

## **Contrition at Work at Work**

Almost twenty years ago, my brothers, sisters, parents, and several spouses were traveling together to participate in a medical research project. We stopped late one evening for supper at a national chain restaurant. After a short wait we were seated at one long table and our orders were taken. Not having been all together for a number of years we talked a lot. About an hour later we noticed that our meals had not yet come and simply assumed that the size of our group was just taking the kitchen extra time to get all the meals ready for service at the same time. About a half hour later the manager came out and apologized profusely for the delay. He said the fault was his in that he had been working on a faulty dishwasher and had not noticed or authorized the filling of our order. He promised the meals would be coming very quickly now. We accepted his apology, kept talking, and enjoyed some very good meals that were served soon after. As we prepared to leave and were looking for the bills, the manager came back to us and told us that we would not be charged for the meals (there were 19 of us) as an expression of his regret for the extreme delay in their preparation.

This incident has stayed strong in my mind as an example of how a company can deal with mistakes. Had the manager not taken some significant action beyond his apology, I would probably not have been a customer of that chain again. As it was I have continued patronizing the chain with some frequency over the years.

I share the story as an example of contrition at work. True, it is not about a matter of sin. If there was any violation, it would have been only of a company policy and not a moral dilemma. However, the elements of contrition were all demonstrated by the manager. There was recognition that some persons had been wronged or hurt in some way; there was voluntary sorrow for the faulty action/inaction; there was an admission and acceptance of fault; there was a promise to do better; and there was the acceptance or self-imposition of a penalty, i.e., absorbing the cost of the meals.

In our daily lives (or at least my life), in our workplaces—in or outside the home—we are each faced with the need or opportunity for contrition each time we make a mistake in our work as well as whenever we commit a moral wrong, a sin. Over the years I made many mistakes at work and at times tried to gloss them over or simply kept silent about them and hoped no one would notice. At other times I brought them to the attention of my supervisors and/or colleagues and took responsibility for them and for their correction. This latter path in the end was always more emotionally calming. Yes, it took humility and fortitude to come forward and deal with the errors I had made. On the other hand I was relieved of long-term stress from worrying about being found out and castigated for the error and the cover-up.

With sin, with acting in a morally wrong way toward others individually or the community in general, there is no hope that the error will not be known. It is known to those we have hurt and it is known to God. Contrition may take humility and fortitude to publicly express our sorrow and our resolution not to err again; yet it begins with love, love of God and love of those in our lives.

It seems to me that contrition for our daily failings and errors prepares us and makes easier contrition for failings in our spiritual life.

## **CONTRITION — A Faith Based Value at Work**

1. What does applying the faith-based value of Contrition 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 Contrition in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of Contrition in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based Contrition in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?