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# REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

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## BUILDING TRUST



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**Theory R: How Relationship Drives Employee Trust**

**I Was Suspicious of Christians Until I Met Arthur**

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When it comes to building trust at work, the principle of reaping and sowing is clearly in full operation: trust begets trust, distrust begets distrust. This article uses lessons from the books of Proverbs and Isaiah, as well as from the research on trust-building, to show that the transition to a more trusting work environment can begin entirely with you.

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While vice president of Pittron Steel Foundry, Alderson faced the monumental task of unraveling decades of mistrust between labor and management. Within twenty-one months he had moved the company from 35<sup>th</sup> to one of the top ten divisions in Textron. He shares with us in this article how he did it.

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1984. The hinge of my life. I found I believed in nothing. I trusted no one. And no one I knew was worth trusting. That is, until I met Arthur.

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Before making a career leap, consider sage advice from three biblical career-switchers: Jeremiah (priest, prophet, poet), Peter (fisherman turned evangelist), and Paul (Pharisee turned missionary and author).

*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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# Building Trust in Your Organization

Michael Zigarelli

Once upon a time there was a company called Eastern Airlines. It was always a reliable company, and it had hardworking employees, but eventually it found itself in some debt—\$2.5 billion worth to be exact. So in 1983, Eastern's president, Frank Borman, went to his workers and their unions to ask for some assistance. "The company's going broke," he told them. "But I can save it if you take a big pay cut." The workers said no. They remembered that just a few short years ago, Mr. Borman fought hard to freeze their wages, so they didn't trust him very much.

Then the president threatened the workers: "Make these concessions or I *will* take Eastern into bankruptcy and none of you will have jobs!" The workers consented. They really had little choice. But in exchange for the concessions, the workers got to own 25 percent of the airline.

By 1986, the workers decided that owning a company that was losing \$2 million a day was not such a good idea, so they demanded all of their wage concessions back. Now it was Mr. Borman's turn to say no. He did, however, give one thousand of the workers a permanent vacation. Then he sold the airline to another Frank, whose last name was Lorenzo.

Mr. Lorenzo and the unions did not work well together

either. In 1988, when he too desperately requested wage concessions, the workers voted by a 99 percent majority to reject his proposal. The next year, when the workers made contract demands, Mr. Lorenzo did the rejecting. He wouldn't budge, so the workers went on strike.

## A leader cultivates trust by first being trustworthy.

The strike lasted about two years and in the middle of it, Eastern's creditors went to court to get Mr. Lorenzo fired and replaced by a trustee. They got their trustee, but it was too late to stop the bleeding. A few months later, the creditors demanded the liquidation of the airline and in January of 1991, Eastern Airlines flew away forever. And no one lived happily ever after.

Eastern's civil war classically illustrates the destructive potential of labor-management distrust. But it is only one of an increasing number of examples. As we've moved toward a global marketplace and as business environments have become more competitive, organizations are under constant pressure to make rapid changes. Often

these changes include asking employees to modify the terms of their employment—to accept more job responsibilities, to work more hours, to be paid based on performance, to retrain, to work in teams, and so on. Perhaps this trend explains why a majority of employees now perceive that their employer has breached some aspect of the employment agreement.<sup>1</sup>

"Organizational trust," defined well in one leading management journal as the willingness of an employee and employer to be vulnerable to one another and to take risks for one another,<sup>2</sup> is fast becoming a critical determinant of organizational success. From a top-management perspective, it is a precursor to employee

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<sup>1</sup> See Sandra L. Robinson and Denise M. Rousseau, "Violating the Psychological Contract: Not the Exception But the Norm," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 15 no. 3 (1994): 245-59. See also Alan Farnham, "The Trust Gap: Corporate America Is Split by a Gulf Between Top Management and Everybody Else— in Pay, in Perks, and in Self-Importance," *Fortune*, 4 December 1989, 56.

<sup>2</sup> Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis, and F. David Schoorman, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," *Academy of Management Review*, 20, no. 3 (June 1995): 709-34.

acceptance of strategic initiatives, a *sine qua non* for the flexibility demanded by a dynamic business environment. From the perspective of lower-level managers, shrinking resources and staff make synergy between boss and subordinate more important than ever; but without trust, this synergy is limited.

At every level in every organization, though, the starting point for building this invisible, invaluable asset is always the same: *A leader cultivates trust by first being trustworthy.* This principle we learn from, among other place, the Book of Proverbs.

### A Proverb on Building Trust

Solomon, Israel's third king (after Saul and David), knew much about leadership. He stood at the nation's helm during a time of unprecedented prosperity. Among his three-thousand-plus proverbs, he wrote this about leadership:

*Love and faithfulness keep a king safe; through love his throne is made secure.*  
(Proverbs 20:28)

The impetus for these words of Solomon was most likely Israel's experience with its first two earthly kings. Saul, as we read in the book of 1 Samuel, was originally extolled as a great warrior and consummate leader by the people of Israel. So they made this tall and handsome, yet humble man their king (see 1 Samuel 10:20-27). But later, King Saul proved to be untrustworthy. He was unfaithful to God's instructions (e.g., 1 Samuel

13:9-13; 15:9-10) and displayed little love for his servants. For instance, in one colossal blunder of leadership, Saul demanded that until his army defeated the Philistines in battle, none of them could eat (1 Samuel 14:24).

The insecurity of Saul really began to accelerate after young

## Organizational trust is the willingness of an employee and employer to be vulnerable to one another.

David slew the mighty Goliath, prompting all of Israel to hail David's military prowess as superior to that of the king (1 Samuel 18:7). In response, a jealous Saul tried to kill David, but only succeeded in chasing him into exile for a decade. Ultimately, this unloving, unfaithful king lost his throne by committing suicide (1 Samuel 31:4).

By contrast, the first half of King David's forty-year reign was characterized by fastidious adherence to God's will and by the extension of loving acts toward his people (e.g., 2 Samuel 9). Indeed, no throne could have been more secure, as Israel during these years enjoyed a high standard of living, expanded its territory, and became the military powerhouse of the

neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> No doubt, had pollsters been around, they would have reported David's job-approval ratings in the high 90s.

But then, like Saul, David breached the trust of both God and man. We know the stories well. David adulterously cavorts with Bathsheba and then has her husband murdered. David's son Amnon rapes his half sister Tamar, and David does nothing about it. After stewing for two years over the injustice, David's son Absalom takes matters into his own hands, killing Amnon and seizing control of the kingdom from his father. As David's "love and faithfulness" unraveled, so did his throne.

Solomon's inspired reflection on these events under-girds the theory of effective, enduring leadership he chronicled in Proverbs 20:28. The attributes of love and faithfulness make a leader trustworthy, thereby engendering a reciprocal trust among his followers. Accordingly, the leader's influence is strengthened, "His throne is made secure."

### *Additional Perspective from Isaiah*

But admittedly, for all of its truth, this "theory" seems a bit underdeveloped. The proverb offers only broad strokes, with little practical guidance about what it means for a leader to be loving and faithful. Fortunately, though, these

<sup>3</sup> See 2 Samuel 5-10. See also John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3d.ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 195-207.



exact terms are unpacked for us in a verse that is undeniably linked to Proverbs 20:28.

Isaiah 16:5, one of Isaiah's many prophecies of the coming Messiah, illuminates God's definitions of loving and faithful: "In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it—one from the house of David—one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness."

*Here is the model*, Isaiah wrote. This is what the prototypical leader looks like. Anyone who aspires to godly leadership and who seeks a secure throne need look no further than the example of Jesus. Love your followers as Jesus loves His. Be as faithful to them as Jesus is to you. In doing so, you will establish a fundamental bond of trust with your people.

So from a Christian perspective, this is the compelling leadership lesson of Proverbs 20:28: Emulate Jesus for the people entrusted to you. That means regardless of the cultural norms where you work, and independent of how anyone treats you, model the love and faithfulness of Jesus in the management of your subordinates. Herein lies the foundation for building trust and insuring long-term leadership success.

## The Research on Organizational Trust

Since the 1950s, researchers have examined how this teaching operates in the work world, formally inquiring into how organizational trust is created, how it's undermined,

and how it's linked to organizational effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> They have concluded that employees view their relationship with an employer in terms of reciprocal obligations. Academics have called this the "psychological contract" of the workplace,<sup>5</sup>

## Employees perceive that there's an unwritten bargain in place between employer and employee. You need to honor that.

but in plain English, it simply means that employees perceive that there is an unwritten bargain in place between employer and employee. The employee's end of the bargain is to do a decent job and to function within the established rules of conduct for the workplace. In exchange for this, the employee believes the employer has obligations in the areas of pay, promotion, job security, work assignments, hours required, and so on.

Much organizational trust research focuses on what happens when these employee expectations are not met—

when, from the employee's perspective, the employer has breached the psychological contract. In the context of proverbial wisdom, the researchers have primarily asked: "What happens when an employee thinks that the employer has done something contrary to the instruction of Proverbs 20:28?"; that is, when the boss does not show love and faithfulness.

As might be anticipated, the consequences can be pretty grave. When an employee perceives a breach of trust on the part of management—for instance, when he does not get an expected pay raise with the annual review—the research predicts lower performance from this person and reduced "citizenship" behaviors (such as concern about the success of the organization, department, or work group; perceived obligations toward the employer; and courtesy toward those in management). In addition, researchers found a higher propensity for such employees to leave the company, contributing to higher turnover rates.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Diego Gambetta, ed., *Trust* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Sandra L. Robinson, "Trust and Breach of the Psychological Contract," *Administrative Science Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 4 (1996): 574-99.

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<sup>6</sup> Sandra L. Robinson, Matthew S. Kraatz, and Denise M. Rousseau, "Changing Obligations and the Psychological Contract: A Longitudinal Study," *Academy of Management Journal*, vol. 37, no. 1 (1994): 137-52; and Sandra L. Robinson and Elizabeth Wolfe Morrison, "Psychological Contracts and OCB: The Effects of Unfulfilled Obligations," *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1995): 289-98.

These studies further indicate that this employee will be less trusting of management in the future and, most importantly, *this employee will be more likely to perceive almost any future change in the status quo as a breach of management's end of the bargain.* That is, he may be quick to cry foul at even the most innocuous managerial decisions. And in the larger picture, when a mind-set of low trust permeates an organization's workforce, major consequences exist for organizational performance.

For example, let's say that a company had purchased some new computerized machinery to expedite the manufacturing process. Management is now explaining the rationale for the new system to the employees who will use it, pitching the technology as necessary to keep production costs down so the company can remain competitive. They're basically asking for workers to accept an initiative that will require their retraining, the developing of new skills, and the unease of setting aside their old way of doing things for a new way. What will be the employees' response?

#### *In a Work Culture of Low Trust*

If this is a work culture of low trust, both the research and common sense predict vehement resistance.

Employees will respond with comments like: "Why should I care about competition and costs? That's your problem, not mine." "New technology' is just management code for 'work faster!'" "How many jobs is this going to cost us?" Some may query sarcastically, "What

was the phone number of that labor union?" And, of course, many may ask, "What kind of raise comes with this?"

Self-serving attitudes and behaviors are common manifestations of a distrusting culture. They will stunt an organization's growth and effectiveness. Or they may yield even worse outcomes. As

## **The move to a more trusting culture can begin entirely with you.**

with Eastern Airlines, such attitudes can preclude the flexibility that is necessary for survival.

However, to the same extent that low trust produces a competitive disadvantage, high trust creates an advantage. In fact, as evidenced by one company, genuine trust between employer and employee can be leveraged into long-term industry domination.

### **A Case Study: Trust and Success at Lincoln Electric**

The Lincoln Electric Company in Cleveland has thrived where others have failed. Situated amidst long-abandoned factories in America's rust belt, this manufacturer of welding equipment has sustained both tremendous profitability and its industry leadership position for several decades.

Lincoln's product strategy has always been basic: Produce the highest quality product at the lowest cost possible and pass the savings along to the customer, thereby expanding demand. High efficiency, high market share, high profit. It sounds like the simplistic marketing plan of a college freshman writing a paper for his first business course. But at Lincoln, it's really that unvarnished.

Significantly, the key that has made Lincoln's system work since 1911 is an unswerving trust between management and workers, a symmetric belief that management and labor are a team working toward a common end. Lincoln's management has built that trust, in large part, by breaking down the barriers that so often kindle an "us-against-them" mentality in workers. For starters, at Lincoln there are no top management privileges: no executive dining room, no mountain retreats, and no corporate jets or company cars. Beyond these symbols, and more important to workers, the compensation structure is parallel for those at the top and the bottom. Just as factory workers' pay is variable with performance, so is management's pay. When corporate performance declines, as it did in the early 1990s, executive pay goes down commensurately. All take the hit together.

All share in the gains together as well. Each year since 1934, most of Lincoln's profit has gone into a bonus pool to be divided among its

approximately three thousand employees. This is not just your run-of-the-mill extra check at Christmas, though. Factory workers receive anywhere from a few thousand to tens of thousands of dollars from the profit-sharing plan. And workers are not only satisfied with the magnitude of the bonus, they are also satisfied that Lincoln is sharing its profits *equitably*. They believe they're receiving and will continue to receive a fair share of the company's prosperity. As such, Lincoln employees view their interest as aligned with those of management.

In addition to dismantling traditional barriers and sharing the wealth, the third ingredient in Lincoln's organizational trust formula is guaranteed lifetime employment. Anyone who has worked at Lincoln for two years or more is promised at least thirty hours of work each week. Many firms, like IBM, have made and broken such promises, but Lincoln has steadfastly honored theirs ever since 1951. Even during the drastic downturn of 1982-83 when Lincoln saw its sales volume drop 40 percent, the company was able to keep everyone employed.

Guaranteed employment is integral to the firm's success, because as management periodically updates equipment and redesigns the work system, employees do not resist. Management typically gets quick buy-in because employees fully trust that their jobs are secure.

The results of the Lincoln philosophy speak for

themselves. Lincoln Electric has been the eight-hundred-pound gorilla in the industry for as long as anyone can remember. In the process, they have driven out numerous competitors, including corporate behemoth General Electric. As for Lincoln's workforce, although some employees may not love their jobs, they are committed to making the system work. This is perhaps best evidenced by their productivity levels—more than two times the national average!

The linchpin to Lincoln's extraordinary commitment and efficiency is its culture of bilateral trust, a culture that management has effected and sustained by being trustworthy.<sup>7</sup>

### Trust Begets Trust

When it comes to building organizational trust, the principle of reaping and sowing is clearly in full operation. Trust begets trust. Distrust begets distrust.

So whether you're responsible for five people or five thousand, the move to a more trusting culture can begin entirely with you. It begins by intentionally adopting a Christ-like attitude toward

your subordinates and thereby permitting unconventional, trust-oriented questions to enter your decision making. Among these questions might be: "Will my decision have the effect of increasing or decreasing the trust that employees place in me?" "Will the manner in which I am reaching this decision make my employees suspicious?" And "If I were on the receiving end of this decision, would I trust that the decision maker had my best interests in mind?"

These are powerful questions, but they are also inconvenient ones. Taking them seriously will decelerate the process and, in many cases, will entail defending your unorthodox approach to skeptical higher-ups. It's important to remember, though, that things like convenience, expediency, and political palatability tend to be the enemies of "love and faithfulness." They, in essence, represent competing paradigms for making people-management decisions.

However, in this case, these secular paradigms are competing with the Word of God, a Word that says "Imitate Jesus and build trust."

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<sup>7</sup> This information on Lincoln Electric comes from the following sources: Randall S. Schuler, *Managing Human Resources*, 5th ed. (Minneapolis: West, 1995), 155-156, 425-438, 718-19; and "The Lincoln Electric Company," Harvard Business School case 9-376-028, (1974), [www.hbsp.harvard.edu](http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu)

# Theory R

## How Relationship Drives Employee Trust

Wayne Alderson and Nancy Alderson McDonnell

A human resource manager, new to her position, told me of a meeting with a group of employees in her plant. They were supposed to discuss the results of an opinion survey. She said, "I was so frustrated. I kept asking for input, but nobody would talk! They were like stones. Nobody would say anything!"

I asked, "Why do you suppose they were silent?"

She replied without much forethought, "I guess they don't trust us." Even as she gave her answer, she had her problem clearly defined.

Trust. Communication. Loyalty. Every executive want them in an organization because they are the keys to a healthy operation. Yet, in most cases, they are lacking or low.

Too many managers aren't doing what is required to endanger trust. They aren't communicating with their employees. They aren't doing what will build loyalty. And therefore, they have created no reason for their employees to respond to them in a trusting, openly communicative, loyal manner.

"What can you do to grow trust?" That question should be asked in virtually all corporations today. Programs won't fix trust. Valuing others

and building relationships will build trust. How can managers instill trust in their employees?

By first demonstrating acts of trust. Trust grows trust.

**"Beginning today,  
we'll make free  
gasoline available  
to any employee  
who needs it to get  
to work."**

### Build Trust by Extending Trust

As vice president of operations at the Pittron Steel Foundry, a division of Tectron, back in the 1970's, I was able to experience firsthand what can happen in a work environment when conscious choice, effort, and priority are given to shifting a management style from confrontation to reconciliation. A dramatic turnaround occurred that affected not only the bottom line but also the lives of the employees. The 64 percent increase in productivity improvement in a 21 month period were dramatic, but not as dramatic as seeing the impact on the families of

employees. The new emphasis on trusting relationships at work also created and promoted trusting relationships in the home environment.

Pennsylvania—as many areas—was hit hard by our nation's gasoline shortage in 1973. Within weeks, we became aware that a number of our Pittron Steel Foundry employees with excellent attendance records were having difficulty getting to work because they lacked access to fuel.

We had substantial gasoline reserves at the foundry, and I made a decision: "Beginning today, we'll make free gasoline available to any employee who needs it to get to work."

My palace guards fought the decision vehemently. The objections were voiced in the form of questions:

"Who will monitor this to make sure the gasoline is distributed fairly?" Answer: Nobody. We'll distribute gasoline on an honor system. No one will keep track of who gets what. We won't ask questions.

"How will we distribute the gasoline?" Answer: Workers will request what they need. We'll give them what they request as long as our supply lasts.



“Why not sell them gasoline?” Answer: Absenteeism costs us more than gasoline. We’ll give it away.

“What if someone abuses the system?” Answer: We’ll deal with that if it arises.

The employees also questioned the new directive. One of them said, “If you think we’re going to pay one dollar a gallon for gasoline, you’re crazy.” They automatically assumed management was out take advantage of the employees. (The going rate for gasoline was 31 cents a gallon.) They could hardly believe that the gasoline was being made available free.

More than one manager said to me, “This is going to cost us a lot of money.” Looking back, we found the facts showed just the opposite. We spent far less on gasoline than we would have lost in production had our employees not been able to get to work.

The flow of gasoline was an amazing thing to watch. Some employees requested one gallon or two gallons or five gallons. A few requested a fill-up but then used that gasoline to travel to and from work for two weeks. The employees requested what they truly needed. A few of the workers were so low on gas they ran out before they reached the pumps and had to be pushed the final few yards.

The worst fear, however, did come to pass. Pittron ran out of gas. One of my colleagues came bursting in to my office

one day with the news: “Are you the guy giving away free gasoline to your employees?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Look, I have 2,000 gallons of gas on hand. Do you want them?”

## **Workers were invited to burn the past by tossing any unwanted documents from their files into an incinerator.**

Those were sweet words. We replenished our supply, and by the time we needed gasoline again, the national shortage had eased to the point that free gas was no longer needed. In all, we gave away about 6,000 gallons. In their place emerged a corps of people with much higher morale.

What kind of message was sent to the employees?

### **Build Trust by Giving Opportunities to Vent**

A manager should create opportunities in which employees can vent. We know of one manager of a 3M rock-crushing plant who has become very intentional about doing this. At least once a quarter, he schedules a time when he meets with each shift in the employees’ break room. He

makes himself available for an informal discussion of problems, questions and ideas. For his part, he comes to the meeting with updated information about the status of the company.

The tone of the meeting is relaxed. A key question asked at each meeting is, “How are we doing as a plant in conveying love, dignity, and respect to one another?” Two principles are embodied in this manager’s actions: 1) opportunities for venting emotions and communicating ideas are periodic and 2) opportunities for venting emotions and communicating are informal.

Without venting, an employee can become completely absorbed by thoughts and feelings and plays them over and over again mentally. The more mental rehearsal, the more the employee tends to move toward an entrenched, and more extreme, position about them. Ultimately, a worker’s complete and fixed preoccupation with thoughts and feelings will affect performance in the workplace.

Thoughts and feelings will ultimately be expressed—even if their expression isn’t encouraged or desired. In encouraging the venting of feelings and communication of ideas, a manager not only lowers the emotional temperature of the workplace but gains valuable information to make changes before employees reach the point of burnout or boil over.

## Build Trust by Making Time for No-Agenda Listening

Dr. Sharell Mikesell, vice president for science and technology at Owens-Corning Work Headquarters, sent a copy of a memo to us. One of his scientists, whom Sharell described to us as an “extremely talented and fundamental research scientist,” attended one of our seminars.

The scientist wrote,

I have always believed that my first supervisor at DuPont was the finest supervisor I have ever had (no offense to the other fourteen or so previous or present supervisors intended) because of the way he interacted with me and other chemists in his group. One of the most significant and symbolic things he did was to walk into our labs unannounced—and provided one had somehow indicated time was available, and one was inclined to have a conversation—he would sit down with his cup of coffee at the conference table separating the two desks in the lab, put his feet up on the table and ask, “What’s hot?”

What ensued could be a technical discussion of current research (what was boiling in the hood), “Did you see the article on...?” “What did you think of X’s seminar yesterday in Central Research?” or “Do you need any help to get Y to let you use his explosion proof hood to scale up the diazirene synthesis for the patent

application verification?” I do not recall any conversation ever starting with “I think you should...” or “What is the status...?” It has only been in recent years that I realized how symbolic it was that conversations almost always took place on my turf and not in his office.

**Without venting, an employee can become completely absorbed by thoughts and feelings, and plays them over and over again mentally.**

One of the greatest expressions of love that a person can make is to listen without an agenda, and to do so intently, with full attention and interest.

People need to tell others what they are doing, how they are feeling, and how they are responding to life’s circumstances—not only at the dinner table or in prayer but on the job. It’s a part of how employees see themselves as workers, and good managers will recognize that giving employees an opportunity to tell “what’s hot” is going to be far more valuable than it may appear on the surface.

A manager who takes time for no-agenda listening, whether in a hallway, over coffee in an employee’s office or on the

plant floor, will discover numerous things about employees, and a good percentage of those things will relate to the employees’ lives away from work.

## The Exception Doesn’t Necessarily Become the Rule

Very often traditional managers say, “I can’t do this for one person because then I’ll have set a precedent, and I’ll have to do it for everybody.” Chances are, you won’t. The opposite approach is to deal with a specific problem in a specific way.

A worker named Big Cooper walked into my open-door office at Pittron one day and said, “Mr. Wayne, I have a problem.”

“What is it?” I asked.

“I need an advance in pay.”

Cooper’s request the day after payday was clearly against company policy, and he knew it. I heard myself responding, however, “That’s not a problem. What’s the real problem?” Cooper went on to explain that his wife had left him and he needed an advance in pay and also a few days off to go to her where she was staying out of state and see if he could reconcile the relationship.

Cooper was a hard, mean man at that time. He had a severe absenteeism problem, and one more absence would have given the company sufficient reason to fire him. As far as my palace guards were concerned, Cooper was in the

exact position they wanted him. They knew he was going to take the time off whether it was granted to him or not: therefore the company could fire him and not have any trouble if the dismissal resulted in a grievance. For a number of good reasons, I shouldn't have even considered giving Cooper time off.

I chose to take a risk, however, in an attempt to help the man and possibly help save his marriage. I gave Cooper the time off and the amount of money he needed.

My managers were irate. They felt certain that I was setting into motion a policy that was going to bring the company to its knees. And they argued that if word got around that one employee received money the day after payday and was able to side step the absenteeism policy, everybody would soon be lined up to do the same.

Cooper was the only employee who ever came to my requesting such an advance. Furthermore, he and his wife, Mildred, were able to reconcile their differences. He returned to the workplace more eager than ever to do a good job. His loyalty toward the foundry increased 1,000 percent. He never made another request for an advance and his absenteeism stopped.

Employees who make a request that they know is against company policy are in desperate need or are attempting to manipulate management for their own purposes. A manager can usually tell the difference.

In the first place, people who attempt to manipulate the system are likely to make repeated requests that buck company policy. They aren't likely to abuse the system once and then let the matter rest. In the second place, people who attempt to circumvent or manipulate company policy usually take great pride in the accomplishment (if successful).

## **Closing the gap costs something. It means putting your reputation on the line, being willing to take risks to do what's right.**

They tend to spread the news widely that they have succeeded in outfoxing or outmaneuvering management. A manager may be fooled once by such persons but rarely twice. Most employees know that too.

And what about employees who are desperate? The last thing on their minds is job performance. What would have happened if I had said no to Cooper when he requested an advance in pay and a few days off? I would have lost a worker who had years with the company, was well trained, and did good work. The company would have spent a lot more money in hiring and training his replacement than in giving him the advance.

Had the employee opted to stay at work, he certainly wouldn't have been happy. He would have been emotionally away, consumed by his problem. He would no doubt have spent part of his energy on solving it rather than giving 100 percent to the work at hand. And, he would also have been resentful of the fact that he was forced to stay at work. That frustration certainly wouldn't have had a positive impact on productivity, the quality of his work, or team morale.

People have *individual* needs. We need to deal with them as such.

### **Radical Demonstrations of Trust**

We encourage managers to create opportunities for a fresh start.

One of the most dramatic examples of a manager doing this happened at a Fortune 500 plant. The head of the division declared an incinerator day for all personnel files. Employees were given their own personal files to peruse and the privilege of purging those files of any information that they didn't want in them.

On the way out of the plant that day, workers were invited to burn the past by tossing any unwanted documents from their files into an incinerator that had been placed in the courtyard. All records about absenteeism were erased, and a new program of presenteeism, with rewards for good attendance records, was implemented.

The division head simultaneously announced that from that day forward, management would make a concerted effort to add positive information to personnel files so that a personnel folder would reflect a more complete profile of an individual's performance.

## **Beware the Palace Guards**

Palace guards are persons in management who choose to consciously insulate the top person from the heartbeat of the organization. They can be the administrators, managers, assistants, bureaucrats—people in power—who tend to insulate and isolate top-level administrators from the people who do the work. They operate as gatekeepers. It is generally to their political advantage to keep top-level administrators from mingling with employees and vice versa. Problems that might be solved within five minutes in a face-to-face conversation between the president of a company and a worker on the line can be tied up for months in round after round of meetings and memos.

The reason of course for having palace guards, of course, is primarily one of time. Top-level administrators don't have the time that they might like to spend with each employee. Tradition also has its place. Employees have

frequently been trained to be uncomfortable around top-level administrators. Thus, the bigger the organization, the larger the cadre of palace guards tends to be.

At Pittron, many of the symbolic actions I demonstrated resulted in my having direct contact with the frontline supervisors and the employees. Those managers who were palace guards weren't comfortable with my non-conventional style, circumventing at times the organizational chart. I intuitively understood, however, that if the company was to succeed we had to reach the heart of the organization. I forged ahead and chose to walk among the people and to identify the needs of the rank-and-file employees and the frontline supervisors.

In the Old Testament of the Bible we find these words: "So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one" (Ezek. 22:30).

What does it mean to make a wall and stand in the gap? It means to be a bridge builder, a peacemaker, one who closes in the wall and breaches the break in it with one's life.

Closing a gap costs something. It means putting your reputation on the line, being

willing to take a risk to do what is right. There's usually a price to pay, at least initially, in terms of time and effort. Closing a gap means being vulnerable to others. Closing a gap means being a peacemaker.

Those who will close the gaps, however, are true heroes. They are the ones who bring about reconciliation. And reconciliation flows from love, dignity and respect.

These are the ways to grow trust.

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*Adapted from Theory R Management (Thomas Nelson). Copyright 1994 by Wayne Alderson and Nancy Alderson McDonnell. Used by permission.*

*As vice president of operations at Pittron Steel Foundry, a division of Texaco in the early 1970s, Wayne Alderson steered the company from the brink of disaster by employing practical demonstrations of love, dignity and respect to his union workers. The principles Alderson employed became the foundation of his Value the Person Consultants, a firm devoted to teaching the importance of creating equality relationships in business environments. His clients include 3M, Heinz, Owings-Corning, Ford and others. Alderson can be reached at [walderson@valueoftheperson.com](mailto:walderson@valueoftheperson.com).*

# I Was Suspicious of Christians Until I Met Arthur

James O'Donnell

1984. The hinge of my life. It was the year my father died. It was the year my employer cut my salary, but only after I had hit the pay ball out of the park. It was the year, too, when our nine year old son began talking about killing himself. And it was the year I decided to divorce my wife, Lizzie.

1984 was the year in which I found I believed in nothing. I trusted no one. And no one I knew was worth trusting.

That is, until I met Arthur.

In meeting Arthur I awoke as if from a long sleep. From a lifetime of self-absorption, I awoke to learn about the purpose and meaning of life. I met Jesus on the transit trains to NYC through Arthur.

## Weekday Warrior

My office on the 57<sup>th</sup> floor of a midtown Manhattan skyscraper may have been lofty, but I still looked up to those whose power exceeded mine. I worked with lots of very smart people who, like myself, had Ivy League educations. We competed ferociously with each other and knew lots about yachts, designer suits, jumbo mortgages and discounted cash flows.

I don't remember hearing one thing about philosophical or spiritual things, except perhaps for some nuggets that might

get a laugh at a party. Yet, here we were, running the world. Or at least making enough money to think we were. Who knew more than we did about real life and how to get and keep the good life than people like us?

**I never met a man before who shared personal details of his life to help a younger friend. I began to wonder, as nice as this guy was, "What's his angle?"**

Yet, as I look back on those years I'm astounded at how little I knew about anything worth knowing. How poor, too, were my instincts—other than in business—about how to learn and grow in a confusing and challenging world. But, then, I didn't know anyone else who knew more than I did.

I do remember occasionally overhearing conversations about important things. A perk of my job gave me membership in a swanky health club. One day I overheard a guy,

obviously in pain and feeling embarrassment, telling one of his buddies he was divorcing. I tried to be inconspicuous, retying my sneakers or adjusting my socks. I wanted to know what another bright, successful guy from my world might tell his friend about the trauma he was heading into.

Conversations like this were rare in the world I belonged to. We didn't talk about feelings or failure. Those kinds of things were woman stuff. They weren't shared among us heavy hitters because we knew that appearances were reality. Seeming to be out of control was a good as being out of control. We avoided letting others know a lot about us, for knowledge could be used against us. I ached for wisdom on divorce. But as was almost always the case back then, my listening was worthless. The older guy said nothing to his hurting buddy, except that "it was probably for the best." And that, "Hey, we learn from such things."

Another time, I found myself in an important business meeting in which the senior executive and his human resource guy got caught up in a very audible conversation before the meeting started. It was about an executive the senior fellow wanted fired. The HR manager said research suggested it best be done on a Monday, especially considering the man's level.



"On a Monday?" Why, Phil?" the senior executive demanded.

"Well, it gives the poor guy the rest of the week to absorb the shock. He can tell his family when he's ready. Saves some dignity. He might even keep leaving for work for a few days without his family's knowing he got fired."

The senior executive was unimpressed. "So what am I supposed to do? Wait to tell him and ruin *my* weekend?"

In those days I never wasted time thinking about anybody but myself, but what I'd overheard in these conversations struck me as selfish, even then. Some instinct in me was bubbling up whispering "Not this."

My worldview was like of those around me. We were the warriors who left our families in the lovely suburbs and rode into battle each day. We were the ones who'd made it in life—not our spouse, nor the kids, nor our underlings. We were the ones entitled to the fruits of our accomplishments. At best, others lived off us or received a share of the dividends from our reflected glory, *if* they behaved. Yet, at home, we weren't always as revered as we were at work. Lizzie even talked back to me and increasingly went her own way. I resented being unappreciated after all I afforded her and the kids.

I was simply a jerk who didn't know it.

## Conversations with Arthur

I had no adult male friends in the fall of 1984 and wasn't looking for any, either. But as things worked out, on many a morning I found myself running into Arthur during the few minutes it took me to get to the train station. Sometimes we walked together, never by plan, but simply because we happened to be on the same schedule.

## Arthur was the first person I met who actually thought about his beliefs and his actions.

He was about twenty years older than I, and a lawyer on Wall Street. We both had two degrees from Ivy League schools, but his came from Harvard—in nuclear physics and law no less. That's what first got my attention. His background gave him instant credibility. I believed in that old saying: "You can always tell a Harvard man, but you can't tell him much."

In the course of our commutes into New York City, Arthur asked me important questions and shared his own life. As I look back, I think he must have chosen the words he shared with me with the utmost care. He'd share a bit about himself and then ask me about my own life, always listening for my motivations.

We began meeting for lunch in the city once in awhile. As time went on, he shared himself with me with what seemed like an almost uncomfortable level of vulnerability. But Arthur did it naturally. He wasn't morbidly self-critical, nor was he an emotional exhibitionist. No, he was simply honest and appropriate in what he shared. Even helpful.

I'd never met a man before who shared personal details of his life to help a younger friend. I began to wonder, nice as this guy was, "What is his 'angle'?" To me, everybody had an angle, because information was power. Vulnerability was weakness. Or stupidity. Yet here was a Wall Street lawyer telling me about his life. Even his divorce.

Yes, his divorce.

And I wanted to know about his divorce. I wanted to know everything! I was on the edge of divorcing Lizzie. When Arthur's first wife told him she wanted a divorce, Arthur recalled he thought it would be a mistake, but, somehow, he didn't fight it. So they divorced. Simple as that. Seemed back then, Arthur didn't believe in much of anything either. Then almost as a throwaway, he said, "It would be several years before I met Jesus—"

*"Whoa! 'Met Jesus?!' Did I hear that right? Is Arthur kidding?"* I wondered, feeling my palms getting sweaty. He continued by explaining that although he and his wife had attended church regularly and he had been an elder, he believed in

nothing. I sat there speechless for a moment. Arthur was the first guy who talked like this, who talked about things other than pro sports or where to get good ribs.

Arthur's honesty made a space in my own life into which I felt I could share a little bit about myself and my struggles. So I 'fessed up that I was thinking of divorcing Lizzie. He continued to listen and asked why. Then he delivered the clincher: "I'll pray for you."

There it was again—like slamming a fist on a table full of soup bowls and watching the soup fly all over the linen. That's how the prayer comment and the Jesus comment sounded to me. They were embarrassing.

When Arthur mentioned "Jesus" and told me he would "pray for me," it was as if he'd just said he'd pooped in his pants: It was simply not what polite people I knew talked about. Yet, there he was, hoisting up his faith like dirty underwear on a flagpole for all to see.

But no sooner had I heard evidence of Arthur's faith than I began to think about my own. I began to wonder: "If a bus ran over me on Madison Avenue, and the morgue called Lizzie to fill out my death certificate, what box on the form would she tell them to check for my religion?"

Arthur was the first person I met who actually thought about his beliefs *and* his actions.

## Penetrating an Inflexible Heart

I accepted an invitation from Arthur to attend a small businessmen's group at his church. I planned to go once for his sake, to show him what a good guy I was, and I took my checkbook along, thinking maybe—just maybe—all along Arthur only wanted a donation for some cause but was too polite to ask.

**"What's your heart set on?" Arthur warned me to be very careful before answering, because few of us think deeply about what we really want.**

I was nervous because I thought I might be stepping into the world of the truly looney or that I'd be humiliated when asked my favorite Bible verse or hymn. Or maybe, God forbid, to pray out loud! But nothing like that happened. For, I was being introduced to the courtesy of eternal love.

After Arthur introduced me, the men greeted me warmly. Then these six men let me be a fly on the wall. They went about sharing a little of their personal lives as friends and offered concern for each other. Then they prayed out loud for the health of each other and

their families, and that their work would glorify God. They also prayed that they would face life's challenges with courage, and finally closed with prayer for the needs of the larger world. One even included me in his simple prayer, thanking God that I had joined them that morning, hoping that my life might be blessed.

Then it was over. It was like a warm bath, but one the likes of which I'd never experienced before. Arthur thanked me for coming and without any pleading, invited me to come again if I wanted to. That was Arthur's way: never insisting, never embarrassing me by pointing out what I didn't know.

By February 1985, I'd known Arthur six months. He told me that he hadn't expected coming to faith either. In a moment of weakness long after his divorce, he'd agreed to go on a church retreat. And it was that retreat changed his life. Now he suggested I go on such a retreat.

I did go and found it deeply affecting. But I didn't know if it was real or just a temporary after-affect from being around a bunch of nice men. Had my weekend been affected...or had my *life* been changed? It didn't take long before my first test.

## The Test of True Change

On Tuesday, April 30, 1985 Lizzie came upstairs to tell me yet again that she was going out that night to a board of education meeting. By then the poor woman must have been

weary from the delicate struggle to find words that didn't detonate an explosion. My attitudes were sometimes destructive to my wife and to our marriage. But I didn't seem to care, and even when I did, I felt both unable and unwilling to change.

She tiptoed into our library and asked, "If it would be all right?" The question was rhetorical, I'd long felt. She knew it was never all right, but she'd go anyway. In the past, I greeted this ritual dishonesty with sarcasm and anger. But now just two days after the retreat and praying that somehow I might really begin to be different, I had an opportunity to show Lizzie. It was my first, real chance to show her how sorry I was for the many times I'd made her feel lousy when all she wanted to do was help our troubled son.

I jumped up from my desk, hugged her, and told her, "Have a great time, and don't worry about when you get home." Hearing me say that, she drew back slowly. Looking puzzled, she asked, "Are you feeling okay?"

When Lizzie came home at 10:30 that night, I was in bed trying to sleep. But this time, I was *really* trying to sleep. Over the years, I had honed my awful skills in imposing the maximum degree of pain on Lizzie while never laying a hand on her to physically abuse her. At moments like these I would fly into a rage. Though I could never keep her from going to her stupid meetings, I could and did practice my ugly drill once she got back. It was

a mean and destructive payback for having left me that night.

But this night, through the grace of God and probably the prayers of Arthur, I didn't erupt. I simply asked Lizzie, in the dark, after she was in bed, whether she had a good meeting.

## **I trusted him because he was real. And that made all the difference.**

She sat bolt upright in bed and turned on the light.

"What has happened to you?" she demanded. She seemed more scared from the fact I was different than that I would rail against her again. "I don't know," I said. But I hoped whatever it was, it would be real and permanent. I told her again that I wanted to become a better husband and father. And, once more, I told her I was sorry for the pain I had caused her over the years. I also told her I loved her.

### **Loving the Hard Questions**

Arthur wasn't one of those little, old Italian ladies I saw on the streets reciting the rosary. He wasn't one of those sandwich-board guys, handing out leaflets about going to hell. But he was speaking the same code. Arthur showed me the God I didn't yet believe in. He showed me Jesus in the only

way I would then have been able to understand him—through friendship with a gracious human being.

It was Arthur who taught me to love the hard questions, or at least tolerate them, and not run, or hide from them. Arthur asked me the deep questions of life, three of which I'll share with you.

First, he asked, "What is your heart set on?" Arthur warned me to be very careful before answering this question because few of us think deeply enough about what we want. He said that for good or bad, whatever we set our hearts on is most likely what we will get—or what we'll become.

A second question Arthur wanted me to think about was, "What do you most deeply trust?" When I met Arthur, I trusted no one. And since I didn't know anything or anyone more important, I trusted in me. And my money. And in my ability to build networks.

Finally, Arthur asked me, "What are you most afraid of?" Is it looking foolish? Or being asked something you don't know? Maybe not fitting in? Appearing uncool or different? Losing your job? Running out of money? The death of a loved one?

My friendship with Arthur taught me that an idealist can be grounded in reality. I didn't expect that from a person of faith. I once thought of people of faith as brittle, as tourists in this rough world where I lived and competed. They might say they were "in this world but

not of it,” but too often, they seemed out of touch and sometimes out of their minds.

But not Arthur. He was the first person of faith to share his Harvard accomplishments with me as well as the sadness of his divorce. I trusted him because

he was real. And that made all the difference.

---

*Adapted from Walking with Arthur (Northfield Publishing). Copyright 2005 by James O'Donnell. Used by permission.*

*James O'Donnell, associate professor and executive in-residence at Huntington College in Indiana, was for years a senior executive at Fidelity Investments and Chemical Bank. He has contributed to The Wall Street Journal, Barron's and Fortune.*

## In Arthur's Own Words

Jim O'Donnell is a dear friend. But frankly, I do not recognize the Arthur depicted. Rather his characterization of the person he calls Arthur is simply far from the image I have of myself. To me, the substance of what Jim recalls sounds more like the work of the Holy Spirit ... I find it wonderful that I may have been used in such a way, but I never set out to make Jim my “project” on behalf of God.

The real story here is that the author and I met, and we became friends—trusting friends. I happened to bring into that friendship my own relatively new relationship with God. I had a slight head start over Jim on this walk of faith not because I am twenty years his senior but because I had been truly changed a few months earlier by my own *Tres Dias'* weekend [a men's church retreat].\*\*

Having been spiritually awakened on my own weekend, I learned a new truth: that one does not come to know and grow in God alone. A friend such as Jim challenged me to confront my own mistakes and shortcomings. He had a mind that could help me understand the Bible as we read it together. I never had the feeling I was leading him. Rather, I felt I was learning from him.

I sense that the Holy Spirit has only committed one of his usual, yet often unnoticed, miracles in bringing Jim O'Donnell and Arthur together. The Spirit colored our perceptions of one another as the motivating force in the relationship, only to spur on our mutual growth and maturity.

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\*\* *Tres Dias, Spanish for “three days,” is the three-day weekend we experienced—an ecumenical, lay-led, offspring of Cursillo De Christandad (“a short course in Christian living”). The Cursillo has its roots in the Spanish Catholic church, with the first Cursillo weekend held in 1949. The program was brought to the US by Spanish fliers training in Texas. Today Tres Dias communities thrive in many states and foreign countries.*

# Biblical Principles for Changing Careers

Brian Ray

Thinking about changing careers? You aren't alone. In fact, one out of four of us is either contemplating a career change or is searching for a new one.

Small wonder—the latest job satisfaction survey of 5,000 households clearly shows that only 14% of U.S. workers are “very satisfied” (The Conference Board, February 28, 2005) and job dissatisfaction is on the rise. Did you know that people entering the workforce today will on average switch careers three to five times, and change jobs seven to 15 times? Welcome to the new world of work in America!

Career switching is becoming commonplace, not only for those who've just entered the workforce, but increasingly among workers midway through their careers—folk who have plenty of experience in a single industry. During a recent “Money Matters” radio program, a man from New York confessed, “I am 40 years old, have 20 years in public service in local government, and am back in college to get a degree in financial services. I'd like to become a certified financial planner and long-term want to move into investment banking. Is this feasible at this time in my life?”

Yes, even for someone with 20 years of experience in another

field, it is possible to make the switch. In our rapidly changing economy, sometimes it becomes necessary for survival. Unfortunately, there are no quick answers about how to make a career change

**Our natural tendency while standing at a crossroads is either to flee or to run through as fast as possible. Both are bad ideas.**

successfully. What I can offer are practical tips and three Biblical principles which have proven helpful in guiding many others through their tenuous journeys into new careers.

## **Principle 1: Seek Work Slowly, if Possible**

*“This is what the LORD says: Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls...”*

*Jeremiah 6:16*

Crossroads are decisive moments in our lives—moments which change our lives forever and if we let them, produce a lot of anxiety. Our natural tendency while standing at a crossroads is either to flee or to run through as fast as possible. But notice the verbs in this verse: 1) stand, 2) look and ask, 3) walk.

The first guiding principle when contemplating a career change is to look and ask. Take a few minutes to analyze yourself and your situation. Why do you want another career? Is the issue your job, or is it you? Do you want to make a change because workplace relationships seem askew? Does your boss behave badly? Or, are you behaving badly? How about workload—does the workload intrude on family time and make maintaining good relationships difficult?

Part of looking and asking is examining your responsibilities and skill sets. The things that you do best (and think outside the workplace on this one)—are they the same skills your employer needs most? How about the level of challenge—do your responsibilities either overwhelm or not challenge enough? Is the industry declining or jobs being outsourced? Perhaps your family has grown and requires more money, or caring for



aging parents necessitates more flexibility in work schedule.

Whatever the reason, make a list of your thoughts and get input from others. Most

## **My gifts are not for me; they are for other people. So if I'm not using them, I'm not being a good steward of what God has given me.**

importantly, hold it up to God in prayer. As the Lord shows you the good way, walk in it. Do not respond as Israelites did in Jeremiah 6:16: "But you said, 'We will not walk in it.'" Trust and obey, even if it means *not* changing jobs.

Dave Frakes, applied the principle of standing, looking and asking. He describes his mid-life career transition as "a blinding flash" even though it took several months. After seven years in management, the organization for which Dave worked went through a merger and re-organization. "One morning I came to work at 8, and by 9, my job was eliminated."

Dave says, "I had to assess where I was in my life and my career. I re-tested my skills and personality. It showed the same results as before, but with some subtle changes. I started asking for input—the best of which came from my spouse

who knows me better than anyone else, and course, I bounced ideas off my friends. Educating kept coming up. I had always done some, but never full-time. Among other odd jobs, I tried substitute teaching in a high school and liked the environment with students. Then a job opened up at a college in my town. I got the job, tried it, and that experience clinched it. It was a hand-in-glove fit for me. This January I took a full-time position as an instructor at Toccoa Falls College and teach a variety of courses in the School of Communications."

So, how did Dave know that this was the right path, as the verse says? Dave explains, "God confirmed it in my spirit. I either have peace or no peace. I laid it out before Him, and He gave me peace and granted me success immediately. I really like interacting with students, and helping others be all they can be—spiritually first, then educationally and relationally. My gifts are not for me; they are for other people. If I am not using them, then I am not being a good steward of what God has given me."

### **Principle 2: Seek Work God Has Prepared You For**

*"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms."*

*1 Peter 4:10*

Explore, educate and employ your gifts in service to others. Discover your gifts, which include abilities, skills and talents. What do you do well? Uncover your passions. What do you like doing? What do lose all sense of time doing? What are your values—the people, places or things that are worth living and dying for?

The overlap of your gifts and passions is your "sweet spot." They are more than the skills you take from one job to another. Your sweet spot is the unique place in your fabric where what you have to give is not only your best, but it's also what you enjoy and value most.

Ainsley Amundsen learned the importance of aligning her gifts and passions when she burned out from her career as a physical therapist. Ainsley's

## **From a Christian perspective, we are not to be looking for jobs or careers that simply satisfy us or that pay the most.**

career began with a master's degree in physical therapy and accelerated over seven years to a job in spinal cord injury rehabilitation.

"It was physically and mentally exhausting," she explains. "My full-time job began to absorb my whole life. I wanted to do something else, but my biggest

fear was not knowing where to go. My undergraduate degree was in biomedical sciences, and I knew I didn't want to work in a lab!

"Then I heard about a career study course in a nearby church, so I went to see what it was all about. A friend was going through the same type of job burnout, so we went to the studies together. It became apparent that God gifted me with administration skills and interests. I had suspected I had these gifts, but wasn't sure where else I could use them. Going into an administrative career just didn't seem reasonable after all my schooling. Honestly, I thought I would be letting myself and my parents down with that kind of switch.

"I got an email from a woman who was leaving her administrative assistant job at our church and read the e-mail out loud to my roommate, who said, 'That's you!' I called and after going through a long interview process, took the job. It was great that the process was long, because it gave me time to figure out if I could deal with the emotions that come along with changing careers.

"The position proved to be ideal. I am working with the church I love using the skills God gave me. It has been three years, and I'm a very content administrative assistant at my church! The work challenges me every day, and I am put in positions where skills in administration, organization, analysis, and project management are asked for and needed.

"A lot my friends in their early 30s have gone through similar experiences. They get out of school and start in a job for which they were educated only to find it does not fit. I really benefited from the process of exploring the skills and talents given me, exposing myself to what else is out there, and talking through my feelings with others who understood. I see now how the gifts God gave me have been used in both of my careers. It was just a matter of finding a job where I could feel that inner peace—something that used my gifts and satisfied my soul."

### **Principle 3: Seek Work God Has Prepared for You**

*"For we are God's workmanship,  
created in Christ Jesus to do good  
works, which God prepared in  
advance for us to do."  
Ephesians 2:10*

I am always stunned by this verse, not because it says I am God's workmanship created in Christ for good works, but because it says *He* prepared works for me beforehand so that I might walk in them.

This changes everything when it comes to changing careers. It means that we are not to be looking for jobs or careers that satisfy ourselves or simply which pay the most. It tells us that we should be looking for work He has prepared for us—not jobs, not careers—but work He has prepared for us.

The story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50 is a great example of

career planning God's way. Joseph starts as favorite son of a wealthy farmer, is sold to gypsies, becomes a servant in a captain's home, is thrown into prison but is promoted from prisoner to the warden's helper, and finally is appointed as Egypt's prime minister. That's quite a career! What was his secret? He obeyed God in the work He had prepared for Joseph.

Imagine transitioning from an IT project manager to a private investigator. Art Buhrman discovered after 9/11 that the work God had prepared in advance for him to was private investigation. Three months after the tragedy, Art lost his job as project manager at a major computer software company. Part of his severance package included outplacement services, so he attended a career ministry at his church.

Art says, "I started a list of my strengths and skills from my past experience and from assessment tests. They pointed to a career I'd always been interested in—private investigation. But I wondered, from IT to PI? I have strengths in IT analyzing data and interviewing people to understand their system requirements and I had bank auditing experience from a prior job, but how exactly did that fit private investigation?"

Art started attending classes in private investigation and interrogation, and found that his skills were totally transferable. He says, "I knew I was good at writing reports and would have no problem testifying in court." As part of

his exploration, Art called a local investigator “just to pick his brain for a half-hour and learn about the business.” Ninety minutes later, Art had a mentor and future business partner.

Three years later, Art has found a growth niche in his PI work. He has become a Certified Fraud Examiner, a licensed private investigator, and owns a PI company. He is preparing to build his company and hire other people. Art talks with great enthusiasm about his work and how he is helping people: “I have the gift of caring and helping the down-trodden. God gave me a knack for uncovering evidence in

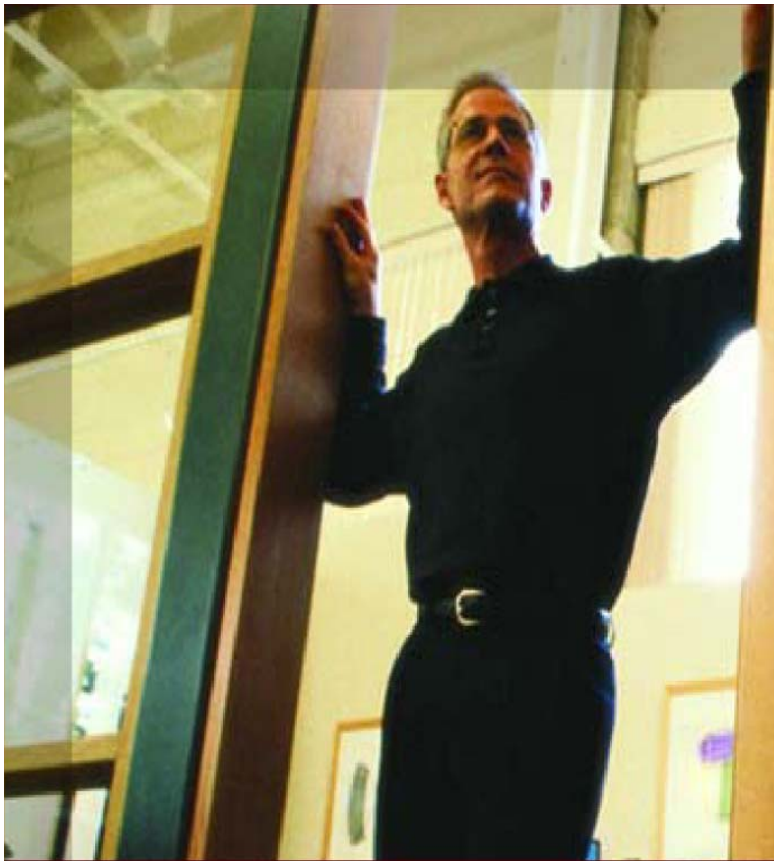
cases and knowing when people are lying. Three years ago, I would have never guessed that I could be doing what I am now doing. My wife told me when this all started, ‘Don’t worry, God has something better for you!’ She was right. God has me right where He wants me.”


If you are contemplating a career change follow the three principles found in Jeremiah, 1 Peter and Ephesians. Stand at the crossroads and first look and ask. Then, walk in the path of work Christ has prepared in advance for you to do, even if it means no change. God has not only given you passion, but talents and abilities to harness

that passion to benefit others. Remember, your work is divinely designed to meet others’ needs, bring you satisfaction, and give God the ultimate glory.

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*Brian Ray is the founder of CareerTIP Network and Crossroads Career Network, a church-based program to help people through crossroads in their careers. Ray is a regular guest on Crown Financial Ministry’s Money Matters radio program. He and his wife are happily married with four children and seven grandchildren. Brian can be reached at [Brian@CareerTIP.net](mailto:Brian@CareerTIP.net)*



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## Ten Practical Tips When Considering a Career Change

There are hundreds of great career tips, any one of which could be life changing, so picking just ten is daunting. With that said, here's my top ten list:

- 1. Take career assessments.** Some of them are simple and free ([www.careerkey.org](http://www.careerkey.org)). Others are multi-faceted, and require some financial investment (CareerDirect® Guidance System for \$100 from [www.crown.org](http://www.crown.org)). You can also find good career assessments through local counselors and colleges, many of which use established standards such as the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, Myers-Briggs for personality profiling and Self-Directed Search.
- 2. Elect a board of advisors.** Ask input from your family, friends and fellow workers as well as trusted career advisors and experts. Ask those who know you well how they would describe your abilities, interests, personality and values, as well as your "blind spots." What do they see as work God has prepared for you? For more info, go to [www.CareerTIP.net](http://www.CareerTIP.net) and enter key word "advisor."
- 3. Inventory all your life experiences.** Include school and education, work experiences, personal interests and hobbies, and community and church activities. Circle the things you did best and like most, especially activities that were meaningful to you. Contrast and compare what you have discovered in tips one through three. Are there recurring themes, interests, abilities and/or values? For more info, go to [www.CareerTIP.net](http://www.CareerTIP.net) and enter keyword "sweet spot."
- 4. Explore the wide world of work fast and free.** The Internet is great for learning about careers of all kinds. Some helpful sites are: America's CareerInfoNet at [www.acinet.org](http://www.acinet.org), Occupational Outlook Handbook at [www.bls.gov/oco](http://www.bls.gov/oco), Career Guide to Industries at [www.bls.gov/oco/cg](http://www.bls.gov/oco/cg), and Occupational Information Network at [online.onetcenter.org](http://online.onetcenter.org).
- 5. "Netweave" through personal referrals.** Whether exploring career direction or looking for a particular job, how much better is it to have a personal referral? Would you believe 42 times! That's 4,200% better! Why? Because you are good by association with the person who referred you. So start making connections by helping others. For more information, checkout [www.netweaving.com](http://www.netweaving.com).
- 6. Educate your gifts.** Michael Jordan could jump high, but it didn't mean much until he learned how to play basketball. Talent alone is not enough; knowledge and skill are required. You need to stay current on fast-changing technologies to stay employable, so live a life of continuous learning. To find opportunities for more education, degrees and certifications and classes, checkout [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com) and the American Association of Community Colleges at [www.aaca.nche.edu](http://www.aaca.nche.edu).
- 7. Take courses on career planning and job search techniques.** Find a CareerOneStop Center near you by typing your zip code into [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org). For a Christ-centered approach, consider a Crossroads Career® Explorer Course. For more info, go to [www.crossroadscareer.org](http://www.crossroadscareer.org).
- 8. Lose financial weight.** If you have debt and cost of living which makes it hard to afford a career change, then it's time to deal with the money issue. Wonderful resources are available to help you decrease your dependence on dollars and increase your freedom to change careers. Checkout Crown Financial Ministries at [www.crown.org](http://www.crown.org).
- 9. Plan on working after retirement.** Sound like an oxymoron? Forty-eight percent of people who have retired work at least part time. Eighty percent of the soon-to-be-retiring baby-boomers plan on working. For more info, go to [www.CareerTIP.net](http://www.CareerTIP.net) and enter keyword "retire."
- 10. Generate a positive attitude.** Motivational speaker Zig Zigler writes that 85% of the reason people get jobs and get ahead in those jobs is a positive attitude. Exercise forgiveness to free you from hurts from the past, and practice love of others to overcome fear of the future.