers. (That wasn't easy, but it was doable.) He "Wycliffed" his workplace, asking God to show him relevant cultural illustrations that his colleagues would understand. And, he encouraged other "indigenous" workplace believers to do the same.

The results? Some people still resisted any mention of John's faith, but many more felt comfortable opening up with him about their own beliefs. God finally connected through John, and productive dialogue followed. As the missionary changed, so too did some of the natives.

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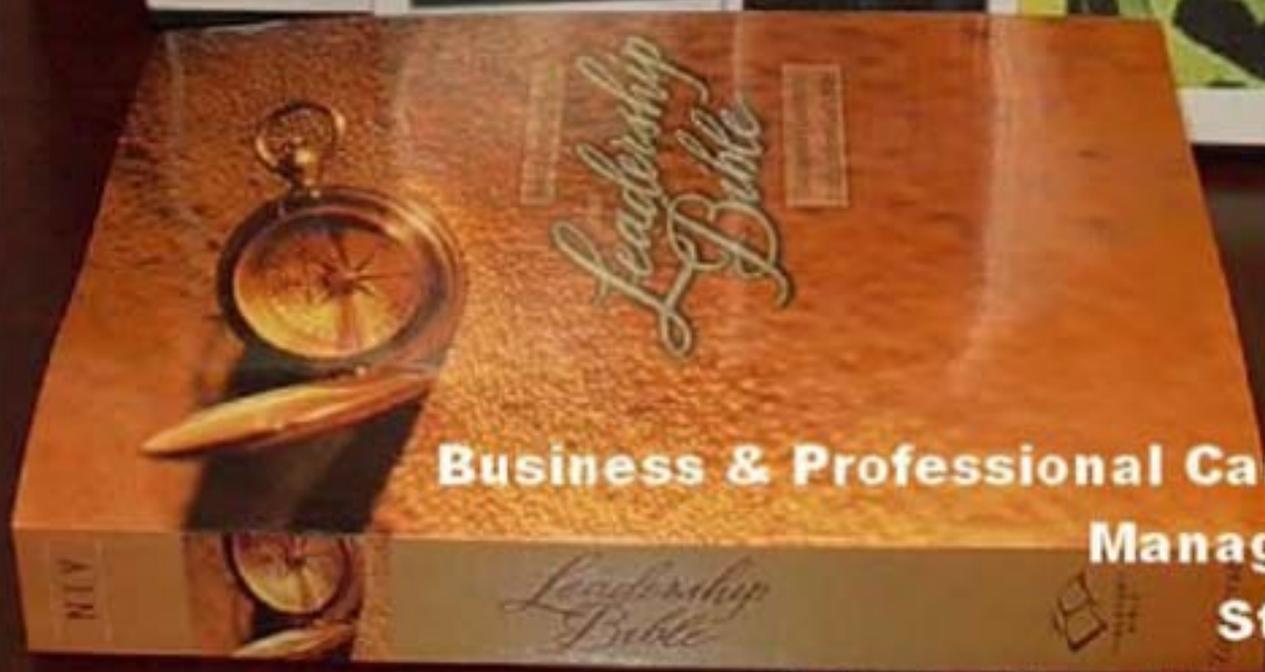
*Randy Kilgore worked for twenty years as a senior human resource manager before returning to seminary. He is now a Senior Writer at Marketplace Network, Inc., a work/faith ministry in Boston. His latest book is entitled: Talking about God in the 21st Century Marketplace. Copyright © 2004 Marketplace Network, Inc. Used by permission.*

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# Sexual Harassment

## Avoiding the “We Don’t Have a Problem” Mentality

Jodi Matthews

While similar small companies in the area were dealing with one or two reports of sexual harassment a year, Springfield, Inc. hadn’t fielded a single complaint. And, when his friends who managed other companies complained about the inconvenience involved in investigating these claims, John Scott, president of Springfield, boasted that their success was due to a carefully worded policy coupled with annual discrimination and sensitivity training for all employees. They had even adopted an “open door” policy in which any employee could approach the president about grievances. It was shocking then, when Stacy, a former employee of eight years who resigned on good terms to take a job with another company, filed a sexual harassment suit against Springfield—and won.

So, just how much do you know about sexual harassment in the workplace? Let’s test your knowledge with a few questions (but no asking your HR director for the answers).

- 1) What percentage of sexual harassment complaints received last year by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) were filed by men?
- 2) Under federal law, if a company having 15 employees is found guilty of *quid pro quo* harassment, what is the cap on compensatory damages?

- 3) What percentage of working women are sexually harassed?
- 4) How many of those cases will *not* be reported to the employer?

The answers are: Fifteen percent of complaints filed in

**The statistics suggest that, in all likelihood, someone in your organization is being sexually harassed.**

2003 with the EEOC came from men.<sup>5</sup> Companies having 15 employees can be charged \$50,000 in compensatory damages (this does not include state limitations or punitive damages which can run in the millions). Studies have shown that between 31 to 44% of female workers experience sexual harassment, and 60% do not report the problem.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> EEOC, “Sexual Harassment Charges EEOC & FEPAs Combined: FY 1992 - FY 2003,” March 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Capstone Communications, “Statistics on Sexual Harassment,” Louis Harris & Associates Telephone Poll. March 28, 1994; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, “Sexual Harassment in the Federal Workplace.” October 1995.

The last two figures indicate that in all probability, somewhere in your organization someone is being sexually harassed. If employers are liable even if workers do not alert their company to the problem (as U.S. courts have ruled in some cases), what can you do to protect yourself? And most importantly, what does scripture have to say about sexual harassment?

### Some Biblical Perspective

The Bible is quite clear how overseers are to treat females under their supervision. Paul charges Timothy, a young pastor under his discipleship, to “treat older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Timothy 5:2). This verse is, of course, important advice to apply personally, but it goes beyond that. God will hold us leaders responsible for ensuring that our managers are applying this principle. Why do you think Paul was instructing Timothy about God’s policy against sexual harassment? Quite possibly because God was going to hold Paul responsible for making sure that his own managers were acting in a godly fashion!

The U.S. court system has adopted this principle by holding employers liable for the sexually harassing

behavior of their managers. In 1998, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling in favor of a woman who had never reported the sexual harassment perpetrated by her supervisor, even though the company had a sexual harassment policy and procedure for filing complaints.<sup>7</sup> How is that fair? It is good to remember the advice Jesus gave in Matthew 5:25-26:

Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. I tell you the truth, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.

Put another way: Create a policy and a corporate culture that doesn't just allow, but *encourages* reports of harassment—*before* your workers take grievances to outsiders.

In the verses preceding Jesus' words, he placed responsibility for making amends upon us as believers, and not upon the offended person. Note that he made no distinction as to whether the offense was founded or not:

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something

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<sup>7</sup> *Burlington Industries v. Ellerth*, 123 F.3d 490 (1998).

against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

But how can you know that your "sister" (e.g., employee) has something against you if she doesn't report the sexual harassment?

## Many cases of sexual harassment are never reported because reporting it often leads to another type of harassment.

Find out. Find out what it is like to work in the cubicles downstairs day in and day out. See the workplace through your employees' eyes and not through your own managerial eyes. Take the initiative to ask your employees about sexual harassment. As I'll show later in this article, there are non-threatening ways of doing this.

### The Current Definition of Sexual Harassment

Before looking at how to construct a good policy, to monitor the environment, or to conduct an investigation, let's review the current definition of sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment is a form of sexual discrimination and as such, falls under the Title VII

of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to the EEOC, "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment."<sup>8</sup> While crass behavior is reprehensible, not all offensive behavior qualifies as sexual harassment. There exist three conditions of sexual harassment: The overtures are unwanted, the behavior adversely affects the victim's performance, and the discrimination is gender based, meaning that it makes the job more difficult for one gender than for the other.

In order to determine whether behavior has escalated to the level of sexual harassment, several U.S. federal circuit courts have adopted a "reasonable woman" test instead of the more gender neutral "reasonable person" test, in recognition that men and women view similar behavior differently. The emphasis therefore, is not upon the *intent* of the action by the offender but upon the *effect* it had on the one receiving it. Corporate harassment policies should reflect this distinction as well.

There are two types of sexual harassment and the extent of corporate liability depends

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<sup>8</sup> EEOC, "Sexual Harassment," January 2004.

upon which took place. *Quid pro quo* harassment occurs when job-related employment decisions are based on the refusal to give sexual favors. In such cases, an employer is liable for the actions of its supervisors, regardless of whether management knew of the incidents. The second type is the creation of a hostile work environment, and liability depends on the nature of the harassment. Behaviors which contribute to a hostile environment include, but are not limited to, the use of sexual innuendo, suggestive sounds, patting, brushing against another, leering, persistence in asking for a date when the request was previously denied, or the posting of pornographic material.

Keep in mind, sexual harassment is not limited to supervisors haranguing underlings. The “hostile work environment” variety can occur between client and employee, coworkers, even between members of the same gender. In fact, even an employee who is in the presence of pervasive offensive comments, but is not the target of those comments, may find the environment hostile and file a sexual harassment complaint with the EEOC.

### **Crafting Policy**

Most cases of sexual harassment are never reported—not because there isn’t a policy, but because the reporting process itself is viewed as a type of harassment. It takes courage for a victim to trust that she will not suffer even subtle forms of retaliation for coming forward. Common

concerns include “they care more about him than me,” “I’ll be labeled a troublemaker who is overly sensitive,” and “he’ll get a slap on the wrist and they’ll move me to another department.” The more clearly these concerns are addressed in the policy, the more comfortable victims will be in reporting problems. This can be accomplished in part, by incorporating a few key elements.

## **A complaint of harassment is not a problem to be dealt with, but an opportunity to honor God.**

Review your company policy and ask, does it...

- state the EEOC definition of sexual harassment and condemn the behavior?
- list examples of intolerable actions (“but not limited to” clause)?
- outline procedures for filing a report?
- explain how confidentiality will be maintained?
- give contact information of the person(s) to whom complaints should be made?
- state disciplinary actions for harassers (e.g., written reprimand, unpaid leave, dismissal)?
- explain that retaliation against those who file

reports will itself be treated as a violation of company policy?

It may be helpful to designate a woman as the contact for complaints, or at least make that an option. Her position should be high enough in the company to make it clear how serious a matter the company considers sexual harassment to be. If the woman is a middle manager who doesn’t have the ear of the president employees will understand that whatever her findings, they could easily be overridden for political reasons. Setting up an investigator without real authority suggests to women that the policy may be nothing more than a sham.

Finally, don’t require a victim to report the matter to her supervisor or to her supervisor’s supervisor, for that matter. If possible, give contacts in different departments. The chain of command the victim is under may be the very problem and if required to report to them, she will be left with no option but to take her complaint outside the firm.

### **Monitoring the Culture**

All right. So you’ve instituted a good policy—now what? Be vigilant in monitoring the culture. Almost all managers measure things like overtime hours or employee absenteeism because those things affect productivity and therefore profitability. Employee morale is also an important factor in productivity, so why don’t more managers monitor that?

One way to do this is to use your annual, anonymous employee satisfaction survey. Be careful that sexual harassment questions are not overt, though. Because people have different stereotypes of what constitutes harassment, do not use the term in your questions; rather, inquire about specific types of behavior. Sample questions are "Have you experienced any of the following?" followed by a checklist of unacceptable behaviors, and "Who behaved this way toward you?"

Just as there are symptoms when a person is ill, so too, a "sick" company culture will produce symptoms. Become adept identifying them. How people dress may be one indicator of a problem, as noted by Anne Levy, professor of law at Michigan State University:

If sexy dress is occurring in a workplace, it may in fact signal that there is some belief on the part of some people that they are judged and evaluated better in that workplace when they act in a sexual manner. Such a situation may raise a danger flag because it could mean that a discriminatory work environment has already been created and needs to be diffused.<sup>9</sup>

Another warning sign is an individual's declining performance, increased

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<sup>9</sup> Anne C. Levy, Michele A. Paludi, *Workplace Sexual Harassment*, (1997); (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall), p. 30.

absences, inability to concentrate, or changes in work habits. Before taking any adverse action against this person, do everything possible to discover why the change occurred.

Exit interviews are excellent opportunities to hear about problems of harassment from those who have experienced or witnessed it. If this is the first time you are hearing about an incident and the employee is unwilling to remain with the company despite offers to investigate and correct problems, proceed with a formal investigation anyway. It may put you in a better defensive position if you are sued later.

The most important ingredient in monitoring company culture is trust. Do your employees believe that you care about them as much as you care about their managers? They need to trust that you wouldn't perform a superficial investigation which would leave them open to more discrimination and embarrassment. How well has your company handled employee suggestions in other matters? If workers haven't been taken seriously in the past, why should they trust you with such an explosive issue?

### **Conducting an Investigation**

You've got a good policy and have been monitoring the environment. Now someone has filed a formal complaint. What does a fair and defensible investigation look like?

Company policy should designate who the investigator will be. If you are that investigator, examine your heart for lingering biases. Have you been the target of an unfair accusation? Perhaps you've had friends who were harassed. Remember, Jesus made removing the log from your own eye a condition to seeing clearly enough to remove the speck from another's eye (Luke 6:42).

Act quickly once the accuser has submitted a written statement of specific incidents along with dates, times and witnesses. Keep a written record of how the harassment affected her work performance. Send written notification that a confidential investigation is under way via certified mail to the home addresses of both the accuser and the accused. Interview each witness privately and take notes. The accused must be briefed of the charges and be given a chance to tell his side of the story. Once the investigation is complete, give a written report along with disciplinary recommendations (if the charges were founded) to the company president or human resources vice president. That executive then administers discipline.

Here's another tip: Be sensitive in the way you treat the victim. One of the worst things you can say to her is "maybe you misunderstood him." It is not your job to change the victim's mind about the matter (besides, that is unlikely to happen). You must investigate the facts and apply policy in a fair and professional manner. Making such a comment to an

employee will undermine her trust in your objectivity and only make your task more difficult.

The decision to report sexual harassment is hard, and if one woman runs into roadblocks when coming forward, other women are unlikely to report problems in the future. Remember, unreported incidents are a company's worst nightmare—not only because of the potential for lawsuits, but because unreported behavior makes it hard to address an unseen problem, which in turn saps

productivity and increases employee turnover.

Over the course of a year, follow up with the victim and the perpetrator. Ask the victim if she has experienced any more harassment and seek out the perpetrator's concerns as well. Show your employees that your care about them.

### **Check Your Perspective**

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind when combating sexual harassment in the workplace is this: A complaint of sexual harassment is not a burden to be dealt

with, but a chance to eradicate existing, but heretofore unseen corporate cultural problems—problems that lower morale as well as your organization's bottom line. Beyond that, a complaint is an opportunity to minister healing to your employees and nudge others toward more godly behavior. In fact, it's nothing less than an opportunity to please God.

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*Jodi Matthews is a pen name used by an author who works both as an editor and as a cross-cultural missionary in Asia and the United States.*



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# Making Righteous Judgments

Douglas Harrison-Mills

My office is located very near the local Anglican Cathedral. And for several months, I have been intrigued by the fact that the cathedral car park contains a collection of cars that most parishioners would consider to be "highly unsuitable" as the chosen mode of transport for high-ranking ecclesiastical staff.

To be precise, the car park contains the sort of cars that racing drivers (or racing wannabes) would be happy to use as their day-to-day street cars. They all have high performance engines, race-bred suspension and even rear spoilers.

[Comment: You never know when you'll need to "speed off" to choir practice, or a prayer meeting, or to chair a crisis meeting of the church jumble sale committee, I suppose.]

And the exterior colors are not exactly subtle, either. For example, there's burnt orange, fire engine red, the ubiquitous FBI black, lime green and something currently called "grape." To tell the truth, I haven't seen so many garish cars in one place since 1983, in Fort Worth, Texas, when I stayed at a hotel that was hosting a Mary Kay convention.

You almost get the feeling that the local churchmen (and

women) have been inhaling too much incense. But not so.

According to a neighbor of mine, who works for Anglicare and drives one of those boy-racer type cars, a few years ago, the august church commissioners discovered that the cars you would expect to find in the church fleet (i.e.,

**Nothing is ever as it seems, so we should not rush to judge anything—or anyone.**

bland, mid-range GM or Ford models) have lousy resale values. On the other hand, these expensive, brightly colored performance models keep their resale value extremely well.

So, when it comes to the local Anglican car fleet, in their quest for fiscal conservatism, the church bean-counters have thrown all other forms of conservatism out the window. Consequently, the local cathedral's use of purple will no longer be reserved solely for the bishop's vestments.

My point? You can't judge a book by its cover. And you obviously can't judge a

cathedral by its car park. Nothing is ever as it seems, which is why we should never rush to judge anything—or anyone. And in this media-crazy world, we have been programmed to make rush judgments on the basis of a 30-second sound bite.

That's what happened recently at the Olympic Games in Athens, when the Australian Women's Rowing "Eight" limped across the finish line, out of medal contention. The initial blame for this substandard effort was placed on one girl, who supposedly "ran out of gas" and stopped rowing before the finish line.

Since Australians take their sport very seriously (the atmosphere at the Sydney 2000 Olympics was described as something akin to "religious fervor"), she was vilified in the national media. The evening news was full of scenes of her team-mates pouring out their vitriol in front of the cameras. And one Australia Olympic legend, who was in Athens at the time, even called her efforts "un-Australian."

A day or two later, it emerged that the German coach -- or, to be more precise, his coaching style and pre-race instructions -- were to blame for the team's poor showing (the governing body of Australian Rowing is holding an official enquiry into his behavior). And it seems

that he was also the one who first jumped on this girl and then stirred up her teammates.

However, before the cameras arrived, he quickly disappeared, left the country, and hid out in Italy while other people took the blame.

[Oops. I just made an unrighteous judgment. See how easy it is?]

Another lesson about our propensity to rush to judgment comes from an episode on the New York subway.

Apparently, one day, some passengers started to get angry and criticize a father who was not imposing any kind of parental control over his very young children, who were running up and down the carriage, out of control, making a lot of noise and annoying all the people.

While all this mayhem was going on, the father just stared into space. But finally, the ire of the passengers snapped him out of it and he apologized, explaining that he and his children had just come from the hospital where they had heard that their wife and mother had died.

Obviously, like the “experts” who criticized the Australian woman rower, the people in the subway carriage did not have all the facts.

There's an old adage that, in war, the first casualty is truth. And in my experience with “conflict resolution.” I have discovered that, especially in the area of husband-wife relationships, there are always

three sides to every story: his, hers and the truth. And that goes for every other facet of life as well, including business.

So, judgment usually arises out of conflict. And, for a Christian, the only way to deal with conflict is through love. Also, in any conflict, it takes time for the truth (the whole truth, and nothing but the truth) to come to the surface. However, since love is patient

## Criticism comes out of either fear or anger—or at best, ignorance.

(1 Corinthians 13:4), we Christians should be willing to wait until all the facts are available to us.

But why do we judge or criticize? What is the primary motivation behind it?

I would suggest that, at worst, criticism comes out of either fear or anger—or at best, ignorance. Sometimes it comes out of our own feelings of inadequacy. And sometimes because we have something we wish to hide—and are hoping that the criticism of others will deflect any close scrutiny of our own actions.

In other words, nothing we can be proud of.

Jesus said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24, KJV). However, the

vast majority of judgments we make on a day-to-day basis would qualify as “unrighteous.” They are not motivated by faith, but by sin—which places us out of “right standing” with God.

Yes, we are called to “(one day) judge and govern the nations” (1 Corinthians 6:2). However, when we do, we will have to do it God's way, and make the kind of judgments that He would make. And since He is “omniscient” (i.e., all-knowing), He always has all the facts at His disposal before He makes any judgments. So that's where we should start.

Interestingly, the Amplified version of the above verse (John 7:24) instructs us “not [to] decide at a glance (superficially and by appearances); but judge fairly and righteously.” So if, for example, you ever judge people by the clothes they wear, or by the car they drive, or by the kind of house they live in, you are judging by “appearances,” which this scripture defines as “superficial.”

There's also another important reason why people criticize and judge others. They are arrogant enough to believe that they know better. And when they judge a brother or sister (in Christ) who has made a mistake, they do so motivated by the belief that they would never be “stupid enough” to make the same mistake, or else they would never have done it that way.

To those people, I would deliver Christ's words: “Do not judge and criticize and condemn others, so that you

may not be judged and criticized and condemned yourselves. For just as you judge and criticize and condemn others, you will be judged and criticized and condemned, and in accordance with the measure you [use to] deal out to others, it will be dealt out again to you” (Matthew 7:1-2).

It’s true: what you sow, you will eventually reap. How many times, for example, have you heard some parent criticize someone whose daughter has become pregnant out of wedlock, or whose children have been caught “doing drugs,” only to see their own children in the same predicament not long after?

And here’s another facet of Christ’s warning: if your neighbor (or business colleague) hears you criticize or judge some third party, that neighbor/colleague—if he or she is smart—will assume correctly that, one day, they too will fall victim to one of your critical diatribes. And they will never be able to trust you. Similarly, if you do judge someone “superficially,” others who recognize what you have done will in turn consider (i.e., judge) you to be a superficial kind of person.

Finally, on the commercial level, a rush to judgment may often result in the loss of a business opportunity, which is not clever. There are probably lots of people out there that God wants you to do business with—but who you have no desire to deal with, perhaps based on what you’ve heard about them.

When I went to work on Wall Street, I was told that the single reason behind 90 percent of failed deals is management ego. They did not fail because of the numbers being bad. Or because of a mismatch of business objectives and/or lack of market synergies. Just human ego.

## **A rush to judgment will often result in the loss of a business opportunity.**

So, it’s time to wake up and smell the coffee. The vast majority of business people are totally focused on their own needs—and not on yours. They are only interested in “No.1.” So they do not believe that they are on this planet to make you happy, or even to make you money. And if you ever wish to be successful in business, you need to learn how to deal with that—and not get offended, or judgmental.

And the first thing you need to learn is to keep your ears open—and your mouth shut.

Now, I’m not saying that you should be nice to every “toe rag” or piece of “pond scum” you come across in business. There may be times when you have to dissolve (or avoid) a business relationship. Instead, what I am saying is that you have to let God make the final

decision as to who are “pond scum” and who are not.

Because, if you will excuse me mixing my metaphors, some of the people who you think are “pigs” may turn out to be “goats.” And, as my old friend, Mike Starita always says, for Christians, the difference between “sheep” and “goats” is clear. You “feed” the sheep—and you “milk” the goats.

In conclusion, I am reminded of a story from the Victorian age, when several gentlemen were sitting around discussing whether or not they should go to the aid of a particular lady, who had found herself in some kind of trouble. It appears that this lady had become the object of gossip, and most of the men had decided against helping her. So they then proceeded to justify their actions (or inaction, as it were) by criticizing the lady’s character.

At that point, one of the older gentlemen reminded the group that an English gentleman was honor bound to assist any lady in trouble. And also honor bound never to question a lady’s character.

That’s a very good depiction of what God expects of the Body of Christ.

“Honor” is a word that is not heard very much these days. But Jesus used it often, especially during His last night with His disciples: “When you bear (produce) much fruit, My Father is honored and glorified, and you show and prove yourselves to be true followers of Mine” (John 15:8).

And later that evening, when Christ was addressing His Heavenly Father, the Amplified version states that He said, "They [the disciples minus Judas] have done Me honor; in them My glory is achieved]" (John 17:10).

Jewish scholars believe that, when you criticize or judge someone (unrighteously), you bring dishonor to three parties: firstly, the victim of your criticism; secondly, the person who is listening to you; and thirdly, yourself. However, I

believe that you also bring dishonor to three others who are, as we used to call them, "the unseen guests" (i.e., God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit).

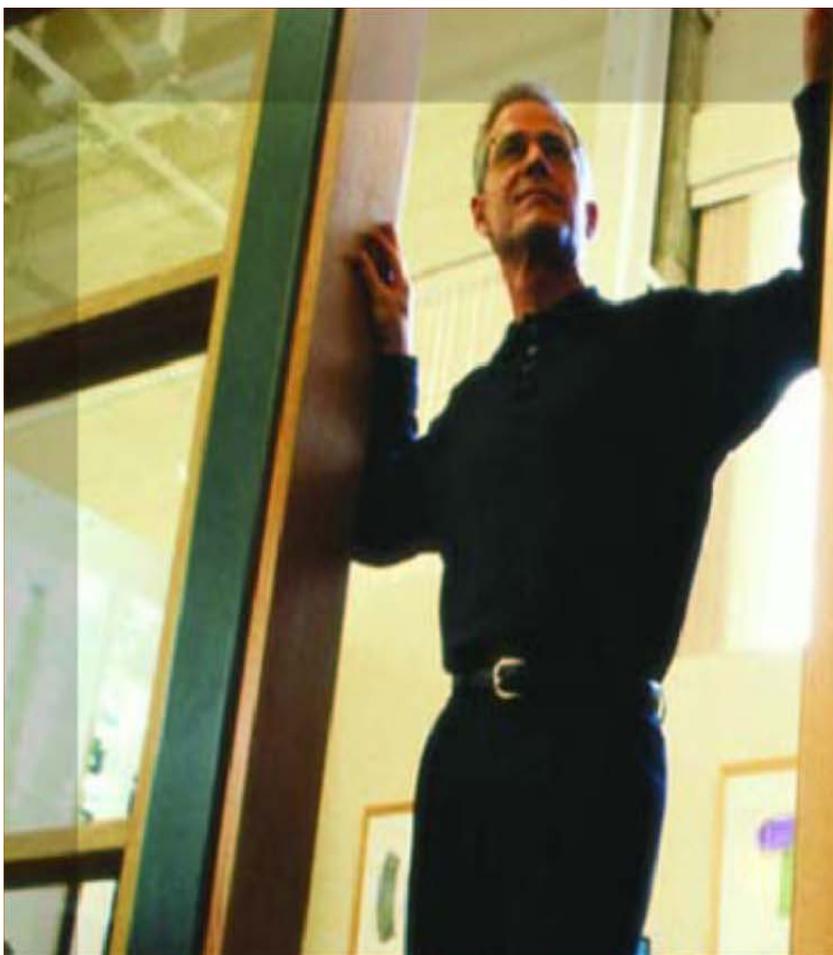
So what's my final piece of advice? Again, keep your mouth shut and your ears open.

That's often the best way to hear from God.

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*Douglas Harrison-Mills is an investment banker who also runs the Haversham Foundation, which publishes a free, fortnightly "e-pistle" for Christian business leaders. For more information, visit [www.haversham.org](http://www.haversham.org)*

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# Identifying Your Calling

Alistair Mackensie and Wayne Kirkland

Because of our involvement with Christian organizations we've seen many application forms—the detailed set of questions they hand to anyone who is considering joining their staff as a “full-time Christian worker.” Filling in these documents is a marathon activity. You labor with all sorts of probing questions, but no question is as difficult to pin down as the one that—in one form or another—asks: “What *call* do you feel to this work?”

## The Christian Call

The “call” has certainly become part of the language of evangelicals. We hear it in a number of ways: “I feel called to the ministry.” “My work is my calling.” “I sense the call of God on my life.” “God has called me to Africa.”

You don't have to be in a church too long to realize that if you aspire to leadership you'd better be prepared to explain what direct communication you've had from God. In some more legalistic circles this may even involve a request for specific Bible verses, prophetic words, or incidents which “prove” God has spoken to you.

The older word—“vocation”—used to have the same meaning. It comes from the Latin *vocation*, a calling. In modern use it usually refers to a person's career or profession. For example, “I'm thinking of taking up law as a vocation.”

However, it is still sometimes used (especially in Catholic circles) to mean God's call to a particular Christian role.

## Biblical Perspectives on “Calling”

The idea of vocation or calling is common in the Bible, but not in the way often thought. The biblical focus is less on what we do and more on who we

**The daily work we do is an expression of our calling, but it is not itself that calling.**

belong to. It concerns our identity. Our calling is to join someone rather to do something or go somewhere.

Biblical calling is not exclusive. It's not limited to pastors and ministers, cross-cultural missionaries and “full-time Christian workers.”

Here's the startling point. *All* of us are called.

And what is it that we're called to? The biblical answer is: to be followers of Jesus—his disciples. Any roles we play or tasks we do are simply our-workings of our call to follow him.

## Called to Belong, Be, and Do

Our primary calling is to belong—to God. In the Scriptures the word “calling” carries a sense of intimacy. For example, God states through his prophet Hosea, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son”(Hosea 11:1). Here is a call to a relationship with God, and with it, to belong to his family.

Matthew writes about Jesus, “Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John...Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him” (Matthew 4:21-22).

We are not called out of the world. We find our true identity as God's people in the world that God made. This is expressed through living a life of transformation, and of service. For example:

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13).

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace (Colossians 3:15).

For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

I urge to live a life worthy of the calling you have received (Ephesians 4:1).

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness and into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).

Os Guinness puts it this way:

Calling means that our lives are so lived as a summons of Christ that the expression of our personalities and the exercise of our spiritual gifts and natural talents are given direction and power precisely because they are not done for themselves, or for our families, or our businesses or even humankind, but for the Lord, who will hold us accountable for them.<sup>10</sup>

So, our calling or “vocation” is to belong to God. The daily work we do is an expression of our calling, *but it is not itself that calling*. However, “spiritual” it may appear, our daily activity is not (biblically speaking) our “vocation” or our calling. It is simply the way we put into practice our service for him.

Whether we clean floors or preach sermons is, in God’s

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<sup>10</sup> Os Guinness, “The Recovery of Vocation for Our Time”; unpublished audiotape.

eyes, not the issue. Whatever our work may be, his concern is how faithfully we live his way.

### **So How Did We Develop Such a Warped View of Calling and Vocation?**

Despite the best attempts of both Jesus and the apostle Paul, it took only a century or so before the Christian church became heavily influenced by the dualism of the surrounding

## **Whether we clean floors or preach sermons is not the issue. God’s real concern is how faithfully we live His way.**

Greco-Roman culture. As a result, certain ways of living came to be viewed as more spiritual and holy.

Soon only priests, monks and nuns were considered to have a “religious” vocation. They were called to the “contemplative life” of prayer—set apart from the active life of ordinary, everyday work.

Even Augustine, who praised the work of farmers, merchants and tradespeople, distinguished between the “active life” and the “contemplative life.” At times

it might be necessary to follow the active life but, according to Augustine, one should choose the other wherever possible.

This type of thinking encouraged both monasticism and professional church leadership. People were supposed to be “called” to these more “spiritual” roles. In other words, “calling” or vocation became almost exclusively defined by the roles of the clergy and religious orders.

It wasn’t until the Reformation that Martin Luther began to effectively challenge this dualism. He promoted the idea that all Christians are called (not just monks and clergy) and that daily work is part of our calling. Monasticism, Luther said, was not a unique class or special order. The work of monks and nuns was no higher in God’s eyes than the normal work, performed in sincere faith, or a farmer or housewife.

John Calvin later developed this idea of daily work as Christian calling. However, it wasn’t long before particular jobs (like farming and law) became specially identified as Christian vocations. Soon the concept that our calling is primarily about belonging to Jesus began to drift into the background.

Consequently, while the “calling” was once too narrowly defined, it now became so closely identified with particular occupations that the words “vocation,” “calling” and “profession” simply became synonyms for “job.” And then followed the

idea of “career,” which resulted in a person’s identity and status being defined by his or her paid job, without any reference to God at all.

The church has never really freed itself from the clergy / laity distinction. The two-tiered value system of the medieval church has largely remained in place. In church circles, a “real” calling is still thought to be one which involves a person in pastoral leadership or cross-cultural mission work. And because of our emphasis on being called to “do,” invariably a calling is seen as something that takes us out of our current situation (geographical or task) as God leads us into a new one.

### **Working Out Our Calling Where We Are**

It’s exactly this type of mentality that Paul spoke about in his first letter to the Corinthians. Certain people within the church had been teaching that if a married person really wanted to grow spiritually then he should leave his partner.

Paul took pains to dismiss this idea. In chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians he argues that we should not think that God’s call on our lives requires us to change our circumstances (relationships, location, social position, employment). On the contrary, the norm should be that we remain where we are already placed and allow God to transform us, our relationships, our tasks, and our whole perspectives within that context.

Paul is perfectly clear on the subject: “Each one should remain in the situation which he was in when God called him” (1 Corinthians 7:20).

**You have received a call to follow Jesus and to be in relationship with him. Your vocation is to work with him in order to transform your whole life.**

About this passage, Gordon Fee says,

The call to Christ has created such a change in one’s essential relationship (with God) that one does not need to change in other relationships (with people). These latter are transformed and given new meaning by the former. Thus one is not better off in one condition than in the other.<sup>11</sup>

Paul was not advocating that we should never change our circumstances—simply that the call to follow Jesus means we can serve Christ wherever

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon Fee, “1 Corinthians (NICNT) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 307.

we are. Our context for serving may indeed change, but rather than seeking change in our situation, we should be working to discover ways that our calling (to follow Jesus) can be lived out through our current circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

So, have you received a call? You certainly have, if you’ve set out to follow Jesus. For his call to you is a call to be in relationship with him and to be part of the family of God. Your vocation is to work with him in order to transform your whole life. As you do this you will increasingly find yourself about to serve him even further—by helping transform whatever part of the world you find yourself in.

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# Jesus on Hiring

Randy Kilgore

Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me." And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will." And He came to the disciples and found them sleeping ...

*Matthew 26:38-40a*

He picked his own team, and every one of them failed Him.

They jockeyed for position, questioned His objective, misunderstood His priorities and failed to comprehend the central purpose of His work. In the end, one of them sold Him out for reasons we still don't fully comprehend, and every one of the others deserted Him when given the chance to be faithful.

Still, remember, it was He who picked them.

So he waded patiently through their questions, even when those questions showed how little they knew of the labor they shared with Him. He protected them from the storms that beset them, even when they should have trusted He would do so without their pleas. He trained them carefully, always focused not on the failures of the moment among His tiny band of

workers, but rather on that moment in the future when the mission finally made its way from the paper of Scripture to their heads and hearts. He watched them fail on training runs, and trained them some more.

Maybe He should have picked better people. Or maybe He

**He picked them.  
They failed.  
And then he picked  
them again.**

should have replaced them when it was clear they failed to grasp the mission of the work.

It would seem especially true given their inability to pick up signs of the crisis building at Jerusalem. Tired from the work, and the emotions constantly swirling around being alongside Him, they even failed to keep Him company in the darkest hours before His most important work.

And then they were gone. Like mist at mid-day, they disappeared when He was threatened, and watched from a distance while He carried on without them.

Dejected, disconsolate, and reeling, they gathered after His

death without any idea of what to do next.

And then He did it. He picked them—*again*.

Jesus could have returned triumphant before Caesar; could have taunted the Roman soldiers who crucified Him and the high priests who belittled Him. Instead, He went back to the people who failed, and picked them again.

This time they understood. Armed not only with all the information He gave them before His triumph, but now also with the wisdom to put it in perspective, they did what they could not have done before: They built His church. And history records that we who know Him today stand as fruit of their labors, heirs to their strength. More than that, though, they were armed with the fact that He picked them—again.

Now, in the places where we work, a new generation of laborers has been called. For reasons we can't quite comprehend, He has plucked us out of the morass of sinful selfishness, and chosen us to join His labors.

With the same quiet patience He exhibited toward His first twelve, He trains us for the effort. And when we falter, when we let the irritations of life or the crises before us distract us from the tasks He

assigns us, He does something few managers are likely to do: *He picks us again.* How can we not serve a leader like that!

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