

Coping With Job Hassles

In a survey about work taken at Wooddale Church I was impressed that there was a clear distinction between Christians and non-Christians in the workplace. People know who belongs to Jesus Christ and who does not. There are definite and strong expectations for Christians in all aspects of employment.

“Witness at work” is by far the number one issue faced by Christians. Christians very much want to have a strong testimony for Jesus Christ among their fellow workers, but most see this as a very difficult task. It’s hard to live a Christian lifestyle among non-Christians. It’s hard to speak a word for Christ to co-workers.

Something else I observed was that the desire to be honest and to do what is right and best was very strong. Those who responded to the survey were very concerned about dishonesty, immorality, unfairness and unethical business practices. Although they were very committed to biblical standards on their jobs, most felt that it is very hard to attain and that the competition with sin and the world is fierce.

Interestingly, money was not a major issue. Oh, there were several comments about unfair pay, how to ask for a raise and what to do about unemployment. But even people who were out of work didn’t list financial concerns as the major hassles facing them. Rather, there were other things like witness, God’s will, righteousness, fulfillment and relationships that ranked as far more important.

A final observation was that problems on the job tend to be more with superiors than with subordinates. Job hassles with the boss significantly outnumber job hassles with subordinates and peers. In fact, most of the comments about dishonesty, unfairness, profanity and pressures were explained primarily in terms of the employer and almost never in terms of employees or co-workers. This is consistent with other business and industrial studies that indicate we rate behavior and relationships above us higher than those below us.

Our purpose here is to convey some practical advice for coping with common job hassles. For our purposes we will divide these into four categories. The first one we’ll look at is the hassle of living with

dishonesty. Let me give you some questions asked by Christian workers:

One person said, “What if my boss asks me to relay a message to someone that I know is untrue? Is that untruth on his shoulders or on mine? Should I relay the message or refuse?”

Another wrote: “A product is sold claiming to have an added feature that the customer requested and is also charged for. But then the product is sold not having the added feature, but is disguised as if to have it. What is my response to the one in charge?”

Another asked: “How do I deal with my company when it does not always practice the laws of the land?”

The question of another: “What about the little things that people at work do that are dishonest?”

And a fifth: “The people at work are getting away with putting down overtime that they didn’t actually work. What is the best way to handle that? Should I talk to the person? Should I bring it to the attention of the supervisor? Or should I ignore the whole matter and trust that God will deal with them?”

Let’s look at some principles for coping with dishonesty and then explore practicing the principles. The first principle is that you be honest; this is 51% of the answer. Even when other people are dishonest and even when your honesty may come at a high price, you do what is right. Remember that you are working for God; he is the one to whom you

are ultimately responsible. Proverbs 10:9 tells us, “The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.”

A second principle is to follow Jesus’ example: do not confront every sin. At times Jesus did point out people’s sins; he even cast the moneychangers out of the Temple. But the reality is that there were many times when he did not confront the sins of people because he had other priorities.

We cannot confront or handle every sin that is in our society or in our company. Therefore, it’s neces-

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sary to be selective. We must be careful not to allow the sins of others to compromise us or cause us to sin. We must prayerfully seek God's direction on the dishonesty that ought to be confronted. Then we must first approach the individual, and do it graciously and kindly with the aim to be redemptive. If all else fails, it may be necessary to go to a supervisor or even to quit the job. But that's a last resort.

But how do we put that principle into practice? Here are some suggestions. When the boss asks you to lie, graciously tell him or her that you don't feel comfortable telling even the smallest lie; then offer an alternative. For example, you could tell someone, "(The boss) isn't available right now, may I help you?"

If the company cheats a customer, go to the boss and say, "I don't want to cause trouble for the company or for anyone in it, but I don't feel free to participate in doing this to our customers. Is there some other way we can handle this?" If not, the answer may be to seek a transfer or another job.

When little things are stolen, talk to the guilty party. If it continues to be a problem, ask your supervisor how to handle the situation without telling specifics.

Ask God to make these situations opportunities to glorify him. Trust him for good results. Ask God to help you display love, warmth and graciousness (not self-righteousness) in the way you handle the situation.

A second category of hassles is unfairness. Again, here are some comments from Christian workers:

One person asked: "Should need dictate salary? Should a single person get paid less than a person with a family?"

Another writes: "Should a Christian be forthright and vocal when he feels a raise is deserved, or should it be left up to the Lord to see that we receive what we ought?"

Another: "Sex discrimination against women is being promoted—men being promoted over women even though they're not qualified. I'm tired of emptying my head to fill someone else's."

Another writes: "How does one deal with inequities in promotions? salary increases? politics (at work)?"

And: "What about Christian employers who pay less than their non-Christian counterparts? Shouldn't Christians actually pay other Christians more because they know they are more likely to be honest and dependable?" Again, there are some principles we can apply.

The first is the principle of contentment. Philippians 4:11 gives the testimony of the Apostle Paul where he says, "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances."

Contentment is an inner peace and conviction that God is ultimately in charge and will ultimately make every situation in our lives work out right. God will use it for good. The Apostle Paul says he "learned" contentment; it is not natural. We must pray for God to teach us contentment, and remember that it is usually learned through difficulty. The specific context Paul found himself in when he penned this verse was the extremes of poverty and prosperity, problems and success.

Akin to that is the second principle: patience. I Peter 2:18-20 reminds us:

Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

In other words, we must so trust God that we are willing to suffer injustice and unfairness without complaint! God approves of this!

There are circumstances where we must choose. It may be choosing between adequately providing for our families and settling for unfair wages; between suffering discrimination and allowing an employer to treat us illegally. There may be times when we address the issue and claim our rights. The Apostle Paul did that when he claimed his privileges as a Roman citizen after he was illegally beaten and imprisoned.

However, we must first settle in our hearts the issues of contentment and patience! This usually takes time and is not easy. We must be fully and honestly willing to be content when mistreated and remain patient when treated unfairly. Then and only then will we be in the position to claim our rights!

In order to put these principles into practice, we must first seek contentment from God with our unfair salary and demonstrate that contentment by showing patience for our boss. Then, when God convinces us that he wants us to seek that raise, we can do it!

If we're discriminated against because of age, gender, politics, race or any other reason, we must first resolve the contentment and patience issues. Only

then can we apply the priority principle. Often God is using the circumstance to teach us contentment and patience. When we have learned, he may directly resolve the unfairness for us!

A third hassle on the job is dealing with profanity. Again, some comments from Christian workers. One person writes, "How do you handle obscenities without coming across self-righteous?" Another asks, "A superior, the top boss, cannot talk without swearing. How does one handle this?" And a third says, "How do you react to those who use God's name in vain or engage in otherwise very negative conversation without being pious? In other words, what's the best way to react to glorify God in love?"

Here are a couple of principles for coping with the hassle of profanity. First, be an example in your own speech. Colossians 4:6 says, "Let your conversation be always full of grace." If your speech is pure it will be such a contrast to profane and obscene speech that it will be a strong witness without saying anything more. People will know; the contrast will be sharp. When Charleen and I were in Japan we didn't have to go around and tell people that we were Americans. We looked, talked and behaved in ways that made our differences obvious!

The second principle is the other side of the coin and that is to look for God-given opportunities to share your stand. Pray for the right opportunity. Make it private rather than with others. Speak with love and grace. Say something like, "As a Christian, I feel uncomfortable hearing God's name used in swearing." Enough said; they'll remember. Leave conviction of sin to the Holy Spirit. Don't become obsessed with it.

A fourth and final area of hassle is the whole matter of priorities. Again, some comments from Christian workers:

One person wrote: "How do you have quality time with mate and family when you work long hours (six days and most evenings) in order to earn enough money to barely keep needs met?"

Another: "How does one work and be involved in a local church . . . and do each job well? I realize the type of job has a lot to do with it. However, your vocation requires time, overtime, travel, etc. You must work to eat.

At Wooddale service is expected, which it should be; my concern is doing both well and still have time for family, friends, and fun. I most want to serve God."

Another person wrote: "For housewives – scheduling and planning of time for Q.T.s (quiet times), outreach to neighbors, cleaning, shopping, etc."

And a fourth says: "Where should my job rate on my list of priorities? 1.) The Lord; 2.) Family; 3.) Job; 4.) Ministry; 5.) Leisure/ Social?"

I believe that this whole matter of priorities is extremely difficult. Many people are really hurting because of the demands and pressures coming from every direction. There isn't enough time to do anything well. Yet, one person wrote that "Christians - -

need to become far more involved in things like the American Cancer Society and attend all council and planning and commission and legislative sessions."

Once again, let us look at some

principles for coping with priorities. First is the principle of limited resources. One day a young student went to his professor and asked, "Which is more valuable, time or money?" The professor replied, "Don't ask me. Ask a man who is rich and old."

Time is the most valuable resource that we have. We should treasure it and use it wisely. Listen to what the Bible says in Ephesians 4:15-16, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity."

Everyone has 168 hours in a week, so the resources of time are clearly limited, but the opportunities are unlimited! That means that in life you can't be an Olympic skier, a Rhodes scholar, a concert pianist, a military leader and a farmer. You have to make some choices. Select some and neglect others.

The place to begin is with an inventory of how time is spent. For at least one week keep an hour-by-hour log of how you spend your time. Few people do this. Most would be amazed if they did. Find out how much time is wasted, how much time is spent where it doesn't matter and how much time is given to the truly important things in life. If you are serious about coping with the hassles of pressure and priorities

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A second principle that goes with this principle of limited resources is the principle of balance. It is possible to do too much even of a good thing! You can spend too much time working. You can devote yourself to your family to the exclusion of God. And you can spend so much time on church work that you alienate your children. It may even be possible to spend too much time praying.

God calls us to a life of balance where adequate time is given to God. That means we have daily devotions with time in the Bible and prayer. It also means that we spend adequate time on self — sleeping, eating, exercising and growing. Adequate time must also be given to family for instruction, fun, discipline and love. We must give adequate time to work doing a quality job for our employer and serving God while receiving self-fulfillment. And we must spend adequate time in ministry serving God by serving others. As in the case of vitamins and minerals, if you get out of balance, you'll get sick!

In order to balance our priorities there are some suggestions we should look at. First, sit down and write a list of what you believe God would have you do with the time he has given to you. Be idealistic at first. List everything without time restraints. Order the items on the list by importance. List the items that are non-negotiable: daily devotions; work; family; church; food; sleep; exercise. Design a schedule to reflect your priorities. Keep it and regularly update it.

Keep a running record. When something infringes on the priorities and the balance — like working overtime — then something else has to be cut. Decide what that will be in advance. Less sleep? Less leisure time? Skip church that week? Pray less? Skip a meal?

When work gets out of balance to the point of destroying the other priorities of life, steps must be taken to re-balance priorities. This may mean a different job, selling the house, changing our lifestyle or something else.

Many people have allowed others to set their priorities for them. The results of this can be disastrous. It may result in both parents working too many hours, living beyond our means, debt, fatigue, lack of ministry, being spiritually dead, having hurting marriages or neglected children.

Who wants to end life saying what life was all about were the hours worked or the possessions gained? There are higher priorities! What are yours? Will you decide them and then live by your decisions?

When our priorities are prayerfully set by God's priorities, life comes into balance. You then know when to say "yes" and when to say "no" to working overtime, teaching Sunday School, going on a family picnic or sleeping in on Saturday morning.

The bottom line in order to cope with the hassles of life really comes down to the Lordship of life! Do you remember Joseph in the Old Testament? He had more hassles than just about anybody we could think of short of Job. He told the truth and his brothers wanted to kill him. Instead they sold him into slavery. He was taken off to Egypt and he worked faithfully and diligently in the household of Potiphar of Egypt. He walked in integrity. He learned a new language. He was far from home with no prospects of ever being set free. And what was his reward for hard work? Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. When he refused he was falsely accused and sent to prison.

In prison he worked with equal diligence. He was faithful to God even when bad went to worse. He interpreted the dreams of the baker and butler of Pharaoh, but he was forgotten and left to languish in prison.

Joseph did everything right and nevertheless spent time in a pit at Dothan, in slavery as a houseboy in a foreign land and then years in prison. But through it all, Joseph was God's man! Joseph honored God far more than anyone else who was free, successful and un-hassled. And in the end God revealed his masterful plan. He had been preparing Joseph to become the ruler of Egypt to preserve his chosen people from death by famine.

It's not the hassles that are important but how we handle them! Like Joseph, handle the hassles with patience, integrity and contentment for the glory of God!

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