



Impacting the Workplace for Christ

by Chris T. Morris

As I have gone deeper in my Christian walk, I have struggled to figure out how I can impact the culture for Christ. I have had a strong desire to impact others for God's kingdom—family, friends, co-workers, and my community—but I haven't known how to do so. I have questioned what my calling is and how God intends for me to use the spiritual gifts He has given me. Many of my friends have similar questions, and a few have found their calling in the church. I've come to believe that my calling is outside the church.



Chris Morris

It seems that I walked by the "burning bush" many times before I noticed that God was showing himself to me at my job. For many years I've wrestled with how to be salt and light, never realizing that my ministry could be at work. God has chosen that I serve Him at my job, and as a result I have seen significant changes in how I view and perform my duties. My perspective has changed—

- from performing a job for my employer to fulfilling my calling from Christ
- from being a manager to being a leader
- from personal achievement to serving others
- from skills development to character development.

This changed perspective has made me more effective at performing my job. My ability to take action and get results has improved dramatically.

Background

When I moved to Northern Virginia in November 2000 to take a new job, my family stayed home in Southern California until the end of the school year. I had lots of time to reflect on my life—to take stock of my successes and failures, and to re-

view my objectives for the future. I came to three conclusions:

1. Despite career successes, I was no happier than when I graduated from college 17 years earlier. Self-sufficiency and achievement, objectives I had pursued for years, weren't fulfilling for me. The benefits I had expected didn't materialize.

2. I had important questions that I couldn't answer. I spent many evenings pondering the purpose of my life and the destiny of my family. I realized that my two sons would be going off to college soon. Due to my frequent business travel and long work hours, I didn't feel I had given them a solid foundation to live their lives. Worse, I didn't know what I should be teaching them.

3. I was still searching for the truth, and wanted a life of significance and coherence. I wanted to be able to explicitly articulate beliefs and values that could guide my family in living their lives and dealing with life's challenges.

I resolved to pursue a work/life balance that would allow me to spend more time with my family, to raise my children in a Christian household, to deepen my relationship with Christ and to live a life consistent with my beliefs.

We joined a church when my family moved to Virginia, and my wife and children accepted Christ and were baptized. I joined the C.S. Lewis Institute's Fellows Program and was blessed by the depth of the instruction on both Christian doctrine and spiritual disciplines. The small group, mentoring, and fellowship ignited my passion to know the Lord in a real and personal way. My activities at my church, combined with the Fellows Program, broadened my faith from a Sunday-only activity to a seven-days-a-week walk with the Lord. I began to live all aspects of my life according to a Christian worldview. I sought to live a life consistent with my faith that would impact not only my family, but also my workplace and local

community. But I was still looking to see where God would reveal Himself—where He would call me to serve Him according to His plan.

Answering a Calling for Christ

Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men. (Colossians 3:23)

It used to be that I defined myself by my job. I lived and died by how well I was performing and if I was getting recognized for my accomplishments. I was placed in my role based on my natural talents, and my objectives were the same temporal objectives as my company: shareholder value creation, satisfied customers, efficient processes, and contented employees. But as I matured in my faith, my role changed. God began to put me in situations where I increasingly had to use my spiritual gifts. I soon found myself working with more focus and enthusiasm. There was a clarity I hadn't had before. And interesting experiences began to occur one after the other. God has gifted me with leadership, administration, and teaching. He has placed me at my job to shape and mold me—to show me the gifts He has given me and how to use them. What better place could there be to use leadership and administration than in a strategy and planning role at work? I have been called to be a living example of God's truth, mercy, and justice. It is no coincidence that as I began to live out this calling, I gained the ability to put my faith into words in a unique and personal way.

Truth

I am the way, the truth, and the life. (John 14:6)

God has instilled in me a passion for the truth—for what's right instead of what's wrong. One of the core beliefs I hold is the reality of an absolute standard for morality and justice. While secular society relies upon feelings and reason to determine right and wrong, I believe in the absolute truth of God's word. I am called to be the light of the world by applying God's truth to the issues and situations I find myself in at work each day. I am willing to stand alone, if necessary, on the side of truth.

Looking back over my career, I have always had a passion for making the business case for various opportunities. Typically, making the business case involved providing a rationale for an investment decision. I found that the more that was at stake, the more I enjoyed doing the analysis. I believe that God was honing this ability so that I

could make the ultimate business case—the case for Christ. And there are no higher stakes than a life spent with an eternal reward versus a life spent with eternal punishment.

Mercy

Mercy triumphs over justice. (James 2:13)

It used to be that I held justice to be supreme over mercy. I can think of countless times that I sought to take justice into my own hands at work—to right the wrongs committed against me. But what the Lord calls for is forgiveness. I have found joy in forgiving others—in seeking reconciliation instead of retribution. I've learned that people value mercy far more than recognition—just as God created us to do.

Justice

Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isaiah 1:17)

Each day at work, I can live for Christ by treating everyone as a fellow image-bearer of God. No one is any better or worse than anyone else. I can step alongside my colleagues at the most difficult times and share their burdens, frustrations, and setbacks. There have been many occasions where I have had the opportunity to fight for the dignity and rights of other workers who have been wronged in their jobs. Although at times this has meant criticism, ostracism, and persecution by others, this is an obligation I embrace as a disciple of the Lord.

One of the most memorable moments of my professional career involved taking a stand for someone else. One of my previous employers hired a senior executive to lead a new business line. As I got to know the new executive, I began to share in the ups and downs of his experience getting acclimated to a new city and getting his family settled down. Unfortunately, the new business activity he came to lead was subject to numerous delays, and I happened to hear the chief financial officer of the company mention that he had decided to no longer pursue the opportunity. This decision was made on a "gut" basis with very little analysis. I remember speaking with my colleague, and telling him I would support him in making the case to pursue the business opportunity. I called a meeting with the CFO to discuss the decision he had made and a fierce debate ensued over the merits of his decision. I remember the shock he

had at the intensity of the discussion—he couldn't understand why I was fighting so hard for a new manager and a new line of business at the company, and why I cared so much about a situation that didn't directly affect my job. Fortunately, we were able to convince the CFO to enter into the new business line. The experience taught me that I had a passion for supporting the underdog, and for fighting for people that I believed in.

As an ambassador for Christ, I find that I no longer define myself by my job. I work for God, at the place of my employer. No matter where I work, this will never change. Wherever God wants me to be, whatever God wants me to do, I am ready and willing.

Being a Leader

I used to think of myself as a manager whose primary purpose was to supervise my subordinates. I thought my job was to manage people to achieve a specific outcome. As I have matured in my faith, I have begun to think like a leader whose job is to empower others. My focus has become longer term—more on mission and purpose—and less on short-term tactical objectives. As someone who works for the Lord and not for men, I am focused on God's mission and purpose for me.

My purpose is to glorify God by showing His glory through my leadership, administration, and teaching at work. In order to successfully fulfill this purpose, I must be in fellowship with God and the family of Christ. My problem is rebellion against God. Every time I sin, I alienate myself from God. As a result of this alienation, I constantly need to be reconciled with God. Because of the cross and God's grace, my sins have been forgiven and my relationship with God restored. As God has reconciled me to Him, so I must reconcile myself to others. Each day at work, it is my job to be a unifying, reconciling force rather than a divisive one.

This means I must lead people rather than manage them. I need to spend more time contemplating what's possible instead of settling for what's doable. And I must hire people differently. As a manager, I used to hire people for the task at hand—whatever the specific competency was that the immediate task required. As a leader, I am more concerned with identifying and leveraging a person's strengths. This means hiring with growth potential in mind—what a person

can become is just as important as who they currently are. I think long-term, looking for people with diverse and unique skills who can ensure the long-term success for the organization. Hiring for long-term potential has also meant that my perspective has changed from personal achievement to serving others.

Serving Others

The greatest among you shall be your servant. (Matthew 23:11)

I used to focus on personal achievement—meeting my individual performance targets. My motivation was on the values of the earthly kingdom—power, money, success, and recognition.

Luke 6:24-26 tells us about the values of the earthly kingdom:

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.

Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to false prophets.

As I have matured in my faith, my focus has changed to serving others as Christ did. This means encouraging and developing others. My motivation is to do God's will through helping the weak, poor, suffering, and rejected. Luke 6:20-23 summarizes the values of the heavenly kingdom:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man!

Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.

I have an opportunity to elevate God's values over worldly values. Every day at work, I can stand apart from others by how I conduct myself.

My eternal perspective means I will make decisions for different reasons than nonbelievers. I try to treat people the way I would want to be treated. I try to help and serve others with no expectation of a benefit in return.

Relationships

Therefore if we love our neighbor as God made him, we must inevitably be concerned for his total welfare, the good of his soul, his body and his community. (John Stott)

I was created to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world in community with others. This means that relationships are a crucial part of my mission. I have an opportunity to engage others in a way that exhibits my spiritual depth. I keep in mind that:

We must always be aware that there are leaders who can build great organizations on natural gifts. Say the right words, be smart enough to do the right things, be insightful enough to connect with the right people and one can go a long way before anyone discovers the inner life is close to empty. (Gordon MacDonald)

I want to be known as someone with spiritual depth. This means being genuinely interested in the people I work with, getting to know what they stand for and believe in, and sharing what I stand for with them. People have often shared personal issues with me or asked open-ended questions about the challenges of life. I've noticed that as I've focused on encouraging and developing others, the opportunities to teach and mentor have increased. My colleagues have noticed that I welcome the opportunity to share thoughts on how to cope with challenges and issues and am genuinely interested in their success. The result has been increased trust. This increased trust has led to an increased commitment to each other, and in turn a deeper, more meaningful relationship. The deeper relationships have allowed me to better understand the needs of my colleagues and better serve them. It used to be that work was a place where I did my job. Now work is a community of friends and colleagues where we share with each other and work together to overcome challenges.

Character Development

He who abides in Me and I in him bears much fruit. (John 15:5)

I used to focus on developing new skills on the job to ensure growth and advancement. Now my focus is to mature in my faith through character development. My goal is to conform more and more to the image of Christ—to practice the spiritual disciplines and to fulfill my calling to glorify God. My faith in God and obedience to His will have given me peace. The cross and the salvation I received from Christ give me an eternal perspective. A 75-year life span is equivalent to five minutes in eternity. I have learned to put aside worries about my career path, reorganizations, and work force reductions. If a major change at work occurs tomorrow, I am okay with that. I will assume that I've graduated from my current "class" and that it's time for the next part of the Lord's calling for me. This has given me a broader perspective and calmness that has made me more effective in performing my job. I've learned that work/life balance isn't just about how much time I have outside of work to spend with my family. It's also about having a peace of mind that allows me to weather the storm in good times and bad.

As I continue to grow in Christ, the fruits of the spirit should be more evident in my life. In addition to peace, others should see love, joy, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

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