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CHILDLIKE FAITH IN THE WORKPLACE

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Matthew 18:3: "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."



I was reading a daily devotional and studying this Scripture, I was distracted by thoughts of an upcoming meeting. I felt led to meditate on what it meant to have a childlike faith and how this might apply to me at this stage in my life and the people with whom I work. I sought to better

understand how this verse was relevant for mature believers. C.S. Lewis said that Christ "wants a child's heart, but a grown-up's head. He wants us to be simple, single-minded, affectionate, and teachable, as good children are; but He also wants every bit of intelligence we have to be alert at its job, and in first-class fighting trim."² Childlike faith is relevant not only to mature believers in their walk with the Lord, but also in the workplace, especially in terms of how we lead, interact with others, and make decisions. The most effective organizations have people who lead with a servant mind-set, work well together in teams, and make decisions that incorporate a broad range of perspectives.

Exhibiting the attributes of a childlike faith can not only lead to effectiveness in the workplace, but also serve as an effective witness to our faith. These specific attributes include humility, asking questions, wonder, trust, and hope.

We should be careful that we create an environment where it is okay for people at all levels to ask genuine questions to get to the truth.





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Childlike Faith Has a Humble State of Mind

Just as children trust in their parents to provide a source of wisdom greater than their own, so we must come to rely on and value the input, perspective, and contributions of others as much as our own. Children don't think they have all the answers, nor are they afraid to show vulnerability. The best way for us to remain humble is to have a servant mind-set.

Let every day, therefore, be a day of humility, condescend to all weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellencies, encourage their virtues, relive their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowest offices to the lowest of mankind.³

Can you imagine working with someone who has this mind-set? As a recent college graduate, I experienced an example of this humility. At the end of my first week on my first job, I was invited to a lunch to say good-bye to a colleague who was leaving to raise a family. She was the assistant of the managing partner of the office. At the lunch, I noticed that the managing partner had changed his clothes and was now wearing a very expensive, pinstripe suit, presumably to show his appreciation for the support and contributions his assistant had made. He never said a word about his change of attire or brought attention to himself in any way. It was all about *her*. It has been more than thirty-five years, and I remember that lunch like it was yesterday. The most senior person in the office treated the most junior person with all the respect and dignity he could give her. I felt honored to be included in the "family" celebration. I never felt as if that job was "work," but rather that I was a key member of a team and didn't want to let them down. I knew that my input and contributions were highly



valued. We are all made in the image of God. How we treat one another — with an attitude of service and respect — is not only an act of humility and love, but also a witness to our Christian faith.

Childlike Faith Asks Questions


We all know how many questions children like to ask. They have no worry about their reputation or image. They have one objective in mind: to better understand why something exists, how it works, or what it does. Children ask questions to make sense of their surroundings and to learn the truth.

“Once you were a child. Once you knew what inquiry was for. There was a time when you asked questions because you wanted answers, and were glad when you had found them. Become that child again: even now.”

“Ah, but when I became a man I put away childish things.”

“You have gone far wrong. Thirst was made for water; inquiry for truth.”⁴

As we get older, we spend less time asking questions and more time learning facts. Questions are often asked for reasons other than to seek the truth. Questions asked with ulterior motives or to undermine someone are not consistent with a desire to know the truth. We should be careful that we create an environment where it is okay for people at all levels to ask genuine questions to get to the truth. Companies should have an environment where questions asked at the right time in an appropriate manner are welcome. Valuing the perspectives of others includes welcoming any and all questions. Who, what, why, where, when, and how?! Effective questions can help you better understand problems and identify issues, provide valuable feedback, identify alternative solutions, gather better information, enlist the cooperation of others, gather

A person wearing a plaid coat and a hat stands with their back to the camera, looking out of a doorway. The doorway is framed by a light-colored wall, and the view outside shows a bright, cloudy sky. The floor is made of light-colored tiles with a herringbone pattern. The entire scene is framed by a dark, textured border.

Have you experienced times when creative, adventuresome colleagues have forced you to ask yourself what you value, what is important to you, and where you should focus your efforts?



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better information. Never stop asking questions; the best leaders are good at asking questions. Asking questions lets people know that we are willing to listen. And asking questions is the first step to making change happen.

Childlike Faith Is Full of Wonder and Curiosity

For a child, everything is an adventure and a new discovery. There is a sense of curiosity and an energy that leads to constant exploration and learning. It is a mind-set that believes everything is possible.

As we get older, skepticism and cynicism can develop; it's easy to get comfortable with the status quo. And yet, "is this all there is?" has driven many to pursue new discoveries. Saint Augustine is an example of someone who never lost a sense of wonder. His *Confessions* chronicles his restlessness and multiple quests to find truth.

In the business world, innovation and the need for change have become a constant theme. Infectious enthusiasm and passion are directly correlated with high workplace performance. Have you experienced times when creative, adventuresome colleagues have forced you to ask yourself what you value, what is important to you, and where you should focus your efforts? Positive engagement, whether as leaders, as members of a project team, or as committed participants in a book club, is most often driven by a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Childlike Faith Is Trusting

Children trust what their parents teach them and are dependent on them for food, shelter, and comfort. Children believe the promises



their parents make. This trusting spirit and absolute dependence is what our heavenly father wants from all believers.

To love involves trusting the beloved beyond the evidence, even against much evidence. No man is our friend who believes in our good intentions only when they are proved. No man is our friend who will not be very slow to accept evidence against them. Such confidence, between one man and another, is in fact almost universally praised as a moral beauty, not blamed as a logical error. And the suspicious man is blamed for a meanness of character, not admired for the excellence of his logic.⁵

Trusting others can be difficult. Psalm 118:8 says, “It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man.” At one time or another, all of us have felt betrayed by others — painful experiences that are hard to forget and forgive. But if we’re honest with ourselves, we have not been as trustworthy as we might have hoped. But we can always trust in God. Because our security is ultimately in Him, we should be able to risk having trust in others and enter into relationships. Without trust, it is impossible to have a true relationship. In terms of the workplace, leaders must learn to trust their staff and colleagues. Trust empowers others, gives them confidence in their roles, and can drive performance. It also encourages collaboration and good communication. Good leaders identify the best in people and encourage them. There is always the risk of betrayal, but having trust in others and building relationships is worth the risk.

What does trust look like? Leaders should give their teams clear objectives while letting individuals execute their jobs using personal strengths and unique skills. “Trust but verify” is a prudent adage that limits risk. Establish clear expectations, monitor performance and provide feedback whenever possible. Leaders

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who don't trust their direct reports often micromanage, telling people not only what needs to be done but also how to do it. This can be suffocating; rather than assuming the best, this mentality expects the worst of others.

Childlike Faith Has Hope

Children have hopes, dreams, and wishes. Everything is possible and nothing is impossible. Every child dreams of being something — a firefighter, a professional athlete, a doctor, or a singer. There is no voice telling a child that his or her hopes and dreams are unrealistic. And parents should encourage those hopes, giving a child confidence that dreams can come true.

Timothy Keller insightfully notes, “You and I are unavoidable and irreducibly hope-based creatures. We are controlled — how we live now — by our understanding of the ultimate future state. Christian hope has to do with the *ultimate* future state, not the *immediate*.”⁶

As life goes on, we experience trials and setbacks that can make us lose hope. We begin to believe that our hopes and dreams are unattainable. We lower our expectations. But hope — the belief that things could be better and that we can make them better — is something we should never lose. As believers, we have one hope more important than all others. It is based on God's promise that if we repent of our sins and believe in Christ, our sins will be forgiven and we will have eternal life. Our assuredness and confidence in this promise engenders hope and joy even in difficult circumstances. This hope helps put all of our other hopes in perspective. We can be a light when others see only darkness. Our faith in God's promises as the God of hope (Rom. 15:13) enables us to shed His light and love on others in a way that draws them to our Lord and Savior.



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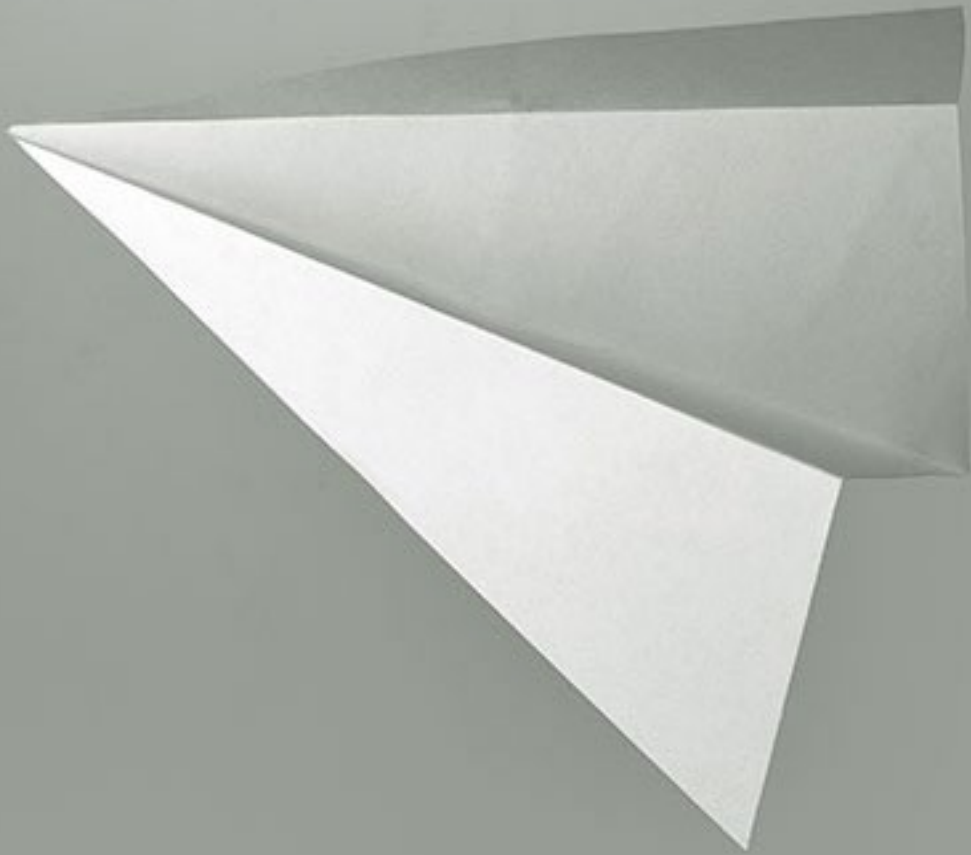
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Hope is important! Researchers say that hope accounts for 14 percent of business productivity.⁷ All other things being equal, people with hope are more productive than those without hope. In the workplace, hope is closely linked to having objectives and believing they can be achieved if there is a plan to achieve them. Facing a difficult task? Define a clear objective, create a plan, and execute the plan. Define clear roles and responsibilities for your team and get to work. Believe in people and give them a chance to use their talents to the fullest.

When recruiting staff, I've learned how important it is to understand their hopes and aspirations. Rather than "sell" someone on an opportunity, try to show how the job can help the applicant realize personal hopes and dreams. The emotion of hope is far more powerful than a sales pitch. Let prospective candidates imagine how their hopes can be realized by the job and see if their enthusiasm reflects this reality.

Humility, questions, wonder, trust, and hope. These childlike attributes are not only the way to enter the kingdom of heaven; they are also a way to lead, interact, with others, and make decisions in the workplace. They contribute to the faith, hope, and love that define our relationship with God and show us how we can live out our faith in the workplace. These attributes also contribute to a positive culture in the workplace — one that will help others grow and thrive and shine a light on what it means to be a follower of Christ. ■





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NOTES

- ¹ Scripture quotations are from English Standard Version (2011).
- ² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1943; rpt., San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 77.
- ³ William Law, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729; rev. ed., Abbotsford: WI, Aneko Press, 2018), 212.
- ⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (1946; rpt., San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 41.
- ⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952), 26.
- ⁶ Tim Keller, "Hope for the World," Sermon, Redeemer Presbyterian, New York, NY, September 27, 2009.
- ⁷ Jennifer Robinson, "Making Hope a Business Strategy," *Gallup Business Journal*, February 12, 2013, citing Shane J. Lopez, *Making Hope Happen* (New York: Atria Paperback, 2013).



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When I became a man I put away childish things, including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.

— *C.S. Lewis*



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1

As you read this article, what struck you about the idea that childlike faith is relevant in the workplace, and that exhibiting the attributes of a childlike faith can not only lead to effectiveness in the workplace, but also serve as an effective witness to our faith?

2

After considering this article, what are one or two new things you could do at work (or school) that would exhibit attributes of a childlike faith? How might those things lead to improved effectiveness at work/school and also serve as an effective witness to your faith?



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Chris T. Morris is Chairman of the Board of Directors at C.S. Lewis Institute. He works with MPact Partners, a strategy, operations and finance consulting firm. Formerly he was a strategic planner, controller, investment banker, private equity investor and business development professional. Chris and his wife, Sheila, and their two children live in Vienna, Virginia and attend Christ Church of Vienna.



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