

No One Likes a Fake: Being Real Brings Life

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Monday morning, there I was sitting in the endodontist's chair. Three weeks prior I didn't even know what an Endodontist did, now I definitely knew. As the root canal was proceeding, for the third time, a shock of pain jolted my whole body as he touched my tooth. With a sigh the Doctor proclaimed, "We gave you multiple shots, more shots of the pain killer will not help, I will see you back in 2 weeks and we will give it another try." With my mouth throbbing, barely able to talk, I left and sat in my car pondering my Monday morning. Also realizing that my next meeting that morning would likely even be more difficult than this failed root canal. Unexpectedly my manager had requested to meet with me, and I was guessing it was to tell me my job had been eliminated.

In my car I prayed for peace. A picture appeared in my mind of a massive ocean wave, terrifyingly powerful and crystal blue, with a small surfer beautifully riding it. That surfer was me, I felt God saying my role was to trust Him and by riding the large waves of life I would give Him honor. I wanted to be that surfer, even if was scary. So, with peace and confidence I continued my day. My job was eliminated that morning and, contrary to what many do or what I had done in the past, I was transparent about this loss with my coworkers, and I asked friends in our Intel Christian Employee Group (ERG) to pray for me. So, with a wild start, March 2019 kicked off one of the most exciting periods of my life.

No one likes a fake. Only being real is truly being alive. This includes me bringing my Christian faith to work for the 23 years I have worked at Intel Corporation. There has been career risk in being real, but also tremendous blessings. I believe in a loving God that desires a relationship with me, and God gave me the freedom to pursue knowing Him. My desire is that everyone can have that same freedom to pursue their beliefs. Be real, no disguises, no masks.

March 2019 seems like a decade ago. The ensuing year has been one of feeling alive, surfing big terrifyingly beautiful waves, and filled with constant amazing occurrences outside of my control. My situation again to unexpectedly changed on Good Friday 2019 when, in the middle of a hiring freeze, I received a tentative offer to come back to Intel. The official job offer came on the National Day of Prayer in May. Then in the Fall of 2019, we kicked-off an amazing Cross-Faith ERG leadership team where I get to work with some of the most amazing leaders I have ever met, all sharing a common goal that everyone should have the freedom to pursue their beliefs and to be real at work. The head of HR became our official Christian ERG sponsor and our CEO supports our Cross-Faith efforts. After hearing about a Religious Freedom conference at the United Nations in the Fall of 2019, we as a group of Cross-Faith leaders engaged and attended the first ever Faith Based ERG conference in Washington DC in February 2020. At this conference we were able to receive an award for Intel as being #2 in the Fortune 100 of the best companies to encourage religious inclusion. It has been a wonderful year of feeling fully alive.

There are a few things I have learned over the years of leading our global Christian Employee Resource Group (ERG), and in teaming up with leaders of all of our faith and believe based ERGs to form the Cross-Faith ERG Leaders Alliance that includes our Atheists/Agnostics, Baha'i, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh ERGs. To be real I have learned to care deeply, engage with others who are different, and to take action.

Caring Deeply. Personality tests in college always pegged me as the “project driver” with little regard to people’s emotions and needs. Results are everything, aren’t they? Well, with time I matured. Now I realize people are the focal point to define value, and not taking myself so seriously. I try to set myself up as the person everyone can joke with and about, rejoicing with them, and shedding tears as challenges with tragedy occurred. I’ve learned the value of investing significant time to know everyone on a personal level when managing a large team. This includes walking the lonely journey with a colleague in Malaysia, a mother, as she slowly watched her special needs son die. Praying and weeping for him and her family while on a business trip, and hearing a small voice say, “you can stop praying, he is now home,” the next day receiving the text saying he had passed away peacefully the night before. Throughout this time a constant source of refreshment and strength were the weekly Bible study and prayer groups in the office. My co-workers often could understand my work challenges better than my own family, so it helped me to “be real” and to live my best self authentically at work.

Don’t Be Afraid of Engaging with Other Faiths. In the summer of 2019, I felt God was poking me to start up a dialog with the leaders of the other faith-based ERGs here at Intel. I didn’t want to. I wasn’t sure what this would result in. All my excuses were lined up – I was busy with my job, I don’t know them, I didn’t want to compromise my beliefs, and maybe there is not even interest. However, I knew God wanted this to happen, so I trusted and followed, surfing the wave. It was a lot of work but slowly it came together, and as I met each leader their enthusiasm heightened my excitement. They felt surprised that someone with different beliefs would care so deeply about them. By November all six of our ERGs had opted in and we formed the first ever “Cross-Faith ERG Leaders Alliance”. We had leaders from our Atheist/Agnostics, Baha’i, Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Sikhs meeting and pursuing this together. Truly some of the most inspiring and fun people I have ever met!

Our Intel HR Global Diversity team was supportive and a bit amazed that something like this could even happen, with such diverse beliefs how could this work? It did work and it felt like coming home. I am now with a family of wonderful people with highly held beliefs. An initial presumed challenge to me was that we all believed different things. I would hope this is not a surprise to anyone that different religions have different perspectives! In hindsight I am not sure why this concerned me so much. We have a unifying desire we all share - everyone should have the freedom to pursue and bring their deeply held beliefs to work. Understanding diversity is foundational, but it is our unity and freedom to express our beliefs that brings life.

Take action. Fear freezes, courage takes action. About 5 years ago Intel started to give US employees the Martin Luther King Jr. Day off as a holiday. After this first holiday, I realized I lacked depth of knowledge on Rev. Dr. King. So, like any logical consumer, I went to Amazon and searched for a book he wrote and ordered the first one that came up. This book was called “Strength to Love”, where he selected his own best speeches and sermons. After reading the book I realized I could truly relate to him. I was overwhelmed by his depth and passion, and I was moved by his argument that people should look at the heart, not appearances. From this inspiration, I started the push for a corporate wide Martin Luther King Jr. speech event so others could also experience his full speeches, not just sound bites. Now after four years of continued growth, it is now held at a dozen cities in the US and even in Costa Rica. This wasn’t easy. There were those that wanted to censor his speeches by removing all references to religion. There were those that were upset that a light skinned person would even be allowed to read one of his speeches in public. However, we persevered it is now embedded in our company DNA and will continue. I learned three key things. First, there will always be those that will oppose you. If we’d given into the fear of what

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might happen, this magnificent program would have been lost. Instead, many view this event as a highlight of their employment. Second, doing what is right takes effort, but it is worth it. These events were a lot of work, coordinating people globally, seeking alignment, and none of this directly helped my career. However, I have never felt more alive and blessed by doing it – better than any promotion. Third, supporting someone different than you is powerful and builds strong relationships. Supporting someone like you is expected, normal, and not unusual. I learned that by being a light-skinned person and strongly pushing Martin Luther King Jr. events surprised many and that opened new doors and relationships. Being real, caring deeply, engaging with others who are different from you, and taking action is worth it. Come on in, the water is fine. Join me riding the wave!