

COMMUNITY — A Faith Based Value at Work

Consider that we spend an enormous amount of time at work. Like it or not, the workplace is a community for us. What kind of community is it? What values control us in our workplace? What values bring success to co-workers? What would a faith based community be like?

The word “community” can have many meanings. A workplace community may simply be a collection of people who work in the same place at the same time. This community is essentially controlled by the workplace owners and managers. The faith based value of community in the workplace can be an environment of support and belonging, a nurturing and collaborative spirit that envelops or seeks to envelop all who inhabit the workplace. This is controlled by all the people in the workplace, not just the owner and managers.

Paul in Colossians (3:8-15) gives helpful direction to developing the value of community when he says, “You must put aside now: all the anger and quick temper, the malice, the insults, the foul language. Stop lying to one another....clothe yourselves with heartfelt mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another; forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. Forgive as the Lord has forgiven you....Christ’s peace must reign in your hearts, since as members of the one body you have been called to that peace.”

So what can be done to create the supportive environment? Based on my experiences in starting several short-term jobs within a relatively short time I would suggest some of these actions:

- Take time to welcome anyone new to your workplace. On one job, I wrote down the answers to all the questions I had as I started to work and got answered (best places to park, how to reserve a meeting room, where to get desk supplies, expectations about being in the office, where and when regular meetings are held, etc) and made copies of information documents related to the workplace. When the next new employee came on board, I shared the notebook with them when I welcomed them to the faculty.
- Have a welcoming pot-luck lunch or invite the new employee to join you for lunch. Tell them about the options for lunch, be it timing or places to eat. Indicate a willingness to be a buddy, a friend.
- When a co-worker has a problem, help them to solve it as if it were your own.
- Acknowledge and show appreciation for the work and skills of co-workers. Provide feedback that will enable co-workers to develop and improve their skills.
- Be dependable in completing your job assignments.
- Keep improving the competencies necessary to do the work assigned to you.

All of these actions and many others that may fit your workplace need to be done in ways acceptable to co-workers. This means it is necessary to be respectful enough of your co-workers to watch for clues about how they want to be approached. Also, the etiquette of the workplace needs to be taken into consideration.

In many ways the admonition of Jesus to go forth and teach all nations could well be accomplished by giving living expression to his values in the community of our workplaces.

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1. What does applying the faith-based value of community in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of community in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How could you apply the concept of community in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the advice of Paul in Colossians? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?