



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

REAL CHRISTIANS IN THE REAL WORLD • Dave Sunde

Next week, George marks his sixth year anniversary as a partner in the law firm of Duwe, Cheetum, and Howe. He is regarded by his colleagues as the firm's top medical malpractice attorney. George is also a Christian. He coaches soccer on Wednesday evenings as one way to get some time with his two sons. And he prefers bottled water instead of a diet cola with his lunch.

There is only one sentence in this list of personal descriptions that anyone in his firm would take issue with regarding him—the statement that he is a Christian. Not that anyone would come right out and challenge him, but George knows, and his associates know, that his “religion” is a personal thing, and is not to be imported into the worklife regimen.

Partners and staff alike, share the view that “we all have our vulnerable points,” and for good ol’ George, it happens to be in the realm of “religion” that he must bear his liability. You too, may have noticed in your workplace, that a lot of people disavow any connection with personal faith in God, or church, or even humanitarian service, simply on the grounds of not wanting to be hypocritical. Rather than try to live the life of a Christian—which has to be some kind of impossibility, they think—it’s best just not get involved.

Is there a message here? I think so. It is the message that if anyone is serious about God and “religion,” that person at best is probably faking it, or is emotionally attached to a family heirloom.

“Real Christians do not exist in the real world” appears to be the majority opinion in many workplaces. And so this may help explain why you face a very challenging situation in communicating your faith and love for the Lord. Somehow, I think you knew that. At least you felt it. We all want to be liked, to be approved, and to advance in our job. So if letting on that you are a Christian will mean the jeopardy of any of the above, then that may be asking too much.

The good news is that there are some very credible ways to establish among your peers that it is not only possible, but very desirable, to be a true Christian. However, in the North American culture, that is not an easy assignment. For Christianity means so many different things. Without going into all the possible alternative descriptions, my benchmark statement is this: a true Christian is one who is depending totally on Jesus Christ for right standing before a holy, just, and loving God.

In other words, the true Christian has entered into a right relationship with God by receiving the gift of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his/her sin and separation from God. Period. The New Testament puts it this way: “For by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God—not because of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The starting point for building a life that expresses a credible witness for Jesus Christ, is to recognize that the world of your workplace needs you more than they know. Of course, you cannot tell them that! Jesus said that His followers are “the salt of the earth.” He also said that we who bear His name are “the light of the world.” How’s that for



significance? But they need Jesus Christ even more. And you cannot just come out and tell them that either! (Some can, I know—those who are gifted like the prophets of old.) But my point is that what both you, and they, may well miss, is that God uses average, ordinary people in non-spectacular ways to communicate His great love and grace. Yet at the same time, there is a built-in resistance to the things of God. So factor that in, too. But don't get discouraged. I'm trying to describe reality—not some fabricated situation.

In the first century A.D., when the New Testament was written, the situation was really not that different than what you and I face in today's workplace. Yet, in many respects, it was much more difficult to be a true Christian, than it is now. For example, the head of state (the Caesar), was worshiped as god. To say that you worshiped Jesus Christ was to be way off-center of being politically correct. And your moral standards and sensitivities would be seriously offended in a culture where worship could be expressed anytime by fornicating with temple prostitutes. Further, you've probably heard that in those days, Christians were placed on the Colosseum playing field, as thousands of cheering fans in the stands watched to see lions tear them apart. This was part of the national sports venue. So if you identified yourself as a follower of Christ, it could cost you...your job...your life.

That is why Peter, the great apostle, wrote the following: "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed ...Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator" (1 Peter 4:12,13,19). Suffering according to God's will simply meant that you experienced insults, discrimination, and even death, with a sense of privilege...that you were counted worthy to be identified with your Lord. Christians of that day were instructed by the apostle to entrust their souls to God, anchoring their hopes to the fact that He was infinitely faithful to them. Beyond that, the apostle said, "Do right." That's where I think we have our window of opportunity in being workplace witnesses.

A credible witness for Jesus Christ involves doing right (or doing good, which is the core idea of the apostle) in three areas. There may be more than three, but I call you to major on these for now, with the idea that you can expand the field when you are ready. First of all, build good relationships. Whatever you have to share, it must travel over the bridge of a growing relationship with your fellow workers. Too much witness is in announcement form. Much more effective is the communication of the message via a trusted messenger...you.

Relationships rarely just happen. Rather, they are developed. And they follow natural interest lines. For example, if you are in love with tennis, you'll hit it off in a great way with another tennis devotee. If your thing is collecting the classics on CD's, then meeting another of your kind, will be music to both your ears. If you like to analyze the economy and make forecasts, when you meet someone like that, I predict that you'll see the market in some interesting new ways. Thinking like this—the workplace is also for building relationships—can really change the way you do your job.

A second way to develop a credible witness is to build good quality in your work. Be the best you can be in your regular job. Build a reputation of excellence in all you do. Make yourself indispensable to the company. According to author Masaaki Imai, in his book, KAIZEN, the key to Japan's competitive success is simply, and basically, making gradual, unending improvements in the production processes. It is an insatiable appetite to reach ever-higher standards. Whatever is, can be improved. Author Imai relates the situation of some of the workers at Komatsu Ltd., who look forward to coming to work everyday, now that they are more deeply involved in their work. If these same workers were Christians, they would be adding honor to that name. If they spoke of their faith, it would have the ring of authenticity to it, because that is the kind of workers they are.

Long before total quality management became vogue, the apostle Paul called Christians to think about "whatever is true ...whatever is lovely ...if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8). The next verse adds that they were not just to think about it, but to do it, according to the model the apostle gave them.



Finally, in this trilogy of developing a trusted witness, build your skills to become a clear communicator of the Gospel. Get good at telling the good news. It is nothing short of impressive if you can articulate the message without a lot of religious words, and can do it briefly. Being clear on the gospel makes you believable. Your workplace friends readily sense that you are not inviting them into a theological maze called Christianity. Rather, you are challenging them to begin a relationship with the greatest Person who ever lived. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Him (John 14:6).

It's time for Christians in the workplace to make an impact. But there are rules to follow there. The marketplace is not the same as the college campus, a day at the beach, or hanging out at the mall. Employers expect a day's work for a day's pay. That's fair. But go the second mile. Distinguish yourself as a follower of history's greatest Person by building good relationships, bringing quality to whatever you do, and when the opportunity comes (and it will), be good at telling His story. It is possible to live happily ever after.

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The Compass is the discipleship curriculum for Campus Crusade for Christ's Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We'd love to hear your feedback on this lesson. Please write us at centerfield@uscm.org