



Ambassadors at the Office

by Jeff Lindeman

Founding member of J.A. Lindeman & Co. PLLC

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There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!" — Abraham Kuyper¹

“I’m a follower of Jesus Christ.” Making the claim can quickly change the dynamics of one’s workplace. People may see you differently and not always positively. Saying you are a Christian may subject you to other people’s labels, prejudices, and disapproval.

Knowing that reality and knowing Christ’s claim as Sovereign over all, I have asked and wanted to understand what it means to be a Christian in the workplace. I suspect that many believers ask that question as Sunday turns to Monday. Yet everyone’s workplace is different and dynamics are never static, even for individuals working similar jobs for the same company. There is not a one-size-fits-all answer.

For most of my professional life, I have worked in large office settings. Currently I am operating my own small business. In each workplace, however, I have asked, what does it mean to be a follower of Christ here in this place? How do I represent Jesus in the office? For me, Paul’s comment to the Corinthians about being “ambassadors for Christ” has been helpful in considering these questions and learning how to implement answers.

Creating a Place

When one country establishes an embassy in another, the embassy grounds are considered the soil of the home country, not that of the host country. The am-

bassador posted to the embassy represents the sovereign of his home country to the citizens of the host country. As Christians, we are told that “we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us” so that others may “be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).² With this in mind I’ve chosen to view my office as an embassy of the kingdom of God. How does this work?

To establish that outpost or embassy, I first began thanking God for the physical place where I worked, for the work that I had to do, and for the people, colleagues, and clients with whom I worked. I also prayed that when people walked into my office they would experience a tangible difference, that when they came through my door they would sense a peace and calmness even in the busyness of our work. I wanted stepping into my office to be like stepping onto the soil of God’s kingdom. I knew there was nothing I myself could do to make that happen, but I believed God could do it and that people would notice the difference.

I also made a very conscious decision not to hang religious pictures, have a Bible out on my desk, or speak using “Christian” jargon. In Washington, DC, where I work, such things can be seen as off-putting political statements. Too often, what we say using Christian jargon creates barriers. Though we may intend blessing, the language may prompt others to throw up their defenses. I do not want that. And, as



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I observe Jesus through Scripture, He did not intend that either. Like an ambassador, I want to be able to speak of my homeland and its King while using the language of the country where my embassy is located. In being Christ's ambassador, I want to speak plainly and draw people to His kingdom and not suggest it is a foreign place where they are not welcome.

Working under Observation

If an embassy represents its home country in a foreign land, then everyone expects the embassy to work differently than its surroundings. If I've chosen not to display artifacts of my faith at the office or communicate in Christian jargon, how can I show evidence of God's kingdom? If the embassy is a place set apart, then the ambassador must also be different. As ambassadors for Christ, we invite others to look at us and see Christ. This is in fact my largest ongoing challenge. Our actions show the attitudes of our hearts—and in the office people see that. When we put forth that we are Christians, others observe how we work and how we treat other people, all to prove or disprove the attitudes they have about Christians and about Christ. Being an ambassador is not a low-risk proposition. However, as Christians we have unique resources. Jesus has promised He will never leave or forsake us.³ We have the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7–11). And Christ has prepared good works ahead of time for us to do (Eph. 2:10). No ambassador has had better resources, though all ambassadors serve in a country that is not their own.

One of the first things people notice about colleagues and clients is how they treat other people. They watch to see if the coworkers are kind, helpful, considerate, or honest; whether they care about the work they do and about the people with whom they work. It is quite noticeable when someone is "in it for him- or herself." Applying the label of Christian to ourselves invites an even more critical assessment. We must be aware of this.

The Bible is clear about our attitude toward our neighbors: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18; Gal. 5:14) and "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor" (1 Cor. 10:24). In the workplace, love for one's neighbor expresses itself not only in interactions with colleagues and customers but also in seeking the success of the organization.⁴ This is not meant to overspiritualize our attitude and actions at the office. Rather, it is quite practical. There are not many coworkers who put others above themselves. Such people stand out. More is said about this

below, but we are to work heartily as for the Lord and know we will receive our reward from Him (see Col. 3:23–24). This is a challenge and a comfort. We serve Jesus Christ, and our work as ambassadors is done for Him.

Our work and our faith go hand in hand. The quality and character of the work we do speaks about our faith—probably much more than any of our spoken words. And people observe our work. We can show our faith by the work we do: "But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works" (James 2:18). Here the idea of works is not charitable or "Christian" works but the things we do day-in and day-out. Those works do not necessarily have to be "big things" and are most often the small, regular tasks. At work, most of the tasks we do are those regular tasks—the routine. Often people want to do the "big thing," the high-impact job, and not the small, regular tasks. But when work is done "as for the Lord," that work itself speaks the gospel. It is not the size of the task or job that has the impact; it is the Lord and what He can do and does through our faithful work. Ambassadors recognize that their work is not their own.

Not only do we show our faith by work, our work can point others to God. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that as believers we are the light of the world.⁵ Like a city on a hill that cannot be hid or a lamp placed on a stand to light the entire house, we believers are to be about the regular tasks of work and life; that is where our light shines. Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). There is a progression here, sweeping upward. It begins with believers, doing the good works Christ has prepared for us. It moves to the others who see those good works and turn to give glory to our Father in heaven. The ambassadors' work points others to their sovereign and to their homeland.

The Work We Do and Do Not Do

Knowing that others will give glory to our heavenly Father as they see our good works, our work is then to lift up Jesus. Speaking of Himself, Jesus promised "that I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). But what does that mean? Practically speaking, how do we "lift up Jesus"?

First, we ask Jesus to help us and to work through us. We want to abide in Him, knowing that apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5). An ambassador must stay connected to his or her sovereign. We ask that the Holy Spirit fill us and enable us to live true, first and foremost, to Jesus' call and claim on our lives. We must lift up Jesus in our own lives. He must have first place in our hearts, and in everything Jesus is to be preeminent (Col. 1:18). We must live with increasing obedience to Him. Along these same lines, we also pray for ourselves, the others working in and visiting our workplace, and for God's kingdom to come.

Second, we do our work diligently and to the best of our ability. The quality of what we do and the attitude by which we do it matters in the workplace. This may be the first way those working with us recognize the difference Christ makes in our lives. In my work, I have wanted to follow Paul's instruction, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Col. 3:23–24). That instruction speaks of the attitude by which we work. It is not easy but we have that goal.

Third, we must recognize that in the workplace we are in a community of colleagues and clients. The workplace provides opportunities to interact and develop relationships with them and care for them. We must value the people we work with just as Jesus did. He came to seek and save the lost. At work we will encounter people whom we may not otherwise meet in other contexts and likely not (at first) in church. We must be prepared to give people an answer for the hope that is in us in the place where we meet them. The place for many of us is at our work—in the embassy we establish there. We lift up Jesus by acknowledging His involvement and action in our lives, and that includes the work we do and the business and busyness of our lives. Quite often I am reminded of how God is present with me at the office; if God did not come through, I would not be able to do my work and maintain my responsibilities. For example, there have been recent paydays where I have been waiting and praying for the cash to come in to pay my employees. By God's grace, we have always made payroll. It would be wrong for me not to acknowledge God and His provision in such ways and within the community, my workplace, where He is acting.

Even though I can see how God is acting in our workplace, I am learning that not everyone at my workplace is or will be open to hearing about Jesus.

There will be those who are eager to hear, and others who like to ask questions. Some will like working in a good environment but will not be curious or go beyond that. There may be others who actively oppose any expression of Christianity. We do not know what God is doing in the lives of those around us. Nor should we expect that only one conversation is needed or what God intends. It may be one conversation about God or a series of conversations that do not necessarily focus on God. Most likely it is through our daily work, including actions that we are not aware of, that God is working or speaking. We may not know if we are planting seeds or working in the harvest. It is not necessary for us to know.

We do know, however, that an ambassador does not grant citizenship. Only the sovereign grants citizenship. By creating a place for the kingdom of God at our work, we act as ambassadors welcoming others and facilitating introductions. It is God the Holy Spirit who convicts the human heart and draws people to Christ (see John 16:8–11). Lifting up Jesus means that we are to be faithful to Him and to do work as unto Him. We are not to be ashamed to be known as Christians. In fact our job as ambassadors is to let God make His appeal through us. There is no need to shrink back or be afraid. It is God who is really at work. We are His ambassadors.

Notes:

1. Quote from "Sphere Sovereignty," Abraham Kuyper's inaugural address at the dedication of the Free University in Amsterdam, October 20, 1880, translation by George Kamps, accessed May 26, 2013, http://www.reformationalpublishingproject.com/pdf_books/Scanned_Books_PDF/SphereSovereignty_English.pdf.

2. All Scripture quotations in this article are from the English Standard Version.

3. Matthew 28:19: And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. See also Romans 8:31–39.

4. See Jeremiah 29:4–7: Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

5. Matthew 5:14–16: You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put

it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

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8001 Braddock Road, Suite 301 • Springfield, VA 22151
703/914-5602
www.cslewisinstitute.org

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