

## The Challenges We Face (Part 2) • Hebrews 6:10-12

Do you have challenges at work? Here is the percentage of Americans who say they:

- Need more fun – 68%.
- Need a long vacation – 67%.
- Often feel stressed – 66%.
- Feel time is crunched – 60%.
- Want less work, more play – 51%.
- Feel pressured to succeed – 49%.
- Feel overwhelmed - 48%.

If any of these descriptions fit you, you have lots of company. No one is excluded from challenges in life or at work. It is a normal part of every human experience. If we look at others and think they are problem-free we are just showing that we don't have any idea what they are dealing with. Problems may vary in size and intensity, and some people are better at covering up their problems than others, but everybody gets their share of challenges at work.

As Christians we are not exempt, but we do have a different perspective because of our faith. We believe in Jesus! We believe he is on our side, encouraging us, cheering for us and helping us in a constant flow of special ways. That's what faith is all about—God on our side!

On another occasion we talked about the first six of eleven suggestions on practical ways to face challenges at work. They are all based on a survey of people from Wooddale Church. The first six suggestions were:

**Adjust expectations**—don't be unrealistic in your expectations; have high expectations but not impossible ones.

**Listen and learn**—learn the culture of the company, listen to others and listen more than we talk.

**Take personal responsibility**—be a contributor not a complainer.

**Be creative**—ask God for ideas to creatively solve problems and help others.

**Pray**—the number one suggestion from our survey. Talk to God about it!

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**Set boundaries**—decide in advance how you will deal with things that are illegal, unethical or uncomfortable. Different challenges call for different responses.

Suggestion #7 is to **extinguish gossip**. Our survey showed that gossip was one of the top challenges at work. While it may not be illegal, like stealing, it is important because of relationships. Survey responses indicate that relationship with co-workers is highly valued and gossip is seen as a chronic problem.

A female manager said, "Avoiding gossip is very, very hard, and I often fail."

Someone in marketing said, "My challenge is falling into the gossip trap, tearing down people rather than building up."

A teacher wrote: "Sometimes it's hard as I get in the middle of the gossip and those talking about others at work. I do not want to do this, but if I don't I don't feel included."

Someone who has a clerical job in an accounting field said:

"I work in a large office, 500 employees, and there is a lot of idle chatter, gossiping, backstabbing and a general lack of respect for co-workers. Since I don't want to hear gossip, and I make a strong attempt to not gossip (I fail at times) I'm pretty much a loner, which is okay, but it gets depressing and frustrating."

I must tell you that almost all the concerns about gossip in the workplace were from women. This is not to imply that men don't gossip, but women are more concerned about it. So, maybe we need some definitions.

The dictionary definition of gossip is "revealing personal or sensational facts about others." The issue in gossip is not truthfulness. Gossip may be false or true. Either way it is passing along information about another person without that person's permission. Proverbs 20:19 says, "A gossip betrays

*a confidence; so avoid a man who talks too much.”* Proverbs 26:20 says, “*Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.*”

Gossip is talking about another person when they are not there and saying things that we probably would not say if they were present. So, if someone is getting a raise, being promoted, getting fired, having a baby, going through a divorce or is diagnosed with a disease we should ask ourselves, “Is this something she would prefer not be told? Is this his information to tell and not mine?”

The place to begin stopping gossip is with oneself. Avoid some of the telltale signs of sliding into a gossip mode: “Someone told me that . . .” “There are people who say . . .” I try to avoid those phrases and not blame others or try to bolster my argument with someone who is anonymous. If it is appropriate, I have asked those who use these expressions where and from whom they learned them. If they refuse to tell me or insist that their sources stay anonymous I have said, “Then maybe it would be best not to tell me until you have their permission”

There is an expression that “everything we do teaches.” The way we drive our cars, how we pay our bills, the speech we use, how we treat others are all ways in which we teach those around us. That principle can be applied to office gossip, as well. There are co-workers who don’t know how not to gossip. They think it is a normal part of the culture. But, we can teach them. When gossip comes up, change the subject. Be an informed and interesting person who follows the news, reads books and magazines and has some wholesome jokes up your sleeve so that you can introduce new ideas and topics on a broad array of subjects. Sometimes silence is the best response. Other times we need to say, “I’m not really comfortable hearing or talking about her.” Gossip will not disappear in your lifetime or mine, but we should do all we can to help douse some of the flames of gossip.

Suggestion #8 is to **love co-workers**. Loving others is a basic principle for all Christian behavior. It is the most powerful tool we have for good where we work. And, it can be the most difficult job we have.

We as Christians love others because God loves us. We especially love those who are less lovable, even our enemies. In his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:43-45 Jesus said”

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love*

*your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”*

There are plenty of opportunities to practice this at work. Let me share with you a small sampling of the opportunities Wooddalers gave in the survey:

A male project manager says:

“I face constant layoffs, 65-70 hours/week. No improvements in processes or toolsets, and management piles more and more work that’s continually added to all our work. People are having strokes, heart attacks, spouses leaving them because they are working such long hours. High stress for all—people burn out. There is not trust from management so everyone has to cover themselves, and the customer is losing out.”

A man in sales and marketing says:

“I work for a person who does not show appreciation for a job well done. He does not offer any encouragement or thanks when you do good work, put in extra effort on a project or try and go over and above the normal work requirements.”

A female manager asks, “How do I deal with a boss who has low morals, asking me to lie in many circumstances and who treats people badly?”

An editor explains about a “boss who has a subtle bias against anyone or anything ‘religious’. He’s asked me questions about others before saying well so-and-so is pretty religious, aren’t they? If the answer is yes, a strange silence follows. He makes it uncomfortable to mention I’m a Christian in casual water cooler conversation he may overhear.”

A person who works in an office with over two hundred employees says,

“There are several openly gay employees who outwardly flaunt their ‘relationship choices.’ They come to me to show me their litera-

ture, like the Gay Pride newspaper.”  
A female administrator says,

“Working with all male bosses, my ideas are not considered as frequently as they are if the idea came from a male. ‘Not considered equal.’ Foul language, putting people down vs. looking at their positive traits and placing them accordingly. Ungodly and non-Christian beliefs and actions.”

A female executive assistant writes:

“Undertaking a new position last December and finding the individual who used to do

some of the things I now do totally resents me and complains about me to her superior (who is also difficult). I get along great with the four men I work for, but these two people make it tense for me and uncomfortable. I need a prayer for the right direction if I should stay or leave. I only have 45 years before I can retire.”

A female employee in customer service:

“Difficult supervisors. One took credit for work I did. Another expected me to come in an hour early daily and frowned when I took a lunch break, despite that all the work was completed each day. There was nothing to do when I would come in early. She just wanted me to be at work longer, even though I was salaried.”

To simply say “love your enemies” seems too pat and too improbable for real life. Yet it is the right way and the better way. Getting even or responding with hate is a destructive approach. As Christians we can pray for God to help us and show us a different and better way. Listen to one Wooddaler’s approach that demonstrates what Jesus suggested we do. She’s a product manager who says:

“One of the women I work with is ex-

tremely difficult. She is frequently angry, impatient, critical and expresses herself with foul, angry language. At first I just tried to ignore her, but that was not the right way. I decided to respond to her in Christ’s love. I learned she had traveled broadly and loved Asian art. I made her a quilt with an Asian motif. She was stunned I would do this for her. She said it was the nicest thing anyone

has ever done for her. Our relationship changed. Responding in love rather than anger has made a change in both of us.”

It may not be easy to love difficult people, but it may come down to a choice. Are we going to hate them or are we going to love them?

Are we going to avoid them or are we going to engage them? Jesus invites us to engage them with love and trust him to make an impact on their lives and on ours. The Christian way is to love even when it’s hard, to love even if it doesn’t seem to work, to love for Jesus’ sake even more than for the sake of the other person.

Suggestion #9 is to **evangelize incrementally**. Without a doubt, one of the strongest themes in the hundreds of responses to our workplace survey was evangelism. People want to share their Christian faith with others; yet they find it hard to do.

One salesman talks about his desire to be the same witness at work as at church. He says, “I struggle in that I leave God at home, rather than bringing him to work.” A mortgage planner wants to witness “in a way that’s bold but not ‘over the top’.” A vice president wants the “courage to witness.” A national accounts manager says, “How do I speak openly in the workplace about my faith?” A female executive director asks, “How do I discuss faith openly without alienating or offending?” A physician asks, “How do you continually save someone’s life but not their soul?” A registered nurse, “I’d like to share Christianity with my patients, but feel hesitant to do so—concerned I’m stepping over the line.” A public school teacher asks, “What is legal to share or say in the school setting in regards to my relationship with Jesus Christ?”

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Phrases like ‘off the record, I do pray for my students’ are one way I witness. It is probably illegal.”

There is no simple answer to how we go about expressing Christian faith in the workplace. Certainly we must respect the expectations and rules of the employer who pays our wages. We are hired to do a job, not to evangelize. At the same time, sharing the good news of Jesus Christ is at the center of being a Christian. We live to evangelize.

Most people are persuaded to follow Jesus over a period of time. Each of us is usually only part of what God is doing to reach our co-workers. We need to realize it is the Spirit of God who is ultimately responsible for bringing them to faith in Jesus Christ. Take it a step at a time. Evangelize in increments. Do a good job at work. Be a Christian. Look for opportunities to share Christ with your co-workers and when those opportunities arise, speak boldly.

Everyone shares their views. Appropriately share yours. Say, “My experience is . . .” rather than telling others what to believe. There is a switch in the way people come to faith in our increasingly postmodern world—less rational argument and more interest in relationships and experience. Be their friend. Tell them about your experiences with God.

A man who is self-employed in manufacturing says it well: “I feel it is best to leave clues of Christianity in conversation and get the employee or colleague to ask questions or initiate curiosity.” That is a deliberate effort to plant seeds and then be prepared to answer the questions that are asked.

Suggestion #10 is to **consult other Christians**. Whatever you are facing someone else has probably already faced. Other Christians have ideas and experiences that can be valuable to you. Unfortunately, we tend to think we are unusual, if not unique, when in truth we are surrounded by people who can help us deal with the challenges we face. Join a Bible study or build a circle of friends, particularly friends who are in the same profession or of similar age or interest. You will discover that you can help them and they, in turn, can help you. Take advantage of the support that is available to

you.

The survey we took impressed me that you have a lot to share about work. We can set up programs at church—we have at Wooddale Church—to connect people with other people so that sharing can take place. But what is really needed is a grassroots movement of supporting one another, praying for one another and coaching one another to be Christians at work. The “X-Files” television series used to say, “The answer is out there.” When it comes to challenges at work that is true in Christians within the context of the church and the Christian community. Whatever the challenges we face, the answer is out there. So, consult with believers.

Suggestion #11 is the most thoroughly Christian suggestion on this list: **Trust God**. God loves you. He is committed to your job. He cares about the challenges you face. You and your work are very important to him. He will not let you down. He is there for you. You can count on him every time. Do you believe this? Do you believe Jesus Christ is committed to your work? If yes, then you are a believer. You are a Christian!

One manager, after listing the challenges she faces, wrote: “How to overcome this: Say to God, ‘I’m giving this to you. I can’t handle this.’”

There are a thousand more things to say. The survey responses raised enough issues and spoke eloquently to enough challenges to last for a hundred weekends. You care deeply about being a Christian at work. So does God. Together you will prevail—you and God on the job!

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