

**You may be bringing your prayer to work, but are you
BRINGING YOUR WORK TO PRAYER**

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Whether newly minted Christians or battle-scarred faith-veterans, most of us have some experience in bringing our prayers to work. Intellectually at least, we understand that God is just as able to hear prayers uttered in our place of business as He is in the quietness of our home or the sanctuary of a church. So it is natural for us in times of stress, anxiety, or uncertainty, to utter brief words of supplication for divine intervention, with some degree of expectation that God will hear, and if He chooses, will answer.

Such moments are not always confined to our own personal or family circumstances. Sometimes they involve others, at their request, even extending on occasion to include those of other faiths, and sometimes of no faith at all.

A few years ago Mel was called in to a company to help employees deal with the tragic and violent death of a co-worker. In the course of an all-staff meeting, he was asked if he would say a prayer. The staff came from many different religious and cultural backgrounds; as a Christian, Mel prays in the name of Jesus Christ. Not wanting to create an issue at such a traumatic time, but also unwilling to offer a general prayer that omitted reference to Christ, Mel agreed with the company executives that staff participation in the time of prayer would be voluntary. Then he waited at the door to chat with those employees who chose to leave, prior to the prayer time. Several moments went by before one of the executives said, "Mel, you can pray now." "But no one has left yet," Mel replied. "None want to," said the executive, being much quicker than Mel was to realize that at that moment of shock and grief, prayer in the name of Jesus Christ was the comfort that everyone there was seeking. It was a rare moment when people of several faiths, and perhaps some of no faith, were united in the name of Christ.

This scene is played out many times over, albeit in less dramatic ways, in workplaces across the nation. Individuals from any number of religious backgrounds, experiencing some of life's challenges, seek out a known Christian to ask for prayer. In those moments at least, we bring our prayers to work.

But how often do we bring our work to prayer?

The authors have worked in many different settings, under many different management styles, in pursuit of many different corporate goals, participating in countless meetings. Susan vividly recalls one meeting in which participants had reached an impasse. Emotions were running high; blame was being liberally spread around; there appeared to be no hope for resolution. The long-term impact on the working environment was likely to be devastating. As things continued to deteriorate, Susan decided to exit the room for a brief period. Going into the washroom, she said, "Lord, you've got to do something in there! If we continue this way, we'll never be able to work together again." Returning to the meeting room a few moments later, "I couldn't believe what I saw. The Chair of the meeting was apologizing for inappropriate comments. Senior managers were listening to each other instead of shouting to be heard. There was a sense of calm in the room, and the problems that had seemed insurmountable a few minutes before were now being resolved amicably and quickly. Only God could bring about that kind of transformation."

Bringing our work to prayer is the real secret to transformational leadership. Only God can transform human situations to bring about His desired results.

Priority-setting and time management are the bane of every executive's existence. Priorities are easily set between the important and the essential; the essential wins (or should!) every time. But how does one set priorities between two equally essential items with competing deadlines? How does one find time to fit in all of the things that need to be done in a day, to balance work, personal, and family time, and still get enough rest?

The answer is straightforward, though not necessarily simple: by bringing one's work to prayer.

Each morning, at the very start of the work day Mel opens his schedule and offers it to the Lord. "Lord, at the time I scheduled these appointments and made these commitments, I believed that they were the most important things to do today. But You may have other things that are far more important to You than any one – or even every one – of these. Show me your priorities, Lord, and I will gladly change my schedule."

The incredible thing is, God takes Mel at his word, and frequently changes the priorities for that day, even for that moment. He even provides solutions to double-bookings and impossible deadlines. But the essential things (from God's perspective) get done. And amazingly, in the course of a week (not necessarily every day) Mel is able to maintain the balance between personal, family, and work time.

How does it work? Why does bringing one's work to prayer produce less stress and seemingly more time for the essential things?

First, because God is invited in. He knows that He is welcome in the life of the inviter, and He enters where He is welcome. His very presence, through His Holy Spirit, is a force for peace and calm, and He is able to work His will without our interference – at least to the extent that we continue to welcome Him!

Secondly, because when we bring our work to prayer we are less *task* focused, and more *outcome* focused. When we focus on outcomes, we are able to entertain multiple means for achieving them, and thus provide the Lord with many more options in working through us. But our creativity, and hence God's options, are limited when we focus on what we are doing. The most productive question we can ask is, 'What does the Lord want to *achieve* through me,' rather than 'What does He (or what do I) want me to *do*'?

Thirdly, our perspective changes when we bring our work to prayer. In the early days of the space program Mel kept a coloured photograph of planet Earth on his office wall, taken by Apollo 8 astronauts on their way to orbit the moon. It provided a visual reminder that things look different from God's perspective than from ours. What seems like an insurmountable obstacle to us is simply, from God's perspective, one more step in the long process of our spiritual development. Allowing God access to one's schedule, and permitting Him to make whatever changes He wishes, enables Him to apply His perspective through us.

Fourth, God knows our every need. That applies as much to our work assignments and responsibilities as it does to our personal and family lives. God knows the demands from our boss or our Board of Directors. He knows, if we are self-employed, that we have bills to pay and need business opportunities to generate revenue. He knows the deadlines we are facing, the travel arrangements that have gone wrong, the impossibility of being in two places at once.

But He also knows what He needs from us, if His kingdom is to advance in His way through us. An independent-minded drill or sander or vacuum cleaner or computer or golf club or car is of no use to the one who wants to use it. They are designed and built to serve, for use as instruments in the hand of the craftsman. So are we with God. Independent-minded individuals are of no use as instruments to Him.

When we bring our work to prayer, God has the opportunity to align our will with His, to intervene in the circumstances and situations we are facing, to use us as an instrument in His hand, to fulfill His purpose through us. This process is not always easy or comfortable or stress free, but in the end it is always a blessing for us and for those around us. The outcome produced by a faithful instrument wielded by the hand of God is a beautiful thing to behold!

You are probably already bringing your prayer to work. Isn't it time you brought your work to prayer?