

# THE REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

ISSUE 7

## The Obstacles to Christian Leadership ...and How to Overcome Them



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in the  
Workplace**

**Case: When the  
Golden Rule Yields  
No Gold**

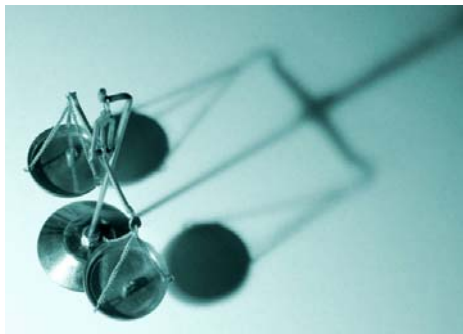
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Regent University Graduate School of Business

A Magazine for  
Christian Leaders  
and Managers

# THE REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

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*The Regent Business Review* is an electronic magazine published at the Regent University Graduate 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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## FAST FOREWORD

# Leap of Faith

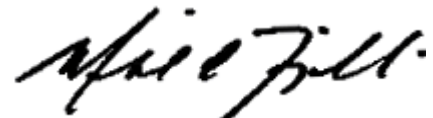
Consider of the folly of sprinter who ignores the hurdles in his 100 meter race. It's silly, perhaps, but just take a second and envision the comedy and tragedy that would ensue. He gets in the starting block without any strategy for surmounting the hurdles and without any training in how to beat the obstacle course before him. The gun goes off, he sprints ten meters and then goes crashing to the ground, knotted in aluminum. The crowd gasps but then chuckles when it's clear that his injuries are only minor. Undaunted, he continues on, only to eat dust again ten meters later. Bleeding and humiliated, the crowd now laughing, pointing, and snapping photographs, he limps down his lane, running courageously but still blindly, collecting bruises all the way to the finish line.

Silly indeed. But a hurdler is an apt metaphor for the Christian in any position of leadership. To run the race our Coach wants us to run, we need to see clearly the barriers to success and we need to have a strategy to avoid those barriers. When we don't, we eat dust and require first aid, like many of the blind sprinters to our left and right. And, more disconcertingly, we displease our Coach.

Christians in leadership would be well-advised to glean from the many Biblical examples here. Solomon identified his lack of wisdom as an obstacle to effective leadership, so he petitioned God for wisdom and was granted a greater portion than anyone had ever received. Nehemiah saw clearly the political obstacles to rebuilding the wall and then took action to circumvent or confront them. Jesus once saw our well-intentioned friend Peter as an obstacle to fulfilling His mission and admonished him to "get behind me Satan." He also taught us to pray daily to overcome a major obstacle: "and lead us not into temptation." By contrast, when the people of Israel refused to recognize their obstacle of hard-heartedness, they paid a 38 year price for it in the desert and a 70 year price in Babylon. That's a lot of dust to eat.

Threat assessment is a basic strategic tool in management. The millions who have performed SWOT analyses can attest to that. But too often we management types leverage our strengths, acknowledge some weaknesses, identify our opportunities to gain market share, and then go charging out of the blocks, oblivious to the threats that mark the course. Is it any wonder that so many Christian leaders stumble and ultimately abandon the race toward success in God's eyes?

This issue of *RBR* explicitly and empirically identifies some of those threats to authentic, consistent Christian leadership – obstacles like pride, busyness, lack of care for others, poor communication, task-orientation, corporate culture, and an unwillingness to forgive – internal and external obstacles that are within our power to overcome if we'll just let our Coach teach us how to leap.



Michael Zigarelli, Editor

# The Obstacles to Christian Leadership ...and How to Overcome Them

by Michael Zigarelli

“Knowing” and “doing” are surely distinct entities. Legions of Christians traveling the circuitous road toward sanctification understand this well. We Christians may know what God wills us to do, but often we still don’t do it.

Counted among those struggling with this “implementation gap” are some of the giants of the Bible. Phillip Yancey notes this in his trenchant work, *I Was Just Wondering*, posing the question: “Why did King Solomon show such wisdom in writing the proverbs and then spend the latter part of his life breaking those proverbs?” We could add similar questions from Biblical history. Why did King David, a man who knew God’s law as well as anyone of his day, sleep with Bathsheba anyway? Why did Peter, having recently confessed Jesus as the Christ, turn around and deny that he even knew Jesus? Why did Paul, after planting churches and preaching the Good News for years, say late in his ministry that he still couldn’t stop himself from doing what is wrong (Romans 7)?

The answer is this: because these people, like all of us, stand in the dubious human tradition of being unwilling to always submit to God’s will. Something’s in the way – many things, actually. Some of these obstacles are internal to us; others are external. But every

one of these obstacles separates knowing from doing. Every one prevents us from traveling God’s higher road.

These obstacles, as we’ll see below, are no less a problem for Christians in the contemporary workplace. We’ll first look at some

## **Knowing and doing are distinct entities. Here’s the evidence of this “implementation gap,” as well as some ideas for what we can do about it**

quantitative evidence of the implementation gap for Christian leaders and then turn to understanding that gap qualitatively, examining in more detail leaders’ biggest obstacles to living the faith at work. Hopefully, seeing the obstacles of others more clearly will put each one of us in a better position to identify and address our own obstacles, thus enabling us to more consistently do that which we know.

### **A Gap Between Belief and Behavior**

Consider this: if someone has made a sincere personal commitment to Jesus Christ, would that person also consider God to be his Boss at work? One might think so, but that’s not always the case.

What if we look exclusively at those who *do* strongly agree that God is their Boss at work? Would not that affirmation dominate their approach to selling, to employee management, and to financial management? It should, but again, that’s not always the case.

This isn’t just conjecture, though. Consider the following six statements from a survey I conducted of 300+ Christian leaders:

1. I have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in my life today
2. At work, God is my ultimate Boss
3. I avoid overselling what my product or service can do
4. At work, I consider the financial resources at my disposal to really be God’s resources
5. It is a high priority for me to serve my employees
6. Profit is a means, not an end

Although almost all (95%) Christian leaders in the survey strongly agreed that they have made a personal commitment to Christ, fewer (82%) strongly agreed that God is their ultimate boss at work. Furthermore, when it comes to what are arguably Christ-centered approaches to sales (Statement 3: avoiding overselling: 66% in strong

agreement), employee management (Statement 5: serving employees: 61% in strong agreement) and financial management (Statements 4 and 6: financial resources are God's and profit is a means: 53% and 42% in strong agreement, respectively), the percentages become smaller still. This gap between knowing and doing illustrates the continuing challenge for Christians to walk the talk in the workplace.

In light of this gap, the next logical question is: "Why do Christian leaders stumble?" What trips them up? What should they guard against when trying to be God-honoring leaders? ***What are the primary obstacles to applying the Christian faith at work?*** To find out, I followed up my survey by conducting interviews with 152 leaders.

### The Primary Obstacles

The leaders I consulted about these obstacles come from various backgrounds and have a wide range of management experience. The interviewed group is also reasonably balanced by gender, with 40 percent of the responses coming from female leaders.

Specifically, I asked the straightforward, open-ended question: "For you personally, what are the greatest obstacles to consistently living your faith at work?" Their responses were introspective. They were humble. They seemed candid. And collectively, the responses confirmed both a diversity of problems as well as some significant commonalities. In

sum, these leaders listed 72 distinct obstacles. More helpful for our purposes here, though, as a group they pointed to a handful of the most pervasive, most tenacious obstacles. As shown in the table below, there appear to be more than rocks in the road to Christ-like leadership. There are some genuine boulders as well. Here

are the bigger ones:

**Pride:** Foremost among these obstacles is "pride" in its myriad forms. It's the antithesis of God-centered humility. While a few leaders identified "pride" generally as an obstacle, most elaborated further, citing self-centeredness, an unwillingness

### "For you personally, what are the greatest obstacles to consistently living your faith at work?"

(based on responses from 152 Christian leaders; respondents could list more than one obstacle)

Obstacle	<i>Percentage of All Leaders Reporting this Obstacle</i>	<i>Percentage of Male Leaders Reporting this Obstacle</i>	<i>Percentage of Female Leaders Reporting this Obstacle</i>
<b>Pride Issues (all)</b>	<b>74.3</b>	<b>65.2</b>	<b>88.3</b>
• Reputation or "people-pleasing"	17.1	9.8	28.3
• Ambition / career focus / striving for "success"	9.2	10.9	6.7
<b>Communication Issues(all)</b>	<b>38.8</b>	<b>42.4</b>	<b>33.3</b>
• I can't control my tongue	15.8	18.5	11.7
• Poor conflict resolution skills	10.5	8.7	13.3
• I'm not a good listener	6.6	8.7	3.3
<b>Other Issues</b>			
• Impatience	19.7	14.1	28.3
• Task-orientation	14.5	16.3	11.7
• Lack of care for others	13.1	13.0	13.3
• Busyness	11.8	8.7	16.7
• I'm not good at forgiveness	9.2	8.7	10.0
• Corporate culture	8.6	12.0	3.3
• I don't trust others to do the job right	5.9	3.3	10.0
• Burnout	5.3	3.3	8.3
• Ingratitude for what I have	5.3	5.4	5.0
• Miscellaneous obstacles	24.3	22.8	26.7

to take advice, a mind-set that they are “above” others, demands to be in control, refusing to trust God or to submit to Him, an unwillingness to accept criticism, a propensity to impose views on others, and a refusal to trust others enough to delegate work. Both men and women put pride atop their obstacles lists.

#### **Reputation and Ambition:**

One could also include in the pride category obstacles like “concern for one’s reputation” and “drive for success,” but these are separated out in the table, given the significant frequency with which they appear. The reputation issue is a biggie, it seems. Call it concern for one’s image. Call it a focus on “people-pleasing” over God-pleasing. Regardless the label, many Christians say they don’t want to risk friendships and promotion opportunities for the sake of their faith. They also wrestle with ambition – the desire to climb higher and faster in their career – at the expense of a consistently Christ-like disposition. Clearly, the potential social consequences and job consequences of taking one’s faith seriously sometimes crowd God out of Christians’ work lives.

**Communication problems,** in their various forms, are also a major inhibitor. Cited in this general category are things like an unwillingness to communicate, an inability to criticize constructively, and poor listening skills. Relatedly, there is the issue of ***controlling one’s tongue.*** Many report difficulty here, saying that they are not gentle,

they are not meek, they lose their temper too often, they are hyper-critical, or that they have a tendency to gossip. Relatedly, the interviewees also reported that underlying their communication problems were root issues of ***impatience*** and ***lack of forgiveness.*** As noted under “Other Issues” in the table, a noteworthy proportion of both men and women cited these as obstacles.

**This is quite an array of obstacles, but for the Christian who is willing to work at it, this is one obstacle course that can be conquered**

#### **Conflict resolution skills:**

Also related to communication issues, some leaders cited poor conflict resolution skills as a barrier to living their faith at work. These Christians understand that they are called to be “peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9), but many avoid or ignore conflict, saying they “don’t like to deal with it” or that they are “not very good at resolving inter-personal problems.”

#### **Task or financial**

**orientation:** Christian leaders are challenged to balance concern for results with a concern for people. Apparently, many are keenly aware that the former inhibits the latter for them.

**Lack of care for others:** This may be the other side of the task-orientation coin. Clearly it would be impossible to love and serve others consistently, and to put others’ needs first, if

one doesn’t really care about those other people. A notable proportion of the interviewees stated candidly that they have little compassion or care for those around them at work, precluding them from being authentic witnesses to the truth of God’s love.

#### **Busyness or over-**

**commitment** showed up frequently in the interviews as well. It’s a problem that transcends genders, but in this sample, more women than men indicated that their frenetic darting from task to task undermines their ability to care about and meet others’ needs. Relatedly, leaders also reported that the natural end of this busyness – ***burnout*** – also limits their witness.

**Corporate culture:** Whereas ambition, concern for reputation, communication problems, and lack of care are internal obstacles, the corporate culture – the environment in which one works – is an external obstacle that can have similar effects on one’s behavior. Without vigilance, people can drift to become like those around them at work and some of our leaders recognize this problem. Adopting the assumptions of the secular organizations (e.g., assumptions about the way work should be done, about the way to relate to people, and about how to make decisions) sometimes undermines one’s ability to act like Jesus on the job and to make the decisions that He would make, as acknowledged by a handful of respondents.

## Beating the Obstacle Course

This is quite an array of obstacles. But for the Christian who is willing to work at it, this is one obstacle course that can be conquered.

Some of the impediments have reasonably obvious solutions. Busyness is remedied by adopting a simpler lifestyle – by choosing to do fewer things, by saying no to the lesser things in favor of excellence in doing the greater things. It's a choice, by God's grace, and myriad magazine articles and best-selling Christian books show that the power to beat busyness resides with you. Similarly, having poor conflict resolution skills can be addressed somewhat efficiently by learning about and how to do this better and by practicing the techniques. Influential secular resources like *Getting to Yes* and *Getting Past No*, as well as Christian resources like *The Peacemaker* will take you to the next level in this area if you make the time to adopt and implement their recommendations. These are skills, and like any other skills, the more you practice them the more capable you become in conflict resolution.

But what about the other obstacles? What about character flaws like pride, people-pleasing, impatience, low compassion or a loose tongue? What about the tendency to be molded in the worldly image of a corporate culture? How does one remedy such obstinate problems? How does one finally move the boulders that have for decades

blocked the road between knowing and doing?

First, I should say that there's no quick-and-easy fix here. There's no magic wand that you can wave to assure sanctified leadership by next Monday morning. Contrary to what you might infer from reading certain magazine

**Reading is not enough.  
Hearing is not enough.  
Knowing is not enough.  
Trying hard is not  
enough. And making  
sincere vows to do better  
next time is not enough**

articles, hearing well-intended sermons, or picking up a popular book on the subject, no one can take three easy steps to become a God-honoring Christian leader. That's far too simplistic. Overcoming one's character flaws and one's very nature, not to mention lifetime of bad habits, is one of the most challenging conundrums with which man has ever wrestled.

Today, though, we are the beneficiaries of all of that wrestling. Centuries of exegesis, experience, and examen have furnished us with perspective, with hope, with a way to remove the boulders in the road that runs from knowing the faith to consistently and joyfully living the faith.

The first part of the solution is this: **recognize that you're not strong enough to remove the boulders.** On our own, we don't have the power to

permanently beat things like pride, greed, ambition, impatience, concern for reputation, or lack of compassion. And that's by God's design. God does not want us to pursue sanctification and Christian living by ourselves. Quite the opposite, God wants us to ***depend on Him*** to move the boulders for us.

That's a very different approach from the one tried by legions of Christians. Many have attempted to become Christian leaders – and have achieved quite patchy results – by learning about how Christianity applies to leadership or to various organizational functions like employee management, marketing, or financial management. The problem with that is not necessarily with the books, classes, and seminars themselves, but with the ***exclusive reliance*** on such resources. This myopic reliance ignores the foundational inward journey that must take place if one wants to consistently practice the things that one learns about in these books and in these educational venues.

Reading is not enough.  
Hearing is not enough.  
Knowing is not enough.  
Trying hard is not enough.  
And making sincere vows to do better next time is not enough. What's required is something more...something deeper...something ***relational***.

I'm not a fan of silver bullets, especially in the theological realm. But this much is true here. If there's one "secret to success" in Christian

leadership, it is that ***we lead best when God is leading us***. That's far from a quick fix; rather, it's a declaration that God-honoring leadership doesn't happen because we try to make it happen. Successful leadership is a product of much groundwork, of much time spent with the One whom we are ultimately seeking to please. Making the right decisions at work, choosing the correct priorities, relating to people as Jesus would relate to them, performing with excellence no matter the task or the pay – all of the attitudes and behaviors to which Christians should aspire in the workplace – happen more consistently when they are the outgrowth of an active and growing relationship with God.

When you make relationship with God a priority in your life, correct attitudes and behaviors are an ***automatic response*** at work and everywhere else. They're instinctive and inevitable. The obstacles are still in proximity,

## **Cultivating your relationship with God is a prerequisite for successful Christian leadership**

but they are less of nuisance because God confers on those close to Him a clearer vision to see the world as He sees it. You're more likely to live in continued cognizance of God's will, a cognizance that bulldozes your personal obstacles by keeping you mindful of what really matters

in life. It's not a magic wand, but it is quite miraculous. You become a fundamentally different person, empowered to do things that you were never able to do in your own strength.

By contrast, when we do not give relationship with God top priority, the yoke of Christian leadership often seems arduous. It becomes a burden rather than a blessing because it contravenes what is intrinsic both to us and, often, to our work environments. As a result, considerable obstacles appear at every turn. We are tempted to live and work for ourselves and by our own rules. Career or paycheck may become an idol, leading to a busyness that only accelerates the downward spiral. Our values and priorities are more easily tossed about by the powerful waves of corporate culture. Desire to preserve friendships and to "fit in" become more important than friendship with God. The norms of the workplace govern the use of our tongue. And an innate self-centeredness may desensitize us to the needs of others. Under these circumstances, even if we do discern the obstacles, it is to little avail since those obstacles appear to be impassable.

So there is a choice to be made, a choice that is freely available to anyone who seeks to take seriously a calling to Christian leadership. You can lay the foundation by cultivating your relationship with God, making it top priority in your life, or you may choose to relegate the relationship to a lesser position. Appreciate, though, that choosing the former is a

prerequisite for successful Christian leadership.

How does one make that choice – and really follow through on it? Let me first say how this is not done, because many have been sidetracked into this dead

## **We lead best when God is leading us**

end. It is not done by becoming more religious or by doing a lot of religious things. Relationship with God is different from religiosity. One business owner in my study made this point so compellingly that it deserves extended quotation. He writes:

"It I had 'religion' down pat. However, I had little or no 'relationship' with Him. Yes, I knew how to 'pray,' and I could be eloquent, covering all the bases of request with a heartfelt attitude. I knew how to 'read the Word' and even dabble in Greek and Hebrew. I knew how to 'give tithes and offerings.' I knew how to 'attend meetings' with fervency and regularity. I knew how to participate in 'missions' and 'local outreach programs.' And I knew how to 'evangelize.' I was a 'good person,' and a doer at that. But, the Lord stopped me in my tracks and said that all I had amassed was a great ability to be religious. Those are all good things, not to be derided, but I had them out of order. They are to come after getting one thing straight. It was time to know Him first and deeply."

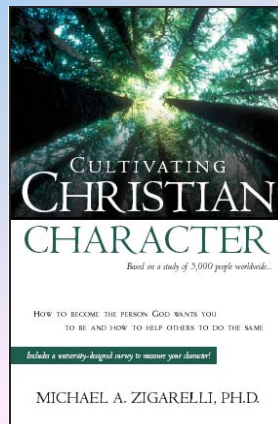
That quote speaks volumes because it shows that even seasoned Christians often buy-in to the myth that doing religious things is a pathway to growth. It's not, as many, like this leader, have learned through laborious and often painful trial-and-error. Instead, the pathway entails making the time to practice the spiritual disciplines taught by the giants of the faith for centuries, disciplines perhaps best summarized in the contemporary classic, *Celebration of Discipline*. As shown there and in other fine resources on the subject, the pathway entails spending time with God in prayer, worship meditation, and bible study. It entails confessing sin, submitting to God's will, and

receiving encouragement and guidance from those who are more mature in the faith. It entails living a life of relative simplicity, making time for solitude, celebrating and enjoying life, and cheerfully serving others. These are not legalistic requirements, more things for the to-do list. Rather, they collectively represent a lifestyle that put us in a place where God generously pours out His grace. Many are familiar with the disciplines, but if you are not, know that they are the starting point for you. To become a better leader and a better Christian generally, become a student and a practitioner of the spiritual disciplines.

This is not new information. It is very old information. But it is timeless and among the most valuable information one can receive. Christ-like leadership does not begin with a leadership book, with a sermon, with a course or with the knowledge of best practices and clever ideas. Such things are important adjuncts, but recognize that they are only adjuncts. Instead, Christ-like leadership begins with Christ.

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## **Barna Identifies Strengths and Weaknesses of Christian Leaders**

The leadership scandals of the past year have raised numerous concerns about the character of individuals who assume positions of leadership, whether they serve in the business, government, non-profit or religious sector. Understanding the character strengths and vulnerabilities of leaders is critical toward protecting organizations and the people who rely upon them from being crippled by unethical decisions and immoral behavior.

A new study from the Barna Research Group of Ventura, California, provides an unusual examination of the character of church leaders. Using the data from the Christian Leader Profile™, a 177-question diagnostic that was completed by a national sample of 1,344 leaders involved in Christian churches across the nation, the study examines four aspects of people's leadership: their sense of calling from God to leadership, the nature of their character, the strength of their competencies, and the aptitude they possess for leadership. Data released by Barna shows that the character of church-based leaders differs according to the position, age, gender, and leadership aptitude of the individual. The report also identified the character traits that are generally strongest among church leaders - as well as those that are most likely to be the weak links in their character.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

The strongest attributes associated with Christians involved in church leadership were having a conscience that is sensitive to sin, morality, godly demeanor, humility, values, faith maturity, and trustworthiness. Attributes that were not as strong included using appropriate speech, having a controlled temper, and teaching ability. The attributes that rated lowest on the scale were possessing a loving heart, modeling servanthood, and having godly wisdom.

Digging more deeply into the three traits that reflect the most common weakness of church leaders, the Profile data indicate that the problems associated with servanthood center around not feeling a sense of responsibility to those who are needy and an unwillingness to sacrifice what they have for the good of others. The most serious challenges related to having a loving heart included the unwillingness to go out of their way to help the disadvantaged or to generously share their resources, and failing to do what is right because of the potential for suffering or personal disadvantage. Wisdom ranked lowest of all 13 character traits evaluated. Among the key difficulties related to that attribute were reliance on personal ability and insight rather than godly guidance, struggles balancing spiritual and worldly forms of wisdom, and inconsistently listening to God.

### **Interpreting the Outcomes**

The research offers both encouragement and challenges according to George Barna, who created the Christian Leader Profile™ and analyzed the data in the report. "It is affirming to realize that such a high percentage of church leaders have strong character in so many areas, especially dimensions such as values, conscience and morality. It is particularly pleasing to see that the character of lay leaders in the Church is just as reliable as that of the clergy."

The researcher expressed the hope that leaders would invest effort into growing in the areas in which their character is most vulnerable or least mature. "Character is not like competencies, for which it is acceptable to ignore your weaknesses and run with your strengths. Weakness of character will eventually undermine your strengths, no matter how strong they are. Identifying character vulnerabilities is helpful because it provides an early warning signal of pending disasters."

From: The Barna Research Group, [www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org), January 13, 2003. Used by permission.

# Christian Rights in the Workplace

## Q-and-A with The American Center for Law and Justice

*Note: This article pertains to the rights of employees working in the United States*

### Employees of Private Organizations

Most employees work for private employers and these employees are primarily protected only by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They may also be protected by laws in their State similar to Title VII. State laws protecting the religious freedom of employees may provide more protection than Title VII, but generally they are very similar to the federal law. This article does not attempt to describe individual state laws therefore employees should consult an attorney who is licensed in their particular state to determine if state law provides them with added protection.

Here, we explain how employees of private organizations are protected by Title VII. The rules of law stated also apply to government employees, but focus on private employees because Title VII is usually their only remedy.

#### Can I share the Gospel with co-workers at work?

If required by their religious beliefs, an employee's religiously motivated expressions of faith are protected by Title VII. For instance, in conversations with

other employees, you may refer to Biblical passages on slothfulness and "work ethics." Employees can engage in religious speech at work as long as there is no actual imposition on co-workers or disruption of the work routine. Generally, no disruption of the work routine will occur if an employee's witnessing takes place during breaks, or other free time. If other employees are permitted to use electronic mail and screen savers for speech that is not related to work, an employee who has a sincerely held religious belief to communicate their faith with others should also be able to use these modes of communication.

To ensure that their religious speech is protected by Title VII, an employee should first of all be able to honestly say that their religious beliefs require them to share the Gospel whenever possible with willing co-workers during breaks or other free time. The employee must then inform the employer of this religious belief (preferably in writing). At that point, the employer must attempt to accommodate this religious belief unless it will cause the employer "undue hardship."

#### Can I keep my Bible or other religious items at my desk?

Yes. As with witnessing to co-workers, an employee can bring his Bible to work and keep it at his desk if he is required to do so by sincerely

held religious beliefs. To ensure that this religious belief of having a Bible or other religious items at work is protected by Title VII, an employee should first of all be able to honestly say that their religious beliefs require them to bring these items to work. The employee must then inform the employer of this religious belief (preferably in writing). The employer is then required to attempt to accommodate this belief.

#### Do I have to work on Sundays if my religion prohibits it?

Employers must accommodate requests by employees for absence on their Sabbath or other religious holidays. An affirmative duty arises under Title VII for the employer to make a good faith effort to arrange the employee's schedule to allow the employee to have Sabbaths off. The employer will be in violation of Title VII if they have "made no real effort" or have taken a "don't care" attitude.

For instance, courts have held that an employer is required to accommodate a World Wide Church of God employee who observed his Sabbath from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. The reason for this decision is that the employer did not incur additional costs from the accommodation because they employed extra men at all times to cover unscheduled absences.

The employer's affirmative duty to attempt to accommodate the employee's request for time off is not limited if the employee asks for more than one accommodation. For instance, an employee who belongs to the World Wide Church of God requested time off in view of two sincerely held religious beliefs: (1) attending a religious festival during her normal working shift, and (2) refraining from all work during the religious festival. The employer argued that accommodating one of these religious beliefs satisfied their duty under Title VII. But the Court ruled against the employer, refusing to "condone an employer's entire lack of effort to accommodate a given conflict merely because the employer offered to accommodate other ones."

The same rule applies where an employee's religious beliefs prevent him from working on Sundays, and prevent him from asking someone else to engage in this prohibited activity for him. Merely allowing the employee to swap shifts with someone does not constitute reasonable accommodation in this instance. In addition to allowing the employee to be off on Sundays, the employer has an affirmative duty to arrange a swap for the employee. Employees must be careful to specifically inform their employer of this religious belief not to ask anyone else to work on Sunday either.

In sum, employers must attempt to accommodate an employee's need for days off due to religious beliefs. At a minimum, the employer's duty to accommodate includes

allowing employees to trade shifts, and may require the employer to arrange for the trade.

### **Can I go to work dressed in the particular fashion required by my religion?**

Employers must accommodate religious beliefs requiring an employee to dress or groom in a certain manner, unless the rule prohibiting certain religious dressing is justified by a business necessity. The EEOC has ruled that a nurse whose Old Catholic faith required her to wear a scarf was unlawfully discharged for refusing to come to work without the scarf, because requiring the nurse to wear a cap instead of the scarf was "not so necessary to the operation of [the employer's] business as to justify the effect that this policy has upon the religious convictions." Title VII has also been found to protect an employee's religious belief that she must wear a Pro-Life button at all times, even at work.

An employer, however, does not discriminate against an employee by requiring him to shave his long facial hair and refrain from wearing a turban, if both of these religious practices result in safety hazards by preventing a hard hat and respirator from being worn properly.

### **Are there any types of religious beliefs or behavior not protected by Title VII?**

Generally, all sincerely held religious beliefs are protected by Title VII. When a Title VII religious claim fails, it is often

because the employer is able to show the employee was discriminated against for inefficiency, bad work product, or an inability to get along with co-workers rather than because of the asserted religious practice. A frequent example is when an employee's religious speech is couched in an argumentative, confrontational style that inhibits cooperation with other employees. In such cases, the court is likely to determine that the employee was not discriminated against because of his religious beliefs, but because of his offensive conduct in the office.

### **Do I have to attend training if it violates my religious convictions?**

An employee cannot be required to attend training that will violate their sincerely held religious beliefs. The EEOC has ruled that an employer violates Title VII if it requires an employee to attend training containing a philosophy that conflicts with the employee's religious beliefs. The EEOC found that the employer failed to show how accommodating the religious convictions of these employees by not requiring them to attend the training would result in an undue hardship.

### **How do I file a claim under Title VII if my religious rights have been violated?**

It is recommended that the employee contact an attorney before beginning this process. Because the process must be completed correctly in order to preserve your claim and because it may vary from state

to state, it is important to obtain competent legal counsel before beginning.

Title VII first requires that the charge be filed with a state agency if the violation occurs within a state that has set up an agency for handling discrimination claims. If your state does not have its own human rights commission or similar agency, you should file directly with the EEOC. Practically speaking, this means contacting the state agency or EEOC in your state by telephone and informing them that you wish to file a complaint. They will then instruct you on how and where to fill out the necessary paper work. In states that have an agency for handling these claims, filing with the state agency must be followed by timely filing the charge with the EEOC. Some state agencies will do this for you.

Usually the complaint must be filed within 180 days of the discriminatory act. The time period is measured from the date that the discriminatory act occurred. Upon the filing of the charge there is a 180 day mandatory waiting period, during which time the EEOC is given the opportunity to mediate and resolve the complaint. The private litigant then has 90 days in which to file suit. This limitation period runs not from the discriminatory act, but from the date the private party receives notice from the EEOC or state agency that conciliation was completed, or the date the party receives a right to sue letter.

## Government Employees

Government employees are protected by both Title VII and the United States Constitution against religious discrimination. Public employees do not forfeit their First Amendment rights upon entering the public workplace. Therefore, the religious freedom of government employees has the additional protection of the Free Exercise and Free Speech Clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Below, we explain how government employees are protected by the First Amendment above and beyond the protection they have from Title VII.

### **As a government employee, is all my religious speech at work protected by the First Amendment?**

A public employee receives greater speech protection when speaking "as a citizen upon matters of public concern" than he does when commenting on employment matters of personal or internal interest. When evaluating these cases, the Supreme Court has traditionally utilized a test which balances the importance of the employee's speech on a matter of public concern against the government's need to run an efficient workplace. Religious speech will always be a matter of public concern.

For example, in *Tucker v. State of California Dept. of Education*, a federal Court of Appeals found religious speech to be a matter of public concern, and used *Pickering* to protect the religious liberties

of a state education department employee who believed that he was commanded to "give credit to God for the work he perform[ed]." He engaged in religious discussions, and kept religious material around his work area. Tucker prevailed when the court weighed the state's asserted interests of efficiency, protecting the liberty interests of other employees, and avoiding Establishment Clause issues against the weight of a "broad ban on group speech." The court rejected the employer's contention that the religious speech reduced efficiency since other types of non-work related speech were permitted. The court also rejected the argument that the employee's speech violated the Establishment Clause because there was no way it could have been attributed to the state.

Therefore, religious speech of government employees is protected so long as it does not significantly reduce efficiency in the workplace, and so long as it will not be attributed to the government employer.

### **As a government employee, can I keep religious items in my personal work area?**

The First Amendment also protects the right of public employees to keep items with religious messages on them at their desk. In a case where an employee had a Bible and plaques containing the serenity prayer, the Lord's Prayer, and one that said, "God be in my life and in my commitment" in his office, the government employer violated the First Amendment when it demanded that these items be removed

because they might be considered "offensive to employees." The fact that other employees may find these items offensive is irrelevant when considered in light of First Amendment freedoms.

**As a government employee, can I advertise events at my church on the bulletin board at work?**

If a government employer allows employees to post non-work related material around the office, they cannot prohibit the posting of religious material. "[I]t is not reasonable to allow employees to post materials around the office on all sorts of subjects, and forbid only the posting of religious information and materials." Religious speech is given the same expansive protections offered to secular speech inviting "employees to motorcycle rallies, swap meets, x-rated movies, beer busts, or burlesque shows." Allowing this speech while prohibiting advertising for religious events "is unreasonable not only because it bans a vast amount of material without legitimate justification but also because its sole target is religious speech."

**Doesn't religious speech by government employees violate the "Separation between Church and State?"**

The oft cited phrase "separation between church and state" is found nowhere in the Constitution. This phrase has been misused by many in this country to mislead people and trick them into believing that the government can have

absolutely nothing to do with religion. The truth is the Constitution only prohibits the establishment of religion through the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment does not provide the government with any justification for prohibiting religious expression in the workplace. As the United States Supreme Court said in this regard: "The Establishment Clause does not license government to treat religion and those who teach or practice it, simply by virtue of their status as such, as subversive of American ideals and therefore subject to unique disabilities.

We emphasize, too, that fear alone, even fear of discrimination or other illegal activity, is not enough to justify such a mobilization of governmental force against [an employee].... A phobia of religion, for instance, no matter how real subjectively, will not do. As Justice Brandeis has said, '...Men feared witches and burnt women.'"

In August of 1997, President Clinton took the remarkable step of issuing guidelines confirming that federal workers can express their faith on the job. These guidelines direct federal agencies to "permit personal religious expression by federal employees to the greatest extent possible...." The guidelines are instructive for all government employees and employers.

In sum, governmental employers may restrict religious activity in the workplace only if it prohibits the government from running an efficient workplace, or there is clear evidence that it is intimidating or harassing to co-workers. Speculative fears of offense or employee discontent do not provide the government with an excuse for discriminating against religious employees who express their faith through words, actions, or symbols.

**Employer Religious Beliefs**

Many employers have sincerely held religious beliefs which they want their businesses to reflect. But federal and state laws prohibiting religious discrimination in employment have discouraged many business owners from communicating their religious convictions at work. The good news is that, just like employees, business owners do not have to check their religion at the door when they come to work. The following information provides some guidance for religious employers who want their business to reflect their faith.

**Do employers unlawfully discriminate if they base business objectives and goals upon Biblical principles?**

No. An employer does not discriminate on the basis of religion by affirming the faith of its owners in business objectives. "Title VII does not, and could not, require individual employers to

abandon their religion." Employers must be careful, however, not to give prospective or current employees the perception that employment or advancement with the company depends on acquiescence in the religious beliefs of the employer. This can be accomplished in a number of ways. For instance, applications for employment should state that applicants are considered for all positions without regard to religion. This statement should also be included in any orientation materials, employee handbooks, and employee evaluation forms. Of course, employers must also be sure that this statement is accurate but not discriminating on the basis of religion.

**As the owner of the business, can I witness to my employees?**

An employer can talk about his religious beliefs with employees as long as employees know that continued employment or advancement within the company is not conditioned upon acquiescence in the employer's religious beliefs. For instance, one court has held that an employer did not discriminate against an employee by sharing the gospel with him and inviting him to church. Employers must be careful, however, not to persist in witnessing if the employee objects. Such unwanted proselytizing could be deemed religious harassment. Employers cannot impose their religious beliefs on their employees.

**Am I permitted to give my employees religious literature?**

As with spoken religious speech, employers can share their religious beliefs with their employees in print form such as pamphlets, books, and newsletters. Employers must be careful, however, not to give employees the impression that they have to agree with the employer's religious beliefs in order to keep their job or get a promotion. For instance, in one case a Jewish employee was wrongfully terminated for complaining about the printing of Bible verses on his paychecks and the religious content of a company newsletter. If an employer shares religious convictions with employees, and the employee disagrees or protests, no adverse action can be taken against the employee.

Furthermore, employers should be ready to accommodate any employee's objections to the religious speech contained in publications distributed to employees. Sufficient accommodation may be to provide the objecting employee with a publication that does not contain the religious content. In order to counter any impression given by publications that job security and advancement are contingent upon faith, it is also recommended that publications with religious material state that the employer does not discriminate on the basis of religion for purposes of continued employment, employee benefits, or promotion.

**Can an employer hold regular prayer meetings or chaplain services for employees?**

Employers can hold regular devotional meetings for employees so long as attendance is not required. Moreover, active participation of management in these meetings does not make them discriminatory. To ensure that employees understand that devotional meetings are voluntary, notice of the meetings should state that they are not mandatory and it is wise to hold these meetings before the work day begins, during breaks, or after work.

**Can I require my employees to attend training based on Biblical principles?**

Employers can use training programs that are based on the Bible. For instance, requiring an employee to attend a management seminar put on by the Institute of Basic Life Principles which used scriptural passages to support the lessons it sought to promote did not violate a Massachusetts civil rights law. Employees cannot, however, be required to undergo religious training, participate in religious services, or engage in behavior that would violate their sincerely held religious beliefs.

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*For further questions and answers regarding Christian rights in the workplace, or to see the dozens of endnotes associated with the content of this article, please visit [www.aclj.org](http://www.aclj.org)*

# Four Steps to Forgiveness at Work

by William Nix

*Jesus said “forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Yet by many estimates, forgiveness remains one of the most elusive of Christian virtues. It may be even more challenging in the workplace, where “an eye for an eye” is often the cultural and legal norm. Given the significance of this obstacle to Christian witness at work, we present here a synopsis of William Nix’s helpful guidelines for forgiveness at work.*

## Step 1: See Others from God’s Perspective

The first step to forgiveness at work is seeing your coworkers from God’s perspective. Take your eyes off the offender and look up to the Savior. Jesus sees each of us as eternally significant beings with brilliant potential. God’s vantage point teaches that we have all sinned and that we are all helpless without the blood of Christ.

This admonition to look through godly lenses is tough when a fellow laborer steps on us to get ahead. Looking around our workplace with godly eyes is difficult if we have been displaced for no good reason. Yet over and over we see how Christ responded to the scorn of others with compassion and forgiveness. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36).

You may work with people whose lives are defined in that verse – helpless and harassed, sheep without a shepherd, aimlessly meandering from one day to the next. It is little wonder that many of your coworkers suffer from debilitating anger, an unforgiving spirit, and a me-first attitude.

## It’s not a mechanical process, but there are several steps you can take, beginning with seeing your co-workers as God sees them

It is for these souls that we seek to capture our workplaces for Christ. Our human perspective on the person at the next desk or in the next office or on the next line is not good enough. We must seek the perfect perspective, the forgiving perspective of the Creator of us all.

Gaining a godly perspective comes as a result of the discipline of prayer. Christ instructs us to “pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Do we pray to inform God of someone’s misconduct so He can wipe them out? Of course not. We pray so God will change us and hone us more to His image.

Intelligence agencies use satellites to transmit messages and images around the world.

A message may be sent from Washington to Moscow via satellite. Imagine a drawing of the process. A line would run between the sender and the satellite resulting in another line between the satellite and the receiver. The message is sent in English, but it is received in Russian.

Prayer is our spiritual satellite system. We voice our concerns, fears, apologies, and requests to God, and He beams back His perspective and will for us. God will take our finite, human perspective on another’s life and miraculously transform it into a Christ-honoring, selfless, forgiving spirit. Through prayer we gain God’s perspective.

## Step 2: Leave the Offense at the Cross

Prayer also carries us back to the Cross. It allows us to leave the offense at the Cross, once and for all.

Have you been the victim of a coworker’s mistake? Have you said to yourself, “Every dog has his day. My day is coming.” That is the easy response. The Bible describes a different response: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). What is your pain compared to the pain Christ endured on your behalf?

When Christ died on that cross, He created a lasting

reminder of His loving forgiveness. If you are harboring the pain of a past wound, make a trip to the “dump for damaged feelings.” Make a prayerful deposit. Then put the memory out of your mind. Enjoy the peace and the joy.

### **Step 3: Operate Out of Your Will and Reason**

The third step to responding with godly forgiveness is to operate out of your will and reason, not out of your emotions. After you have gained God’s perspective and left the burden of your error at the Cross, then, with a reasonable heart, meet to discuss the error and the future.

The prophet Isaiah communicated to the people of Judah and Jerusalem God’s dissatisfaction with their behavior. He related the wages of their sin and then announced a marvelous offer from God: “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord” (Isa. 1:18). God asked the failing people of Judah and Jerusalem to come and talk about the situation rationally and with cool heads.

### **What is your pain compared to the pain Christ endured on your behalf?**

God had given humans a special ability to reason that distinguishes us from other creatures. But in the jungle of commerce we sometimes act like animals. Like the

territorial lion, we quickly dispose of coworkers whose actions annoy us. With lightning speed we unleash our anger on the very ones in need of forgiveness.

In your Judah-like job locale you may have experienced the quick hand of a boss responding angrily, not reasonably. Maybe a coworker told a lie about you. These people need your forgiveness. Follow the instruction found in Isaiah and slow down. Calm down. Do not rush to judgment. Pray. Meet and discuss the conflict. Listen and reason. Forgive.

### **Step 4: Rebuild and Restore**

Restoration and rebuilding is what Christ is all about. He wastes neither anything nor anyone. Imagine the hurt you would feel if one of your closest friends betrayed you. Would you try to restore and rebuild your relationship with you betrayer? During the biggest crisis of Jesus’ earthly life, Simon Peter denied knowing the Savior. Did Jesus brood and hold a grudge? Did He exact vengeance on His fallen friend? No. Christ rose from the grave and embrace Peter. Jesus forgave His friend, and a hurting Simon Peter was rebuilt and restored.

Transforming your company for Christ can be a difficult task. It is possible only if you will humble yourself and seek and offer forgiveness. We must slow down and reason with godly wisdom. Seeing others from God’s perspective, we should take our pain and the

pain of others and leave it behind us at the Cross. Then we should look to the future as eternal builders and restore our broken relationships.

### **Make a list of the coworkers you need to forgive and then begin praying for them today**

Take a minute to reflect on situation this week when you should have used forgiveness. Were you the victim, the offender, or the innocent bystander? Did you represent your Lord in a manner that would be pleasing to Him? What actions can you take in the next twenty-four hours to open the pathway to forgiveness?

Make a list of persons you need to forgive and persons from whom you need forgiveness. Begin praying for them today. Then:

- See them from God’s perspective
- Leave the offense at the cross
- Act out of reason, and
- Restore and rebuild

Adapted from *Transforming Your Workplace for Christ*, © Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997. Used by permission.

William Nix is president of Faith@Work, a ministry that challenges, teaches, and encourages Christians to bring Christ into the workplace.

## When the Golden Rule Yields No Gold

Note: This case is based on a true story. The company name and the character names have been changed, but all other information is non-fictional.

Zach Jordan sat at his desk seeking the high road. It had been his approach to management from day one. But now, on day ten thousand and one, that road was obscure. Or perhaps, this time, there was more than one high road. Regardless, one thing was anything but metaphorical: if he sold his ailing company, several people – good people whom he had embraced like family over the years – would lose their jobs and would have dim prospects for employment. If he didn't sell and business didn't improve, he could lose hundreds of thousands of dollars in rent.

He looked at the pictures adorning his walls – pictures of him with his three girls, pictures of people who had worked for him over the years, a photo of him doing his magic act (his favorite hobby) for mesmerized school children visiting the plant. Zach had a zest for life and a love for everyone around him.

And it showed in his priorities. He had worked from home during much of his early career, sacrificing income so that he could be there to help raise his girls. He had adopted a "Golden Rule" approach to management, paternalistically caring for his employees' needs, maintaining integrity in every deal, insisting on quality, respect, and timely delivery for every customer, treating all of

his stakeholders as he would want to be treated. Over the years, the fruit of that management style was an exceptionally loyal workforce – he had miniscule turnover in twenty years of business – as well as an equally loyal customer base. One of Zach's

**Since day one, Zach had always taken the high road in management. But now, on day ten thousand and one, it seemed that the high road was taking him over a cliff**

eleven employees summed it up well: "Zach's the glue that holds everything together around here. And he's a great boss, too. He treats us better than anyone's ever treated us in our other jobs. For instance, in good times and in bad, he's always given a substantial Christmas bonus. One time he even had to borrow the money to do it!"

The financial fruit was a profitable company – at least through the first decade. His New England Spring Company (NES) in Connecticut earned a decent return throughout the 1980's. But international competition and a weak economy began to take their toll and in the early 90's, many

of Zach's customers moved south or began to import their springs, primarily from manufacturers in Asia whose costs were a fraction of Zach's. Profit evaporated and then turned to losses. The past five years had been particularly difficult, each year culminating in red ink.

As he stared at the photo of the NES family celebrating an employee's birthday (Zach commemorated every employee birthday with a card and a \$30 check), in walked his two invited guests for the day. Steve, his accountant and long-time friend, and Charles, a professor, now emeritus, from Zach's business school days. This was a bittersweet occasion. Zach embraced each in turn, but then had to share with the professor the reason for the invitation: Zach needed advice about whether to sell his beloved company.

Zach closed the door. "Thanks so much for coming, you guys. I really appreciate your willingness to give me some candid advice." His expression turned somber, as did his tone. He looked squarely at his septuagenarian professor and repented: "Charles, this place is bleeding and it has been for years." He paused momentarily before verbalizing the real source of his anguish. "I'm thinking sincerely about getting out rather than signing off on another two-year,

\$200,000 lease for the building. Steve tells me I can get at least \$750,000 for the customers, the inventory, the receivables, and the equipment, but the problem is this: with my financials, *nobody* is going to buy the business itself. So if I sell, it has to be by parceling it

### **With my financials, *nobody* is going to buy the business, so I'd have to liquidate**

off. Then NES won't exist anymore and my people would lose their jobs. And in this economy, most of my people aren't going to find jobs anytime soon – certainly not much beyond minimum wage. I could take a chance and try to keep it afloat, but I'm on the verge of losing my biggest account to India and that's twenty percent of my business. If that happens, I probably couldn't survive more than two months, and the selling price of the business would drop dramatically. But even if I keep this account, there's no guarantee that things are going to turn around. I just can't compete with Asia's fifty cents an hour."

That was a lot of information in sixty seconds, but the professor zeroed in on what he considered the essential issue. "What's the chance of losing that account?"

"Probably about 50/50 next year," Zach replied. "Maybe even 60/40. India's come out with a stainless steel spring that weighs fifty percent more than ours – much better quality – for the same price,

and my customer is seriously considering making the switch."

"And can you get back the lease money if the business fails?"

"No. I'm on the hook for that regardless," Zach sighed.

"I've told you this before, pal," his accountant gently offered. "You've gotta get out. Either that or cut your seven figure salary."

Zach smiled at the welcome levity – and the irony. Two years ago he had cut his own pay to \$31,000 – less than what several of his employees were earning.

"Funny you should mention that," Zach returned with a grin. "The SEC is stopping by this afternoon. I thought I'd give 'em your card."

"Remind me, my friend," the professor interjected with a chuckle, "what your product line looks like. And tell me, if you would, how you've been pursuing new business lately."

"We manufacture and sell several types of springs," Zach began, "everything from specialty stainless steel springs to springs for navy jets and helicopters to common springs you'd find in a hardware store. And over the years, I've tried to grow the business through a combination of in-house sales reps and advertising in the standard industry vehicles, both in print and on the web. Quite frankly, though, it's been years since either approach has paid off, so I've dropped them. Bids are so tight that a sales

reps' five percent commission required me to bid at my cost to remain competitive. I was taking jobs just to cover overhead! And the hundred grand I dropped in advertising over the past decade has returned almost no business. So basically, I'm left with no sales force and essentially no advertising."

"Sounds like you could use some fresh ideas," the professor observed thoughtfully. He was brilliant, Zach thought, but like many academics, he had always been adept at stating the obvious.

"That would be nice," Zach replied politely. He was eager for a few hot tips from the good doctor, but he knew those were probably a few days off. "And there might actually be some new business out there. But my 'fresh idea' file is freshly depleted. I've also thought about re-tooling as an option – you know, create other products that might have

### **My other office gal has a disabled husband and is the sole support for a family of five**

a niche – but I'd need about a quarter-million for equipment, even used equipment, and I have no customer list for whatever that new product would be."

"Let me give the marketing piece some thought over the next couple days," the professor responded with characteristic circumspection. "But in the meantime, I'd also like to get a sense for just how

grave things are financially. Do you have a couple income statements handy?"

Zach buzzed his secretary. "Mandy, can you please bring me the binder of financials?" Mandy, as always, responded promptly, smiling at the gentlemen on her way out. As she closed the door, Zach shared with his guests that Mandy, his secretary for twenty years, was recently widowed, having psychological problems from the loss, and in critical need of the health insurance benefits he provides. "My other office gal," he explained, shaking his head, "has a disabled husband and is the sole support for a family of five. And the guy who runs the plant has four kids, two of them getting ready for college. If he lost his job at age fifty, I don't know what he'd do."

The professor nodded; the accountant flipped pages in the binder. "It's not terrible," the accountant said as he opened the books to the professor, "but it's not sustainable either. The last five years show net losses ranging from about \$1,000 to over \$40,000. Costs are on the high side, mostly because of health care, workers' comp, and property tax increases. Salaries are exactly at market – anywhere from \$10 to \$26 an hour. But we've cut everything else to the bare bones. And as far as sales goes, we're at about 1.2 to 1.3 million pretty consistently, year in and year out, but we don't have any expectation of new sources of income."

The professor adjusted his glasses as he reviewed the statements. His grimace told

Zach that there was no quick fix forthcoming.

"I'm telling ya, Zach, cut-and-run," the accountant recommended, pre-empting the professor's analysis. "I know you care about these people, but they're big boys and girls now. They can take care of themselves. Believe me, they'll be fine."

**"I know you care about these people," said his accountant, "but they're big boys and girls now. They can take care of themselves"**

Zach didn't know whether to be irritated at or grateful for the counsel. Maybe Steve's was the only rational response. But Steve was ignoring the fact that Zach didn't want to sell out his employees. Irritation trumped gratitude for the moment.

"Would you be 'fine' if your income were cut in half and if you lost your health insurance?" Zach retorted softly but firmly. "Would your family be 'fine'? I know you're looking out for me, Steve, but I simply can't operate that way."

"All right," his accountant back-peddled with resignation and a shrug. "So spend \$250,000 to give them six months' severance. And spend another forty grand to maintain their health benefits for that long. Will that help you to sleep at night?"

Zach pondered the idea, but although possible, it seemed a bit excessive. "I'm getting too old for this kind of stress," he said leaning back in his chair and rubbing his eyes. "I'm 62 now, which, I know, sounds like a spring chicken to you, Charles. But the spring business is taking all the spring out of this spring chicken."

Deep down, Zach truly wanted his spring company to bounce back. But that seemed unlikely, absent some new strategy. And he wasn't sure he had either the energy to pursue it or the gumption to roll the dice on another \$200,000 lease. "Cut-and-run" seemed like a logical course of action, but what about the people? This "golden-rule" spring manufacturer recoiled at the thought of repaying their loyalty by putting them out on the street.

### **What Should Zach Do?**

**Response from  
Martin Morris,  
President and CEO,  
Sunbelt Lubricants, Inc.  
Tampa, Florida**

**The best thing Zach can  
do for his employees is to  
give them a thriving  
business**

Zach Jordan's witness to his employees, customers, and suppliers will not be enhanced by a "cut-and-run" strategy which puts his loyal workers out on the street. It would also be a flawed exit strategy and poor stewardship to sell a

business that has survived for twenty years when it is at its low point in profitability and value to the shareholder(s). Zach Jordan needs to sign the lease, create a new vision, sharpen his management techniques, and find some fresh energy.

Obviously Zach and his company have several attributes on which to build a recovery to a prosperous state. He is highly experienced in his field. He is favorably looked upon by his customers, employees, and suppliers. He has an experienced work force which appears to be capable of the mass production of a quality product. NES has the facilities, equipment, and procedures it needs to do the job. The accountant is not indicating concerns about debt ratios, and other than the lease in question, debt does not seem to be a problem issue (as it is in many firms that are in trouble).

Zach needs to go talk to his customers and immerse himself in the wants and needs of his target market. In this way, he can identify the vulnerabilities of his foreign competitors, whether quality issues, service, or whatever. One thing is for sure – his competition is not perfect and they are falling short in some way just like everyone else. Zach should determine how to position NES and its products and services in order to create superior value in the market place. Armed with this information, Zach should ask God to reveal the vision for NES that is in perfect alignment with His will for Zach's life and ministry. Zach needs to get this fresh vision

defined, captured, and articulated throughout the firm and the community.

Zach also needs counsel to review his management philosophy and practices. His emotional attachment to his employees is understandable after so many years in the trenches with them. However, as evidenced by his prior practice of issuing generous Christmas bonuses even in loss

**It would be poor  
stewardship to sell a  
business at its low point  
in profitability, when it  
has survived for  
twenty years**

years, an entitlement mentality may be manifesting itself. Are workers being regularly evaluated and rewarded for performance, or are they given pay raises every year for surviving another 365 days? Are the workers willing to bear some of the financial difficulties involved in the turnaround in exchange for performance-based incentives in the future? Zach is probably holding on to one or more employees who are not the highest performers or the best choice to meet the needs of New England Spring Company. As the CEO, Zach has the responsibility to ensure that all the right people are on board in each position. When facing this kind of competitive threat, tenure and family situations do not override the legitimate needs of the business for top performers. Zach needs to make sure he is hiring character and training

skills, defining good performance, and providing frequent (quarterly) reviews to let the workers know whether they are meeting performance objectives. Substandard performers either need extra training to improve to the desired level or, if that does not work within a reasonable time, repositioning to a better job fit if possible. If all else fails, Zach needs to have a system to compassionately release substandard performers from the firm. He can still be generous to them and go above and beyond in trying to help them find the job God has in mind for them.

The issue at crisis level is Zach's failure to maintain an effective sales machine and to deploy it into the market. There is really nothing wrong with NES that can't be solved by a higher sales-per-employee ratio. Whenever one single customer reaches twenty percent or more of sales, it is time to get out there and get some new accounts on board before that one big account leaves you high and dry. This needs to be the number one priority whether times are good or bad. In Zach's case, he is negative about his prospects for new business and he may be allowing his past failures to convince him that there is little hope. Zach needs professional help in this area, whether it be a consultant or a new hire at the sales manager level.

If he does hire a sales manager, Zach needs the new hire to provide fresh energy and perspective to get the sales problem under control. Zach's new vision will help him shake off the "tired" feeling and get

focused again. To achieve his new vision, Zach badly needs his new help to explore every possible new idea – and to revisit all old ideas – concerning product sales. This might mean using reps instead of direct sales people, or establishing new distribution channels. Maybe it's the Internet, or some sort of strategic partnership with a company that sells a complimentary product line. Perhaps old methods will work with new, better trained people. In any event, Zach needs someone spending the entire day, every day, concerned only with finding a new sale of NES products.

Like everyone else, Zach needs to trust God as his source and also understand that he is called to exhibit the highest standards of diligence in doing his job as CEO of the business God has entrusted to him. This includes, among other things, articulation of a clear vision for the firm, proper selection and nurturing of workers, and a commitment to excellence in serving the needs of the market. At 62, he should also have a prayerfully thought out an exit strategy and have a succession plan in place. As far as the employees are concerned, the best thing Zach can do is give them a thriving business to work for, one that will remain so long after Zach has moved on to his next assignment.

**Response from  
Alex Demeshkin,  
eMarketing Manager  
Regent University**

### **Zach should shift some of the burden – and some of the rewards – to his employees**

What happened to NES was not a result of Zach's inability to run the company well. From what I can tell, Zach has managed NES according to the Biblical principles of servant leadership by treating all of his stakeholders as he would want to be treated. The truth is that his company has fallen victim

### **Just like in the Biblical model of the family, Zach's employees should share in the hardships as well as in the prosperity**

to the globalization effect and to the economic downturn in the US, just as have a lot of other small- and medium-sized companies. In the new, globally-interconnected economy, his business model became obsolete. This is what he should do now:

Given his values, Zach has only one real choice: to transform his business so that it becomes profitable and sustainable in the new economic conditions. My proposal is for him to begin with profit-sharing for employees. NES needs a new strategy and a strong **collective will** to pursue it. Profit sharing, especially in a small firm, can produce that collective will.

The rationale? Zach can not any longer absorb all the responsibility and losses for the company's business

decisions. Just like in the Biblical model of the family, Zach's employees should take the good with the bad, sharing the hardships in the company as well as the prosperity and wealth. I emphasize, though, that profit-sharing to align the interests of his employees with his own interests is only a starting point for Zach. Here's the broader plan, broken down by short-term and long-term initiatives:

Short-term measures include:

1. Cut salary expenses and/or health benefits in exchange for profit-sharing. Zach will meet with his employees and explain the financial situation. They'll have to understand that given the circumstances if they agree on partly fixed and partly profit-driven salaries, they'd still be better off than if the company goes bankrupt. It will also provide additional motivation for everyone, a collective will to make the company successful.
2. Negotiate new terms for the lease. If the owner of their building loses NES as a renter in bad economy, there might be no one else to rent the building.
3. Review the product line. Zach has to consider discontinuing unprofitable products or those that are uncompetitive. Of course, this has to be done carefully since such measures have the potential to cost him customers in profitable segments as well.

Long-term measures include:

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Look for sources of new competitive advantages. If NES can't compete on price, they have to find some other advantage: for example, 100 percent on-time delivery, quality, technological enhancements, etc. | 2. Reduce the risk of losing his biggest customer by offering to fix spring prices over the next year, or even by offering a gradual price reduction, if possible. | 4. If there's no other way to stay in business, consider relocating to an environment where production costs do not threaten his solvency. |
|  | 3. Find new distribution channels.   |  |

## TOOLKIT

# Measuring Your Obstacles to Spiritual Growth

One strategy for jump starting the spiritual growth process involves coming to a clearer understanding of what's in the way. What's preventing you from deeper relationship with God? From growing in Christ-likeness? From consistently being the person God wants you to be?

The Obstacles to Growth Survey (OGS), developed and validated at Regent University, is a free and anonymous online tool designed to assist you in this self-assessment. Used by thousands of Christians around the world, the OGS evaluates the extent to which four obstacles may be inhibiting your growth process: independence from God, lack

of knowledge about how to grow, busyness, and a poor environment for growth.

To date, of those who have completed the survey, "Busyness" is by far the chief culprit thwarting growth. In fact, scores of both men and women suggest that busyness is not only a significant obstacle, it's about twice as likely to impede growth as are the respondents' next greatest obstacle. Tied for second are a "Poor Environment for Growth" and "Independence from God." "Lack of Knowledge about How to Grow" is the least pernicious obstacle of the four. Although it's a major obstacle for some, it appears to be a

relatively minor obstacle across the Christian community.

The OGS takes about ten minutes to complete and does not require the user to enter his or her name or email address. After completing the online survey, users receive their scores instantly upon clicking the submit button. They are also offered several suggestions for overcoming their primary obstacles.

The survey is also available in hard-copy version for group and classroom use. The online version can be completed at [www.Assess-Yourself.org](http://www.Assess-Yourself.org)

## Want to Write for *Regent Business Review*?

The *Regent Business Review* is currently assigning articles to excellent Christian writers who have significant insights to share with Christian leaders worldwide. If you're interested in writing for *RBR*, please review our writers' guidelines, posted on our website ([www.regent.edu/review](http://www.regent.edu/review)). All topics germane to business, leadership, and faith in the workplace will be considered.

# Bookshelf

## Rethinking the Purpose of Business: Interdisciplinary Essays from the Catholic Social Tradition

by S.A. Cortright and Michael Naughton, Editors  
(University of Notre Dame Press, 2002)



More than thirty years ago, Milton Friedman published a now-classic article with the confrontational title, “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Profits.” The authors of a new, more unassumingly-entitled book called *Rethinking the Purpose of Business* couldn’t disagree more with Friedman. Articulating the traditional Roman Catholic theology of the corporation, the premise of this volume is, to paraphrase Pope John Paul II, the social responsibility and purpose of a business is not just “to increase profits,” but to satisfy basic needs and to collectively serve the whole of society.

*Rethinking* is an assembly of thirteen well-written, scholarly essays that evolved from a 1997 Catholic management education conference at Antwerp, Belgium. And while there’s not much new here to those familiar with Catholic Social Teaching, what is new is

the cogency with which the volume is presented. Some of the best Catholic thinkers in the field – management theorists, theologians, economists, ethicists, and attorneys – afford us coherent and sometimes-profound insights into the question of why business exists and how it should be conceived as a vehicle for honoring God.

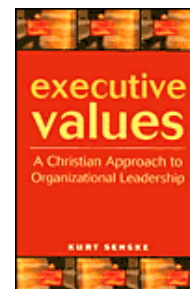
Among the better essays is the opening chapter by Jean-Yves Chavez and Michael Naughton, a survey of the history of Catholic social thought as it relates to business and commerce. These pages should be required reading for any serious student of business ethics. Also noteworthy are Dennis McCann’s carefully argued (although, from a Protestant perspective, sometimes elitist) chapter on “Business Corporations and the Principle of Subsidiarity” and James Murphy and David Pyke’s more practical closing chapter on “Humane Work and the Challenges of Job Design.” Similar to the papal encyclicals themselves, all the chapters tend to be long on theology and public policy imperatives and short on practical implications (i.e., what does all this mean on Monday morning?). So it’s not a book for frazzled managers looking for tomorrow’s quick ethical fix for the problem du jour. Rather, it’s for the thoughtful business person, policy-maker, or educator – whether Catholic or not – who wants to understand the controversial Catholic position that business

is a vehicle to serve the common good. No better volume exists on this topic. Kudos to editors Cortright and Naughton for making clearer an essential, provocative voice in the conversation about the purpose and responsibility of business.

*Reviewed by Michael Zigarelli. Michael is an associate professor of management at Regent University and the editor of the Regent Business Review. You can reach him at michzig@regent.edu*

## Executive Values: A Christian Approach to Organizational Leadership

By Kurt Senske  
(Augsburg Press, 2003)



The author is the president and CEO of Lutheran Social Services of the South, Inc., an agency with an annual operating budget of \$70 million employing more than 1,200 people. He holds a law degree and a Ph.D.; likewise, he is an experienced attorney, political consultant, and university administrator. More importantly, he’s a committed Christian and in *Executive Values*, he’s committed to

teaching Christians how to lead by the Golden Rule.

What does that mean in practice? Here's a sampling of the implications according to Senske. Golden Rule leaders are servant-leaders, humbling themselves to put others first. They are entirely trustworthy. They hire people who have values similar to their own, thereby perpetuating the culture. And they build other leaders, unthreatened by talent and insights that may be superior to their own.

Beyond enumerating attributes and principles, Senske also offers a lot of practical guidance to the reader. Using both anecdotal evidence and academic research, he shows how to effect cultural change within an organization, how to use values-based strategic planning, how to develop and mentor a leadership team, how to balance work and life, and how to lead a life of significance.

I would recommend this book to both practitioners and academics. Although it is a fast

read – fewer than 175 pages – it provides a good review for leaders about basic management principles. The inclusion of practical applications of Christian values in business settings is beneficial for the new and mature Christian leader alike.

*Reviewed by Bill Laing. Bill is a Ph.D. candidate at Capella University and a business instructor at Anderson College, Anderson, SC. You can reach him at [blaing@ac.edu](mailto:blaing@ac.edu).*

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# A Rebellious (Court) House

*"Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn. Say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says.' And whether they listen or fail to listen – for they are a rebellious house – they will know that a prophet has been among them. And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words." Ezekiel 2:3-6a*

On June 26, 2003, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the American people can no longer deem certain sexual conduct to be immoral, striking down a Texas law that criminalized gay sex acts. Dumb law, perhaps, but an even dumber court decision. Worse than dumb, though, some have accused the Court of throwing out the Constitution in favor of taking sides in a cultural war. They're right, and that precedent poses and almost unprecedented problem for Christians.

The decision, *Lawrence v. Texas*, is less about closing the bedroom door to government than it is about opening the door to every type of nefarious sexual activity. If the penumbral right to privacy (created out of thin air by this Court in the 1960s and then used to find a "Constitutional right" to abortion in the 1970s) means that we the people cannot establish moral boundaries in sexual conduct without trampling on

someone's constitutional rights, then what possible grounds are there to criminalize – or even denounce – things like prostitution, adult incest, bestiality, or bigamy? Justice Scalia noted this plainly and with haunting trenchancy in his dissent: the court decision, said Scalia, "effectively decrees the end of all morals legislation."

**Some have accused the Supreme Court of taking sides in the cultural war. They're right. Now, the time has come for Christians to say "No more!"**

The business implications are myriad, since as society changes, business faithfully follows. "Sexual orientation" will soon be a required category in corporate anti-discrimination policies and corporate benefit policies will, by law, include spousal equivalent provisions (e.g., health insurance for partners of gay and lesbian employees). Sensitivity training will be as commonplace, and as mandatory, as sexual harassment training is today, and National Coming Out Day will replace Columbus Day as an October business holiday. Within a decade – perhaps less, given the pace at which courts are abetting this movement – the gay lifestyle will be fully normalized, accepted as equally valid by a majority of the U.S. population, and business, with

its tagalong personnel policies, will have been an accomplice.

Or, the future can be different if Christians collectively rise up today and say "no more!"

A hymn that's currently popular in contemporary worship services includes the line: "These are the days of Ezekiel..." Indeed they are. The "rebellious house" of Israel stands tall today in North America and Europe, now given even more structural integrity by the rebellious courthouse in Washington. Ezekiel's task was to speak on God's behalf, to put this "obstinate and stubborn" people on notice that they've engaged in rampant idolatry and they must immediately turn back to God. That, now, is our uncomfortable task.

But the difference is that in 2003, the world needs an army of Ezekiels, stalwart men and women of God standing unflinchingly firm for what's right, despite the firestorm of persecution they will inevitably face. The culture has drifted because of the silence of the lambs: too many of us Christians have been mum for too long, distracted by more important life issues or simply too pusillanimous to risk offending friends, colleagues, and family members. Sure, we occasionally draw the line and engage a battle or two. But 95 percent of our battles are fought with people who share 95 percent of our worldview.

Those numbers need to change. The time has come for

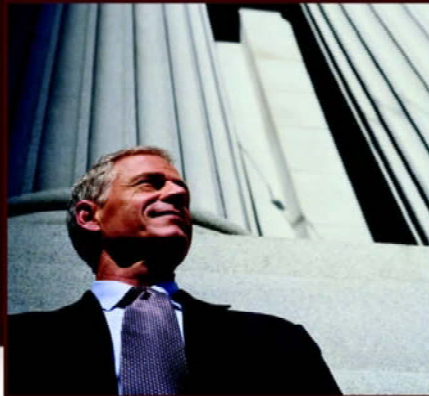
all Bible-believing Christians to be the voice of the “Sovereign Lord,” courageously denouncing the accelerating cultural decay that surrounds us. In these days of Ezekiel, we no longer have the luxury to loiter.

We should take action in our statehouses, of course, and we should take action at the polls. But we also need to begin reclaiming ground in our personal spheres of influence – in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our workplaces, sometimes even in our

churches. *Lawrence v. Texas* is the fruit of our inaction: the rebellious house gains more square footage every year. The time has come for it to be dismantled, even if we have to do it the way it was built – one brick at a time.

“...Corporate America has got  
to understand there’s a higher calling...”

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# Confessions of a Christian Businessman

by Buck Jacobs

*We are privileged to publish this candid article from a seasoned Christian businessman and a leader in the marketplace ministry movement. Buck Jacobs is the Founder and President of The C12 Group ([www.thec12group.com](http://www.thec12group.com)), an organization that brings Christian business owners together to increase their business skills and to show them how to use business as a platform for Christian ministry. Before founding C12, Buck served as director and vice-president of sales of the S.H. Mack Company in St. Charles, Illinois. You can reach him at [buckj@thec12group.com](mailto:buckj@thec12group.com)*

I have been immersed in this experience of serving Christ through business for thirty years, first as an experiment but then, as a conviction and call. And during that time, I have made just about every mistake that can be made and watched others make the ones that I hadn't thought of. But along that bumpy road, I've learned a thing or two and I am blessed to share it with you here.

Among the most important lessons I've learned is this: the marketplace presents the single greatest opportunity in this world to share Christ and advance the Kingdom of God around the world. However, to participate in that transformation, we Christians need to circumvent the two biggest traps into which I fell over the course of my business career. I offer them to you here as signposts of the major

hazards we must avoid to do God's will in the marketplace.

## Believing "The Big Lie"

As I reflect on my "faith at work" struggles and on the struggles I have observed in my Christian brothers and sisters, it seems that one pernicious lie has hamstrung

**During the past thirty years, I have made just about every mistake that can be made and watched others make the ones I hadn't thought of. But I've learned a thing or two as well**

Christians' ability to advance the Kingdom through business. Satan has planted in our minds and in the culture that *you can't mix religion and business*. Have you ever heard that? Of course you have – not only directly, but in innumerable, more subtle forms. It is devastating!

Think about it. If it's true that we can't mix our faith with business, the implications are unlimited. For instance, what we call "sin" at church and at home may not be sin in business. There is no absolute standard – no absolute right and wrong – for how we treat people in business. We can do whatever we please with corporate money, confident of immunity from God's judgment. And on it goes.

The truth, of course, is just the opposite: we cannot separate these dimensions of our lives without being a "hypocrite." When we as Christians use a different set of values in our work from those values we promote in our church, we deserve the ugly label. Bottom line: God has only one set of criteria that apply everywhere. He doesn't alter His standards in the name of profit.

## Manipulating People for Personal Gain

I have regularly struggled with the temptation to manipulate people to gain selfish profit of some kind – not just money or success, but acceptance and recognition as well. In fact, using people for personal gain was my standard way of operating for thirty-five years. How contrary to the gospel can one be? I manipulated, but Jesus served. As I've now taught for decades, personal advancement through sinful exploitation is sin, not profit, regardless of the material outcome. My role is to serve others and to allow Jesus Christ to live His life through me – as me – to them. "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" is the way Paul put it (Galatians 2:20).

Let me candidly rewind the tape, highlighting for you the major signposts. Often in business I have been tempted to lie or to shade the truth to gain what would appear to be a business advantage. Jesus

wouldn't do that. Often I have been tempted to take advantage of my position to "lord it over" another. Jesus wouldn't do that. Often I have been tempted to compare

**Real success – God's view of success – will not be measured in net worth or in worldly reputation, but in our obedience to living out His calling**

myself to others, holding in subtle contempt those who have less and those who have accomplished less than I have. Jesus wouldn't do that. I still tend to look first at the temporal bottom line and only later to consider the eternal significance of what I have done. Jesus wouldn't do that. And I sometimes place importance on my job title and think that my value is demonstrated by it. Jesus wouldn't do that, either.

What He would do instead is embody God's love and standards every moment of every day, regardless the cost.

Friend, since Jesus is not here in the flesh, we are His ambassadors. In fact, the central reason we are here is to represent Him and to demonstrate His ways to the lost. Prideful pursuit of personal gain at the expense of others is the antithesis of this call, marring our witness more than anything else. Real success – God's view of success – will not be measured in net worth or in worldly reputation or achievement, but in our

obedience in living out our roles in the context He chooses.

**How to Minimize the Mistakes**

The question next becomes "How?" How can I avoid these pitfalls and do God's will in the marketplace each day? Well, there is a good answer, but it has nothing to do with applying a legalistic set of rules. Rather, there is a *relational* way that works every time that it's tried in earnest.

It entails first getting to know God through His Word. It is impossible to live a successful life in the marketplace apart from God's written revelation of His Truth. This means intentional study with intentional application. For many, the first thing in the morning is truly the best time for it. Spending the first part of the day with God just gets the day off on the right foot.

Relatedly, use this morning time for genuine, uninterrupted prayer. I can personally attest to the power of this practice. Seventeen years ago a trusted friend said to me: "I don't see how a man can say that God is first in his life and not give Him the first part of his day." I don't know if that's true for everyone, but I knew that it was for me. So on that day, I committed to spend the first hour of every day with my Father, and I have very seldom missed our appointment. I talk to God about every area of my life, listening for direction as I do. Moreover, I journal and keep record of what I ask Him and what I think He tells me.

Since that day, my morning time with God has been the platform on which every good thing in my life has been built. On countless mornings, God has shown me areas of my life and specific actions that were either sinful or would lead to compromise. And at least as often He has given me wonderful direction, counsel that I doubt would have ever occurred to me apart from this discipline.

Beyond this relational, devotional time, it's important to practice the discipline of accountability (this is part of the reason I created The C12 Group). I know, I know. It's almost trite to say that accountability is essential, but guess what: *accountability is essential*, both with friends and with God. And I'm not referring to some superficial accountability, but to intimate, *meaningful* accountability. Our

**A friend said to me: "You can't say that God is first in your life but not give God the first part of your day." I don't know if that's true for everybody, but it was for me. So I made a decision.**

thoughts, not just our actions, need to be brought into the light and evaluated by both wise, mature Christian friends and by God Himself. And while the former is valuable, the latter is indispensable. Keep short accounts with God, asking Him each night to show you your sin. Then confess it

to make it right. Better still is to live in the awareness of His review every moment of your life, experiencing His cleansing and empowerment continually.

So to sum it up, if I've learned nothing else in three decades of devoting my work life to God, I've learned this: the real secret to business "success" is intimate relationship with God. No one achieves true success as a Christian without building on the solid foundation of divine relationship. Further, I believe that in the frantic pace of the twenty-first century, scheduling non-negotiable time with God each day is the only way that any of us will make the relationship a reality.

A last caution and an invitation, if you'll indulge me. Our enemy is too clever and too strong to take lightly. The very idea that we would think that we can beat him on our own proves that he has already deceived us! Brothers and sisters, fellow laborers in the marketplace ministry of God's Kingdom, rise up! Join the growing number of us who see the marketplace as the last great mission field. Look beyond the mundane and see the eternal purpose of your role. Build relationship with God and avoid the common mistakes I and others have made, faithfully pressing forward to God's will for your career.

## **How Can a Christian Business Owner, President, or CEO Deal Strategically and Biblically with**

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- ...and everything else?**

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