

Checking My Religion at Any Door Just Isn't Possible

Paul Lambert

Paul Lambert is an executive education specialist and former Assistant Dean at Georgetown University's McDonough School of Business. Paul Lambert serves as Secretary/Treasurer and Senior Business Fellow at the Religious Freedom & Business Foundation. He is helping to develop the foundation's in-company and campus-based executive education seminars on religious diversity & inclusion in the workplace.

Over the past five years, I've traveled the country to talk to companies about how to create environments of accommodation regarding faith. These conversations have most often been in the context of diversity and inclusion, meaning that a particular company, in the name of diversity, wants to acknowledge and welcome faith diversity among its employees. Obviously, I have been an advocate of this trend. There is certainly a need for us to do a better job at recognizing the religious identity of so many of our employees and colleagues.

However, looking at faith at work as simply an issue of diversity representation misses a significant aspect of the power of faith at work. Simply put, the ability for employees to fully live their faith or belief at work may be their greatest asset. When people can connect their work or learning with their deepest held beliefs, it changes the entire concept of work and learning. I've seen this not only as I've worked with companies throughout the country, but also in my career in higher education. People are better workers and better learners when their work and learning are connected to what they believe in and what drives them. Of course, I've seen this in my own life as well!

What leads me

In my work in higher education and consulting, I often have conversations with students and professionals about what drives us in our learning careers and professional careers. For many, that driving force is faith. That is certainly the case for me, and discovering that was a process that started for me in college and has informed my approach to work and learning ever since.

The Gift of Understanding

As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I have a deep faith in the atoning power of Christ. Many times throughout my life, as I've felt the weight of wrong choices or the sorrows that inevitably come in life, I have experienced feelings of overwhelming liberation and tangible rescue when I have turned to Christ. I have felt understood in my struggle and comforted in my grief in a way that only someone that truly knows and understands me and my struggle can provide.

To me, one of the great crowning characteristics of Christ is his ability to understand us in our extremity--a power he has because he suffered all things. As Christ said, "For behold, I, God, have suffered these

Faith@Work Matters (DRAFT | not for circulation)

things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent” (Doctrine & Covenants 19:16). I have felt the reality of these words in my life many times.

Additionally, as Christian, I am charged with trying to follow the example of Jesus Christ in all things, including, and perhaps especially, how I treat others. As Christ taught, “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12). This is a daunting invitation! How am I to love and serve others in a way that Christ has served and loved me?

It was in college that these teachings came together in the motto of my undergraduate alma mater, Brigham Young University: “Enter to Learn, Go Forth to Serve.” If I want to follow the example of my Savior, what better way than to learn of and understand others so that I can better serve them?

This concept has been a major driving force in my schooling and career. In schooling, learning became a sacred endeavor, less about grades and more about understanding. Work has become a call to serve with my duties being less about money or accomplishing tasks and more about contributing to a cause greater than me and building meaningful relationships with those I work with. It turns out that such an approach makes for better learning and work!

Engaged in a Good Cause

Another concept that has led me personally and professionally is that of being engaged in a good cause. Christ taught, “verily I say, [you] should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of [your] own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for the power is in [you], wherein [you] are agents unto [yourselves]” (Doctrine & Covenants 58:27-28).

One of the common teachings among many religious traditions is that we are endowed with agency, and thus, able to choose what we do, how we do it, and for what reason. As my faith and so many others teach, what I do with that agency is eternally important. To put it bluntly in the context of work, my financial or business success will not accompany beyond the grave. My efforts to bless others’ lives through use of the skills and knowledge given to me from heaven, however, most certainly will.

This concept has been a guiding light in my professional career. That isn’t to say that living according to this concept of being engaged in a good and worthy cause has been easy. On the contrary, I have encountered moments in my career where honestly assessing my “engagement in a good cause” has led to difficult decisions and professional uncertainty. In the long run, however, I have been deeply grateful for this teaching.

When in the Service of Others...

Perhaps Christ’s most common teaching is that we are to love others while loving God. In fact, Christ said the greatest commandment was to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,” and “the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:37-

Faith@Work Matters (DRAFT | not for circulation)

39). Within the text of the Book of Mormon, it is also written, “behold, I tell you these things that ye may learn wisdom; that ye may learn that when ye are in the service of your fellow beings ye are only in the service of your God” (Mosiah 2:17).

What an incredible perspective on professional work! When I produce good work that benefits my fellow men and women, I serve God! I am reminded of the great message from Eric Liddell, the great English runner and Christian missionary, “In the dust of defeat as well as the laurels of victory there is a glory to be found if one has done his best. God made me fast. And when I run, I feel His pleasure.” As a Christian, my best work is an act of glorifying God. That’s not only good for me as a Christian, but it’s good for my employer, colleagues, and clients.

Faith at Work Today

Many students and professionals I’ve talked with over the years see the professional world as a place where they have to hide personal views and identity regarding their faith. With their faith playing a foundational role in who they are and what motivates them, they worry about how to make faith and work compatible. They feel as if they are asked to check their religion at the door. To me, as a believer in an omniscient Heavenly Father and divine power that transcends all things, checking my religion at any door just isn’t possible. Thankfully, there are more and more professionals, religious or not, that are discovering that someone’s faith at work is far from a liability, but rather a strength.

My faith informs not only my personal life but all of my life. It changes how I see my colleagues and customers, it informs the kind of work I engage in, and it instills in me a need to offer my best in all I do. You might say my faith is my greatest professional strength!