

Congruency in the Workplace

Steve Hitz

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Generation Z and the Millennial generations are about the same size now. The Alpha generation comes after the Z's, and all together, they will control the work environments for decades to come. The Millennial generation alone now makes up the majority of the workforce. So why is that important as we consider bringing your whole self to work, faith and all?

Consider that the younger generations are vastly more interested than previous generations in making the time they spend at work count toward a better world. Collecting a paycheck is secondary to purpose. These generations are also very keen on being involved in knowing how the puzzle of the company they work for fits together. No longer does it work to have compartmentalized segments of the workplace operate in complete anonymity from the rest of the others. Seeing all of the puzzle pieces fit together includes the puzzle piece of faith in the workplace.

A concept the rising generations have had to grapple with, is overcoming the idea of compartmentalizing their lives. Many were taught that you can have a different life at work, home, church, social, etc.; just put on a different hat and don't mix it all together. As anyone who has ever lived that way eventually discovers, the conflict with this lifestyle creates uneasiness and turmoil. Not only that, it's exhausting to live that way. However, to be your true self in all areas of life, including work, and be authentic in all phases of life brings a much more holistic life and peace. It feels right to live a congruent life because it is.

One solution to bridging the gap between turmoil and peace in the workplace are "Faith oriented Employee Resource Groups" (ERG's), which are making a big splash in companies large and small. These groups help bring congruency to the workplace and allow all workers to be the same person (not having to check their faith in at the door). They gather in authorized groups that allow all workers to practice and share elements of their faith traditions without fear of reprisal. The ERG groups are a relatively new idea but are proving to be exactly what the rising generations desire---to have open inclusivity and transparency in the workplace; to bring their whole self to work, faith and all.

Over the course of my business career, I employed over 10,000 Millennial equivalents (meaning they weren't labeled as such at the time). I have always fashioned myself as a boomer with a millennial heart and felt a special connection to them. I felt I could relate in a way that made me a part of their tribe. At one point in my career, while leading a 20-million-dollar company we had built from scratch, my faith tradition (LDS) asked me to be a Bishop (pastor) to a group of 200 single adult millennials. It became perhaps the single most gratifying spiritual experience of my life up to that point. While engaged in this effort of shepherding young adults, I would ask for help at work from some of my staff as I needed to create presentations and various materials for my little flock at church. I didn't have the skills to do all of this, but *they* did. I didn't seek people from my own faith only, but others who I felt had the skills and heart I was looking for. I invited one young man in particular from the IT department to help me out. I knew he was a Christian like me and trusted he would feel like he was helping like-minded souls by helping me out in my shepherding efforts. I didn't feel like I was asking him to steal his time from the company to help, since I owned the company. One day, he came into my office and was visibly upset.

He said he didn't appreciate being asked to create things in my spiritual realm, as he didn't buy into my faith tradition. I was both embarrassed and shocked---I had no idea he felt I was imposing my beliefs by asking for his help with my faith which was different than his. After pondering this for some time, I concluded the main reason he felt uneasy in helping me, was that I had not really shown interest or curiosity in his own faith. I reflected deeply as I pondered my requests of him, which I felt were done in a non-proselyting and non-judgmental way. It was taboo to mix up religious and spiritual realms with business in the workplace during my early business career---at least that was our "taught" perception. Was it still taboo?

What happened next changed my view of all of this. I started asking others in my company, including my IT friend, about their faith traditions; really seeking to know that part of their lives. I invited those of other faiths to express blessings or prayers over food at company dinners. When others saw that I cared deeply about their faith and it was just fine to express those things in the workplace, things changed. When I mean they changed, I mean the entire team rallied together in our every business quest. Our company mantra focused on giving back to many charities through our efforts, and MANY faith traditions were pulling together for common causes. When this all came together, we were all celebrating the same virtues, expressed differently in our own faith traditions, but for the common good of all. Sound like panacea? Perhaps, but it ought not to be.

This open process was not yet vetted or put into "ERG's", but it was a start of something big. "Magically", our growth and profit margins from that time forward grew to all-time highs. Purpose was established for our very existence. Respect for everyone's faith traditions (or none at all) grew into open dialogues---everyone's traditions added to each other's. I was asked to conduct funeral services for employees of other faiths who lost loved ones, I was honored to attend many of my employee's faith tradition celebrations, attend their churches and pray with them. We became a fabric of faith---unified in many causes, literally woven together.

This experience we had in fostering faith in the workplace is what helped foster the ideas associated with Launching Leaders. We partnered with Brian Grim and The Religious Freedom and Business Foundation to establish inter-faith personalized leadership venues all over the world (29 countries on 6 continents). How were Brian and I introduced? Ironically through a mutually respected friend not of his faith. How has our partnership powered forward? Thru mutually respected associations of many faith traditions. Though I had sold the company (US-Reports), I had other smaller companies and happily signed the pledge (<https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/corporate-pledge>) to make faith an inclusive part of our workplace environments.

This entire process, which is now a central part of RFBF's core, is helping to reduce contempt, foster appreciation and respect, unlock the box of transparency, and create a completeness of peace and satisfaction in the workplace that could not otherwise exist.

Do you want to attract and keep the best talent? Foster ERG's in your company. Do you want to take remove the barbs of friction and create a oneness in your culture? Deploy ERG's in your workplace.

I wish ERG's existed when I employed 10,000 Millennials. Nevertheless, we invoked many of the principles without yet having the governance, and still it made a world of difference.

I encourage all companies, big and small, to learn and implement the "Pledge" through RFBF and establish the concepts of ERG's. We signed the pledge in 2018 at the Global Business & Interfaith Peace Awards. I have studied business culture my entire life. I'm a fan of many of the greats (I.E. Jim Collins,

Patrick Lencioni). Our company fashioned a unique culture that seemed to work. However, adding to these great principles the idea of bringing your whole self to work, faith and all (though not reference as such at the time), empowered all the good principles we had already established even further.

To answer the initial question then of “Why is it important to bring your whole self to work?” The largest population of the world work force is now made up of Millennials, closely followed by Gen Z. They have an innate make up to be inclusive, transparent, non-judgmental, with a desire to make a difference for good in everything they do. The ability to bring their whole selves to the workplace is not only a wish, it is fast becoming a *requisite*. Get on board enthusiastically, not because it is the *cool* thing to do, but because it is the *right* thing to do. Trust me.

As Kent Johnson stated in his forward, “This is transformational stuff.”