

Take It *or* Leave It? Ethics & Faith *at Work*

Integrity (n.): 1) firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values, 2) an unimpaired condition, 3) the quality or state of being complete or undivided. (Definition from Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

“What does it mean to have integrity? Most of my students say it’s when you do what you say you’re going to do. But I add to that, it should have some kind of moral good too,” Chavanne Chair of Christian Ethics in Business Mitch Neubert said. “To have integrity is to be the same person Monday as you are Sunday. And yet, a lot of people live separate lives. Some of my research explores how people integrate their faith in the workplace, and what happens when they do.”

Work and worship are often compartmentalized into secular and spiritual spheres for Christians. According to the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS), a national study of beliefs and values in the United States administered by Gallup, less than half of employed adults who attend religious services regularly indicated they often or always see connections between faith and work. Essentially, half of those who regularly attend church don’t see significant connections between their work and spiritual life.

“Business schools don’t teach about faith at work, but most churches don’t either,” Neubert said. “Many churches focus on being a good steward of the money you make at work, but overlook how you can be a light with your ethics and how your work can honor God and bless other people.”

Director of the Princeton University Faith & Work Initiative David Miller created a framework on faith integration at work. According to the framework, when someone brings their faith to work, it manifests in one of four ways:

ETHICS Faith motivating ethical behavior and excellence within the workplace. This could manifest itself as individual or collective ethics.

EXPERIENCE Faith offering meaning to work as a place to live out one’s calling and a context for utilizing one’s unique gifts and talents in serving others.

ENRICHMENT Faith assisting in work by providing strength, guidance and the capability to cope with difficulties or suffering.

EXPRESSION Faith being shared in word and deed as an example or witness to others.

Sixty-three percent of working adults who attend church regularly agreed or strongly agreed that their congregation promoted the ethical manifestation

of “considering what is morally right when facing a tough decision at work,” according to the BRS. The ethical framework is the most common form of faith integration at work, and it’s particularly important for those people of faith who lead and shape the ethical culture of their organizations.

In fact, according to the Ethics Resource Center’s 2013 National Business Ethics Survey of the U.S. Workforce, only 20 percent of workers reported seeing misconduct in companies where the ethical culture was perceived as “strong,” as compared with 88 percent of workers who witnessed wrongdoing in ethically weak work environments.

In addition to the moral and faith-based benefits, an ethical workplace pays off. The Society for Human Resource Management suggested that organizations with positive, virtuous ethical cultures enjoy bottom-line and top-line benefits, including: higher employee job satisfaction, increased legal compliance and rule following, increased organizational commitment, increased cooperation, increased change management success, increased attraction of high-potential talent, lower turnover, lower healthcare costs and lower legal risk.

“You’ve got a resource to bring to bear in the workplace,” Neubert said. “It’s your deepest values, and in most cases, it’s rooted in your faith.”

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HOW CAN YOU LEVERAGE YOUR FAITH AND ETHICS AT WORK?

PRAY

Praying about work concerns can help cope with stress, reinforce beliefs, and ultimately, help employees do the right thing even when it’s hard.

FIND A FRIEND

Having conversations with co-workers who share your beliefs can increase your job satisfaction and strengthen your moral compass.

DECORATE

When morals are cued, people are less likely to be tempted to act deviously. So, whether it’s a Bible verse, a cross or a photo, establish a visual, personal reminder of your faith.