

People At Work: Preparing To Be The Whole Church

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Editor's Note: This Cape Town 2010 Advance Paper has been written by Willy Kotiuga as an overview of the topic to be discussed at the Multiplex session on 'Preparing Your Marketplace for a Faith Journey.' Responses to this paper through the Lausanne Global Conversation will be fed back to the author and others to help shape their final presentations at the Congress.

Abstract

One of the largest 'unactivated' peoples' groups that spans across all nations and continents is the workplace where most of the world's populations is actively engaged in earning income to support their families. Within all segments of the workplace are believers who have a personal relationship with God. Some are extremely effective in using their workplace to invite others to join them on their journey while for others work is a place where faith shapes their behavior but not much more. The fields are ripe unto harvest and in the workplace there are many harvesters but only a small percentage are fully engaged in proclaiming hope to a world looking for hope.

While there is little disagreement on the theology of being salt and light where we are planted, the reality of our current situation is that we have fallen short in our passion to live out our responsibility to declare Jesus Christ as Savior. In this paper we explore where we are today, highlight the many positive developments in workplace ministry and look at the barriers to getting where God would like us to be so that there is sustainable development in properly equipping the believers in the workplace to do what God has called them to do.

1 The Context (Biblical Basis)

We are called to go into the entire world and that includes the world that God has placed us in. Wherever our sphere of influence extends we are to be the salt and light for this world to see. This call does not make a distinction between professional Christian workers in churches or Christian agencies and those who have ordinary occupations. Even Jesus lived out His vocation as carpenter until it was time to live out the last ten percent of His life focused on announcing the Kingdom to the masses full-time.

There are numerous examples of Biblical heroes that model how faith was an integral part of how they conducted business in the workplace. The one common element in all the stories is that their faith journey and professional journey were one and the same, with faith and work mutually interdependent. There was no differentiation between work and spirituality as they lived out their faith twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week (24/7).

Joseph's faith not only sustained him through four separate careers (family business, household management, prison administration, public service) but was also a key element in his rise to the top in each position he held. Paul used his skills as a tentmaker not only to support his missionary endeavor but also as a means to reach an audience who did not have the luxury of engaging in public discussion on faith-related matters. Daniel rose to the highest ranks because of his God-given wisdom and his unwavering commitment to God's principles, despite personal risk to his life. All aspects of their work were offerings of excellence unto God.

2 Our Current Situation

The Biblical examples have been the inspiration in the founding of many organizations with a diverse reach into communities around the world. Paul's tentmaking skills inspired a generation of tentmakers who used their professional skills as an entry point to cultures that would have normally

been closed to 'formal' missionary work. The Business as Mission (BAM) movement has taken this one step further in encouraging and equipping entrepreneurs to set up legitimate self-sustaining businesses around the world. These businesses provide living examples of God working through individuals determined to live out the Gospel using their God-given skills.

Throughout the world, men and women of faith have brought the church into their workplace in various creative ways. There are workplace Bible Studies that are taking place in small businesses to large corporations. These studies are not only a source of encouragement to those who attend, but also a reminder that living out the faith is a 24/7 responsibility that extends beyond the boundaries of the local congregations. Many of these Bible Studies have opened up the door for workers in search of God to find Him as they discover the relevance of faith to daily living.

Profession-based Christian fellowships or societies bring people within professional disciplines together to be a source of mutual encouragement and to explore how they can use their professional expertise effectively in building God's Kingdom here on earth.

However, living the faith and professional living are not always aligned. We live in a secular - sacred paradigm that separates the Church from what happens in the workplace. In this paradigm, faith is expressed primarily within the confines of the church building or in church sanctioned and organized functions. But the same faith does not necessarily extend to the workplace where individuals spend forty hours a week rubbing shoulders with people who live in worlds that are not familiar with the Gospel.

There are many 'workers' in the workplace that are not living to their full potential in declaring the Good News. Living the faith goes beyond being good examples at work. The call to making disciples implores us to live the faith by deliberately inviting others to join us on our faith journey. The disconnect between theology and praxis has left so many people with an 'incomplete' calling. We work because we are designed and instructed by God to obey His original mandate as well as to declare the Good News.

3 Serious Questions

What happened that we have become so ineffective in reaching the billions of people working alongside those who have a personal living relationship with God? Within increasingly multi-ethnic work environments in the Western World, penetrating the workplace represents an unprecedented opportunity to enter into the lives of people from all the nations of the world.

We are taught in the church to go into the entire world, and yet the church has been feeble in equipping believers with tools and understanding of how God views the workplace. How we view work has influenced how we act at work. Do we see work as a necessary evil or an incredible opportunity? If it is a necessary evil, then anything related to work becomes less than holy.

Our faith and the teaching that we receive at church do shape our behavior and values. But unfortunately, in an increasingly pluralistic society, being 'nice' is not enough. Do we know the hearts of our co-workers? Do we see our co-workers the way Jesus sees them? Does our passion at church extend to our responsibility at work to invite others to join us on a faith journey? Does our commitment to gathering in our congregations extend to a practical love for our colleagues and customers when we scatter as the people of God? Much of the strategic significance of the workplace flows out of the reality that we are constantly surrounded with colleagues, competitors, clients and customers. Daily, most of us are in close dialogue with unbelievers.

Teaching, training and tools are necessary but not sufficient to bring in the harvest that is waiting. Our understanding and our hearts have to be enlarged to see the 'secular' as something that God desires to make holy. Each one of us has a responsibility to make that happen??not through our strength, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. We cannot do it alone, but we can in partnership with God. A healthy understanding of how to work with God in partnership in the workplace will go a

long way into bringing the Church to the workplace.

4 Where Do We Want to Be

In a sacred work environment, there is a vibrant relevant proclamation of faith in the workplace empowered by a move of the Holy Spirit, all supported by the empowering, dynamic, invigorating prayers of the local church. The workplace is one of the few environments where believers have access to an audience forty hours a week. The workplace is ideal for embodying the Gospel, living a life that reflects grace and truth. There are very few evangelistic outreaches where this is possible.

Rethinking how we do church has become a "catch phrase," but most efforts have been directed towards the improvement and refinement of existing programs without touching the fundamental issues that would open doors towards seeing God move in powerful ways. There are incredible stories of how God has been moving in churches that have been willing to rethink how they live out the Good News.

Directing this rethinking toward equipping people to live and proclaim their faith at work would help us to move from just being present at work to living out our faith at work. Properly equipped with a holistic God-view of the workplace, workers will become highly motivated harvesters. Fully engaging the world will happen only when workers are fully engaged in the workplace.

However, fully to engage workers in the workplace will require a change in the prevailing church mindset to accept workers in the workplace as Christ's full-time servants. The distinction, along with the ensuing inherent biases, between full-time paid Christian workers and the laity must disappear with respect to the notion of being called into the ministry.

The greatest potential for growth for the church in the next generation comes from the people who hunger for meaningful relationships in the workplace. Our workers are in fields that are ripe for harvest, but they have not yet learned how to engage effectively.

5 How Do We Get There

Unfortunately, there is no universal recipe to get where we would like to be ideally. But there are some key steps we can take today to move closer to what God intended for us. For years the church and the secular have been kept in separate spheres. Each has its own prevailing culture that separates the workplace from church.

People don't respond until they are moved to respond. In church we hear about the Good News and how God wants to bring hope to the world, but when we get into the world on Monday there is no invitation to co-workers to discover God's grace, forgiveness and hope. There is a lack of passion for the spiritual welfare of our co-workers. As this goes on week after week, it soon becomes "normal" to disassociate church from work. The gap between theology and praxis grows, creating a paradigm where church becomes increasingly irrelevant to the workplace and the workplace becomes irrelevant to the church.

The Sunday and workweek dynamics that exist today are worlds apart even though they should not be. Workers and pastors for the most part live in different paradigms. Many pastors have spent the majority of their careers in professional ministry and don't fully understand work dynamics. And workers have not attempted to educate pastors on how they spend the week in the workplace. As a result, each stays in his/her own respective worlds, meeting only at church functions. Workers have a responsibility to take their pastors on a tour of their workplace and pastors need to become more proactive in understanding the heart and context of the work culture of their parishioners. The Gospel is not just about theology but also about sharing living examples of what works and what does not.

Lunchtime Bible Studies at work, early Morning Prayer with fellow believers and corridor discussions are part of the solution. Workplace conferences and some of the books and studies on work are

helpful tools and can assist in getting started. However, the problem is that many people do not, in general, integrate work with ministry. We don't have many shining examples of Christian workers who are able to integrate seamlessly their expressive faith on Sunday with work during the week. Many people's faith tends to be compartmentalized. Very few workplace believers make significant contributions that get noticed or celebrated at church on Sundays.

The church has to become alive at the workplace by making the workplace sacred. Work has to be seen as an integral and essential part of the mission field at our doorstep. Two things need to happen if the church - work divide is to be bridged effectively: we need to rethink globally the role of the church in supporting our workplace emissaries, and to rethink the role of work in motivating emissaries. Without deliberate rethinking and concrete actions, we will continue to perpetuate the current paradigm of workers doing very little to bring in the harvest that awaits our attention.

The Business as Mission (BAM) movement has demonstrated how we need to be much more intentional about penetrating the workplace. Its focus on the practical aspect in equipping entrepreneurs to succeed needs to become part of the culture of the church. One common characteristic of BAMers is that they are extremely passionate about their mission and willing to put everything at risk to achieve their objectives.

Work needs to be seen as an opportunity for mission, a place where we can bring God's gift of love to people with whom we would not normally have contact. To transform the current secular paradigm of "working for a living" into "breathing God's life into work," church needs to become more than just worship and teaching.

6 What Do We Need to Do Now

We don't need elaborate plans and strategies—we just need to start. But to help us get started, we do need to develop simple models that work and to build on current experience. We already have a number of good motivational books, studies and examples; and enough guilt about not doing enough; to get a good start. What we don't have is enough critical mass to build and create momentum to make the process sustainable.

Bridging the current secular - sacred divide starts with bringing the church to the workplace. Greater involvement of the laity in developing strategies such as is happening at Cape Town 2010 is a good start. Although pastors rub shoulders with the laity in a church context, the discussions are primarily focused on church business and not workplace mission. Many pastors don't have the background or knowledge to engage in practical mission-based discourse on reaching the workplace. Educating the laity on how to bring workplace issues to the church mission agenda is key, but must be done in parallel with helping the clergy to see the mission possibilities in the workplace. Everything that we do is a gift to God, whether it is preaching, teaching, designing, cooking, cleaning, creating spreadsheets or operating a machine. And everything we do should reflect excellence that is a worthy offering acceptable to God.

All the best training and all the best tools will gather dust on our shelves unless there is a renewed passion that can come only through prayer and the moving of God's Spirit. The pulpit is a powerful instrument but only if it is relevant. Regurgitating old clichés without understanding work dynamics will only widen the secular - sacred divide.

Now is the time to put aside the old paradigms and start the process of transforming the workplace into holy ground where God is invited to move through each of our lives. Starting is great, but without sustainability as an integral part of the design, mission in the workplace will become a fad and not a growing reality. We need to ask God to raise up champions to drive the process. We need these champions to work with believers of all vocations and callings to build a community of practice to promote excellence and to keep the momentum going.

We have tools such as the Internet and Skype that can facilitate the exchange of knowledge through

virtual communities that can have real impacts. Through technology, not only can we share but also experience the move of God in real time. We need to set the wheels in motion that will take us to places that we would have thought impossible.

7 What Does a Sacred Work Environment Look Like? ? Joseph Model

Discussing what is and what should be will create awareness and motivate people into action. But unless we know where we are going we are at best growing in the dark. We all expect our endeavors to produce people who begin a faith journey and enter into a growing relationship with God. But going from where we are today to where we want to be does not normally happen overnight. We don't have a magic formula or instruction manuals that guarantee perfect results, but we do have a collection of examples of what is possible. God has blessed me with a sacred workplace where I serve Him as a professional consulting engineer. I call it the "Joseph Model" in honor of Joseph who transformed each of his work environments under adverse conditions.

The path to faith is a journey that reaches its critical state when searching gives way to commitment and ongoing transformation through a daily walk with God in an environment that has been reclaimed for God. However, in the process of planting the seed, there are many variables outside of our control, impeding growth to maturity. After years of trying to invite co-workers to join me on a faith journey, I realized that without an enabling environment, words and personal examples were not enough. To overcome some of the impediments to reaching the commitment phase, I started the discipling process from the moment that someone came into my sphere of influence. While I have the privilege of being a director of the company I work for, I also have the responsibility to use everything in my power to create an environment that is highly conducive to excellence in the product we provide and in helping people attain their highest potential.

I lead a highly skilled group of professional engineers with active projects in over 20 countries. Our primary output is high level consulting reports for governments, international funding agencies and senior electricity company executives. The values driving our work environment include accountability, responsibility, excellence, teamwork, discussions in a learning environment, risk-taking, forgiveness, support and celebration. While all these are highly desirable from a professional perspective, they also are critical in terms of helping people embark on a healthy faith journey long before any commitment to the Lord is made. These have become not only drivers to attaining professional excellence, but also an integral part of making good disciples.

Accountability reminds people that in all areas of life we are accountable to a higher authority. Responsibility reinforces the principle to work through difficulties in meeting our obligations and commitments. The value of excellence motivates people to do better than they have done in the past and better than others are used to doing. A learning environment stimulates discussion and encourages exploration beyond current knowledge to explore and discover more about life. Encouraging staff to take risks helps them learn to step out of their comfort zone into new territory while forgiveness is offered to those who make mistakes or whose risks have not turned out to be as successful as their initial optimism indicated. Support enables people to go in confidence to the next level of understanding and knowledge with celebration for successes. There is no secular "sacred divide" in promoting these values.

This is a holy environment since all of the above values are fundamental to walking in faith. Such an environment is not only an environment for professional excellence but also for coworkers to be disciplined long before they make a commitment to faith. Each of the values highlights an aspect of faith, and is practiced in the workplace on a daily basis, giving co-workers a taste of walking in faith, which is what the Good News is all about. Therefore when they meet Jesus, crossing the bridge into a life of faith will mean entering a lifestyle that is already somewhat familiar, because prior to their conversion they will have gone already through an intensive discipleship training course that will now help them grow rapidly in their relationship to God.

This is the sacred environment in which I live at my workplace. For others who are not in managerial

positions, the holy ground may be limited to one's shared workspace, desk or workbench. For some, a sacred workplace is the lunchtime Bible study once a week. For others, it could be coffee breaks and/or lunchtimes filled with discussions (not monologues) about matters in life. Ultimately what transforms the secular to sacred is the presence of God—and when God is present, changes take place. We are all called to be change agents. If Joseph could do it as a slave and as a prisoner, there is no reason why we cannot transform that which is within our sphere of influence into holy ground.

8 Road Map For the Future

The future is full of possibilities for reaching the billions who actively gain their living in the workplace. Where the road will take us depends on breaking the secular ? sacred divide. Cape Town 2010 will bring laity in direct contact with church leaders. We can script a program, but what we need more than a script is an enlarged vision with effective leadership. And that will only come through prayer.

All movements need leadership. Leadership in the workplace is needed as much as leadership in mission agencies and churches. Many workplace people are leaders but many are not. The few who speak out or write get some attention, particularly if they are CEO's or some luminary. We need to energize, train and equip laymen and women to lead for the Gospel in every corner of the workplace. How do we train leaders to be catalysts in their context?;and to mobilize others? Many believers in the workplace truly want to reach out and have an impact. As in so many other contexts, they need leadership. Almost everyone thinks of leadership in the secular context and the church/organizational context. People read all the management books and leadership books on leading better in their work or ?ministry.? But what does it take to lead in the context of the workplace in order to make an impact for the gospel? Surely it is more than organizing a noon Bible study or a special speaker. What does that leader look like whether on the assembly line or at the head of a corporation? What do they need in order to develop their faith leadership skills at their workplace?;not merely to be a better manager in their job?

At Cape Town 2010, may God open our eyes and break down the barriers we have created so that we may all prepare the workplace for an incredible faith journey.

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