

Seeking Forgiveness at Work at Work

When thinking of forgiveness, I believe most of us think in terms of giving forgiveness, especially when we think of it in relationship to other people in our lives. Yet, it seems to me that seeking forgiveness is just as important and perhaps more difficult to do. In giving forgiveness we are in control, we make the decision. In seeking forgiveness, we are not in control beyond making the request. We are in the position of a supplicant; we are humbled.

Perhaps the hardest part of seeking forgiveness is accepting the fact that we were wrong, that we have injured another in some way. I recall a time when I wanted to get a message of dissatisfaction to a person but did not want to tell him directly. So, I made comments to a third party knowing he would carry them to that person. Well, that person got the message and then rightfully confronted me for not speaking directly to him. I was wrong; he was right, and I asked his pardon. Graciously he gave it and we talked about my initial concern and cleared that up, too. It would have been better to have raised my concern with him promptly and directly. Fortunately, he did raise his concern promptly and directly.

Another way we get into situations where we may need to ask forgiveness is by believing that our perceptions of a situation are the only ones or at least the only right ones. I remember a time when I was trying to handle what I thought were two important crises at one time and another employee wanted my attention for a problem he were experiencing. I thought my crises were more important and curtly cut him off without explanation. Later, in thinking over the situation I realized that while from my perspective I acted properly to deal with my crises, from his perspective I showed no regard for him as a professional or a person with a problem. I had to go to him and apologize. I had to let him express his frustration and resentment so that he could forgive me for not handling his crisis better than I did.

Both giving and seeking forgiveness are acts of love. Beyond expressing our desire to be in a positive relationship with the person offended, seeking forgiveness gives an opportunity, a gift, to the injured party to release their resentment and attendant emotional baggage, to become whole again. In seeking forgiveness we acknowledge that we have acted somehow in a way to hurt the other person, that we care for our relationship with that person, and that we would like them to give up their feelings of resentment, revenge, or retribution.

Seeking and receiving forgiveness does not necessarily mean that everything goes back to the way it was. Typically when we offend someone, we have violated his/her expectations about how we will act. He/she cannot rely on us to interact with him/her in the same way as before. We have reduced the level of trust between us. Trust may need to be rebuilt. Rebuilding trust is part of returning to the previous confident relationship. Reconciliation is more than mere forgiveness. Forgiveness makes reconciliation possible but not necessarily accomplished. Acknowledging that we have failed someone in his/her reliance on us and seeking forgiveness is a beginning.

SEEKING FORGIVENESS — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of seeking forgiveness 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 seeking forgiveness in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of seeking forgiveness in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based seeking forgiveness 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?