

# Four Attributes of an Effective Workplace Witness

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*May the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us”yes, establish the work of our hands. Psalm 90:17*

If I were to ask you to describe the core attributes of a person who exemplifies God’s ideal for a Christian in the workplace, what would you say? This is the most common question I get from the secular media.

Over the past several years, I have observed four key qualities exhibited by workplace believers who are transforming their workplaces for Christ. I believe these attributes are God’s ideal for the Spirit-led worker today. Let’s take a look at them.

## Attribute 1: A Quality of Excellence

Several years ago, I published a magazine devoted to Christians in the workplace. When I gave a copy to a friend, he looked at it and said, “This doesn’t even look like a Christian magazine.”• What did he mean? He was saying the quality of many products that Christians produce tend to be less than the quality of non-Christian products which is an indictment on the work of Christians.

One of the four ways we can make an impact for Christ on our workplace is by doing our work with excellence. In the Bible, Bezalel was a man handpicked by God to perform an important work to design and build the Ark of the Covenant. He was also the first man described in Scripture as being filled with the Spirit of God: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ““See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship”• (Exod. 31:1-6). The work of Christians should be excellent in every way because we have the Spirit of God operating in us.

Daniel and his friends were also exceptional in their work. “The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom”• (Dan. 1:19-20). Later, the Scriptures make a point of the fact that Daniel was favoured by his employer because of the exceptional job he did. “It pleased Darius to appoint 120 satraps to rule throughout the kingdom, with three administrators over them, one of whom was Daniel. Now Daniel so distinguished himself among the administrators and the satraps by his exceptional qualities that the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom”• (Dan. 6:1-3). Daniel was the model civic worker. He did his job well, which was why his boss respected him.

Atlanta-based Chick-fil-A, Inc. is the country's second-largest quick service chicken restaurant chain. The company's stated corporate purpose is "to glorify God by being a faithful steward of all that is entrusted to us, and to have a positive influence on all who come in contact with Chick-fil-A."• The company is a great example of a business that is modeling religious principles and producing a quality product in the competitive fast-food industry. Chick-fil-A is one of the fastest-growing chains nationally, currently with nearly two billion dollars in annual sales.

One of the defining distinctions of Chick-fil-A is that the restaurants are not open on Sundays. From the time Truett Cathy, the company's founder, started in the restaurant business in 1946, he believed that God wanted him to honor the Sabbath by keeping the stores closed on Sundays. Although he was challenged on this idea many times by shopping mall operators, Truett always held that "we will have more sales in six days than those who are open for seven."• This has proven to be true, and today it is no longer an issue to fulfill the malls' requirement to remain open on Sunday.

When you go to a Chick-fil-A restaurant, you can tell something is different about the people and the atmosphere. The messages in the company's kids' meals always reinforce education, values and integrity. Although the employees do not wear their faith on their sleeve, the fruit of the company is known by many especially the many young restaurant employees who receive educational scholarships each year. The company also focuses on character-building programs for kids, on foster homes and on other community services. I have spoken at Chick-fil-A's corporate headquarters several times and have met with Truett and his son, Dan, and the appearance of their headquarters conveys a sense of quality without extravagance.

Another influential company is HomeBanc, an Atlanta-based mortgage company that is one of the largest mortgage lenders in the Southeast. Pat Flood, the company's CEO, asserts that HomeBanc's financial success is driven by associate satisfaction. Every decision is guided by a simple formula: Happy Associates=Happy Customers=Increased Market Share=Increased Profitability.

HomeBanc's quick growth was causing it to lose touch with the very culture driving its success. When Pat saw this happening when he no longer knew the names of the associates he met in the elevator he moved quickly to set up the Office of People and Culture. That's when the company hired "Ike"• Reighard, a 52-year-old founding pastor of a 3000-member church, to be HomeBanc's Chief People Officer.

HomeBanc's innovative approach to employee relations and its commitment to excellence have resulted in much-deserved recognition. The company was voted one of the best places to work in 2004 by the Atlanta Business Chronicle and by Atlanta Magazine and was named "2003 Corporation of the Year"• by the Georgia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The Orlando Sentinel proclaimed HomeBanc to be one of the "100 Best Companies for Working Families"• and Jacksonville Magazine honoured it as one of the "Top 25 Companies Who Care."• On the national front, HomeBanc has appeared two years in a row on the Fortune magazine list of the "100 Best Companies to Work for,"• coming it at number 39 in 2004 and at number 20 on the 2005 list.<sup>1</sup>

One of the easiest ways to discredit Christ in the workplace is for Christians to do inferior work. In order to earn respect, our work should stand apart because we do our work unto the Lord (see Col. 3:17). Doing quality work will not be the primary

means of winning others to Christ, but doing poor-quality work can disqualify us very quickly from ever having the opportunity to present Christ in a positive light. So go the extra mile when necessary. Make the effort to serve those around you. Do your work with excellence.

## **Attribute 2: A Foundation of Ethics and Integrity**

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle once played a practical joke on 12 respected and well-known men he knew. He sent out 12 telegrams with the same message on each: "Flee at once. All is discovered."• Within 24 hours, all 12 men had left the country!2 Obviously, each of these men had something to hide. The cover had suddenly been pulled away to reveal their true natures. The bottom line is that ethics are important.

In December 1983, The Princeton Religion Research Centre published a landmark survey conducted for the Wall Street Journal by the Gallup Organization. The researchers measured a wide range of moral and ethical behaviours in the workplace, such as calling in sick when not sick, cheating on income taxes and pilfering company supplies for personal use. The results were disappointing, to say the least.

What the researchers found most startling was that there was no significant difference between churching and unchurching people in their ethics and values on the job. In other words, churches seemed to be having little impact on the moral fibre of their people, at least in the workplace. To quote the researchers, "These findings . . . will come as a shock to the religious leaders and underscore the need for religious leaders to channel the new religious interest in America not simply into religious involvement but in deep spiritual commitment."• 3

We have been seeing a wave of ethical failures in the United States since early 2000. In 2002, an article in Fortune magazine cited that "Arthur Andersen, Enron, and Salomon Brothers were all brought down, or nearly so, by the rogue actions of a tiny few. But the bad apples in these companies grew and flourished in the same kind of environment: a rotten corporate culture. It's impossible to monitor the actions of every employee, no matter how many accounting and compliance controls you put in place. But either implicitly or explicitly, a company's cultural code is supposed to equip front-line employees to make the right decisions without supervision. Many of the companies that got into trouble revealed a culture engendered with conflicts of interest without safeguards. Rotten cultures produce rotten deeds."• 4

Lack of integrity is nothing new. The Bible is full of examples. One of these involves Gehazi, the assistant to the most famous prophet of his day, Elisha. It's hard to imagine that anyone working with such an anointed man and who saw firsthand the power of God would fail the ethics test. But he did.

When Elisha healed Naaman (a very powerful man in government) from leprosy, he didn't expect to be compensated and he didn't ask for money. When Naaman insisted that Elisha take some form of payment, the prophet answered, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing"• (2 Kings 5:16). Gehazi, however, did not agree with his employer. He saw this as a great opportunity for gain and took matters into his own hands. "Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, "My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the Lord lives, I will run after him and get something from him"• (2 Kings 5:20).

As a result of his deception, God judged Gehazi and struck him with leprosy, and his life was never the same. He was removed from serving one of God's most extraordinary prophets.

It is hard to live a life of servanthood and watch others prosper when we ourselves are in need. When our desires and jealousy become so great that we are willing to violate our ethics and integrity, we have moved to a dangerous place. We walk out from under the canopy of God's protection in our lives, saying that His provision is not enough.

I call Psalm 15 the "Ethics Psalm."• I particularly like the way THE MESSAGE paraphrases it: "God, who gets invited to dinner at your place? How do we get on your guest list? "Walk straight, act right, tell the truth. Don't hurt your friend, don't blame your neighbour; despise the despicable. Keep your word even when it costs you, make an honest living, never take a bribe. You'll never get blacklisted if you live like this."•

Each of us has the potential of being a Gehazi if we do not have a foundation built into our lives that makes us willing to receive only what God gives us through the fruit of our obedience.

### **Attribute 3: Extravagant Love and Service**

A friend told me a true story about one of his closest friends (I'll call him Max) who experienced great suffering for the extravagant love he demonstrated to his boss. Max worked on a cargo ship, and his boss was his captain. Max was a good worker, but his boss hated and ridiculed him because of his faith in Christ. Max often shared his faith in Christ with others, and one day, he led the captain's girlfriend to Christ. When she became a Christian, she stopped sleeping with the captain.

This made the captain furious, and he later approached Max while he was at lunch and began beating him. Max did not fight back. The captain proceeded to beat him to a pulp. However, when two other men saw what was taking place, they jumped the sea captain and began beating him in turn. The sea captain was beaten so badly that he needed immediate medical attention.

When Max saw the condition of the sea captain, he came to his aid and began helping him. The sea captain was so moved that Max would do that after he had beaten him up that he began to weep, unable to understand what could move a man to have such love in the face of a beating. The sea captain accepted Jesus at that moment.

The Bible tells us that while we were yet sinners, Christ came and paid our penalty so that we might live eternally. Many in the workplace have never known the love of Christ. You might be the only one they ever meet who can introduce them to this love. "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"• (Matt. 20:28).

Someone once said, "people do not care what you know until they know that you care."• 5 When you genuinely take an interest in another person in the workplace, you become a credible person in his or her eyes. You stand out among the crowd.

Recently, I took a phone call from a CEO of a company who shared about the impact of the TGIF devotionals that a family member had been sending him. I recognized that the man was not a Christian. Though I was leaving town that afternoon and was pressed for time, we began to talk, and ultimately the man prayed over the phone to receive Christ. Later, he commented on how impressed he was that I took the time to listen to him even though I had to get out of town. Being a busy executive, this man equated time with love and service. That is what the world is looking for.

#### **Attribute 4: Signs and Wonders**

The fourth attribute of an effective workplace witness is signs and wonders. The Early Church made a huge impact on society not through knowledge, ethics, or service alone, but through demonstrating the power of God. “The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people”• (Acts 5:12).

Jesus gave His workplace apostles the anointing that allowed them to perform miraculous signs. “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father”• (John 14:12). Unfortunately, most Christians in the workplace today do not realize God desires to reveal Himself in miraculous ways in their workplaces. We have been satisfied to have the gospel but deny its power.

God is raising up a new kind of workplace believer who is experiencing the power of God in daily work life. One of these wonderful workplace Christians is Emeka Nywankpa, a barrister (lawyer) in Nigeria. Emeka spoke at a conference a few years ago on the subject of how the spiritual impacts the physical.

Emeka shared a story about arguing a big Supreme Court case in his country. There were five points to argue in the case. The morning the trial began, he prayed with his wife and junior lawyers in his chambers. During his prayer time, he sensed that the Holy Spirit was telling him, “Do not argue points one through four. Only argue point five.”•

In the courtroom, Emeka announced that he wished to drop points one through four and only wished to argue point five. The judge was shocked, but gave him permission to proceed. He argued point five and sat down. The other attorney got up, and then for twelve minutes stumbled around trying to defend his position, unable to get a coherent word out. Finally, he approached the bench and said, “Your Lordship, it is unfortunate that my learned friend has dropped the first four points. I wish to yield the case.”• The other attorney had only prepared for the first four points. Emeka won the case. God had given him a strategy to win his case supernaturally. It made no sense to him, but he obeyed and God gave him victory in a very unusual way.

Chuck Ripka lives in Elk River, Minnesota, a community of about 20,000 people 40 miles outside of Minneapolis. Chuck and some business leaders opened a bank in 2003 with the intent to use the bank as a place of ministry. Within the first 18 months of the bank’s opening, Chuck and his staff saw more than 70 people accept salvation inside the bank, and there were numerous physical healings. The bank employees offer prayer for their customers in the boardroom and often pray for those who come to the teller windows. There is excitement in the bank each day about what God is going to do.

I often receive requests from the media for interviews about the Faith at Work movement. One day, the New York Times Magazine called. After several subsequent conversations, the reporter said, "I believe I have a good understanding of this Faith at Work movement, but can you point me to someone who can demonstrate what this looks like in a daily workplace?"• I told the writer to give Chuck Ripka a call.

Chuck immediately began praying for the writer after I told him the reporter would be calling him. A few days later, Chuck called me and said the Lord was going to use this article not only for the workplace movement, but also for this writer's life. He even had the boldness to tell the writer that when he called.

The writer visited Chuck and the bank for two days. He went with Chuck everywhere he had dinner in Chuck's home, attended community meetings, interviewed all the employees of the bank, and watched Chuck pray for many people at the bank. The writer was impressed that this was the real deal.

At the end of the reporter's visit, Chuck and his friend Larry Ihle asked if they could pray for God's blessing on him. He agreed, and they prayed for God's blessing on his writing skills and for the New York Times. They prayed that God would help him write the article. The writer was touched by this. Afterward, Chuck asked him about his own relationship with God, which led to him praying to receive Christ. Two weeks later, photographers came to take pictures for the article, and they too prayed to receive Christ.

When the article came out October 31, 2004, it was one of the best and most extensive articles on the Faith at Work movement that has been written from a secular viewpoint. Chuck has stayed in contact with the writer, and the two have become good friends. God has opened many doors as a result, and the secular media has taken note of this growing movement. Since then, Chuck has had interviews with the London Times, a broadcast network from France and Germany, a Hong Kong newspaper and many city newspapers across the United States.

Excellence, ethics and integrity, extravagant love and service, and signs and wonders these are the attributes of the worker that God is using in dramatic ways. May the Lord allow you to make these four qualities part of the makeup of your own workplace.

### **How About You?**

1. List each of the four attributes discussed in this chapter. Rank yourself in each attribute on a scale of 1-10.
2. Name one thing you can do better in each area that will make you a more effective Christian worker.

Os Hillman is president of Marketplace Leaders, an organization whose purpose is to help men and women discover and fulfill God's complete purposes through their work and to view their work as ministry.

Formerly Os owned an advertising agency but is now an internationally recognized speaker on the subject of faith at work. He is the author of 14 books and a daily email devotional called TGIF: Today God Is First which has over a quarter of a million daily subscribers worldwide.

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