

## **Change of Heart**

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As I entered the approximately 30-attendee in-person Conscious Inclusion training at PayPal, I fully expected the objective to focus on educating people like myself who grew up in a homogenous environment where skin color was not a factor in a person's opportunity about unconscious bias.

"We will go around the room, and I want each of you to share one word or phrase that describes your identity," instructed the lead Trainer. "For example, male or a male with long hair." About half way through, one Indian woman courageously said "God-fearing". Having a thick accent, the Trainer asked the woman to repeat herself twice until finally I piped up on her behalf, "She said 'God-fearing'" in my best Missouri accent. Thereafter, nearly half of the remaining employees referenced their faith to describe their identity, like Muslim, Christian, daughter of God, etc.

Why do I describe the Indian woman's statement "God-fearing" as courageous? In Silicon Valley, openly talking about religion and beliefs is taboo (see Season 5, Episode 4 of the HBO series Silicon Valley or news stories of students protesting openly religious speakers at Berkley). Prior to moving to Silicon Valley at age 38 I lived in predominantly Christian communities. Integration of faith and work was not a known phrase as up to that point I had not sensed a separation. However, my new hire, computer-based compliance training at eBay depicted a scenario in which an employee claimed harassment because another employee whom she interacted with daily wore an "obnoxious" large cross necklace. While the training confirmed that simply wearing the necklace was not grounds for a harassment claim, I was struck by the existence of the example. I had never considered my cross necklace, which I wore regularly, to be potentially offensive and became attuned to this sensitivity in Silicon Valley.

After 1 year at eBay, a consultant on my project commented when she learned I grew up in Missouri, "I knew there was something different about you." Her comment referred to my positive outlook and service to others. Sure, some of that is a mid-west thing, but her statement affirmed she experienced God's peace and love through me. My life would be forever changed just weeks after this encounter.

While vacationing in Breckenridge, CO, celebrating our 5-year wedding anniversary, I suffered a series of heart attacks caused by Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection (SCAD). Those who know me would never have expected me to nearly lose my life to heart attack. I exhibited none of the typical risk factors, ran Division I Cross Country and Track for the University of Missouri, exercised regularly, and generally took care of my body. God gifted me a change of heart from life "with" God [outside of work] to life "for" God in all aspects of life including work via a literal heart transplant.

While memories of the pain endured in the hospital pre and post-transplant fade, one memory brightens - how close I felt to God in that time where he stripped me of all my faculties, forcing complete and utter dependence on Him. Because of my faith, I not only survived this black swan event, but lead a thriving life back in the fast lane of Silicon Valley. (Not to mention built resilience to future black swan events like COVID-19.) Wouldn't you want your employees to bring that source of peace, positivity and resilience to work rather than feeling the need to check it at the door? God since called me to enable all employees to bring their whole and best selves to work, including their faith, by

establishing faith-based employee resource groups (ERG'S) at PayPal (PayPal split from eBay when I returned from medical leave post-transplant).

That aforementioned pivotal moment during Conscious Inclusion training effectively made the case with PayPal's Diversity & Inclusion team as to why faith-based groups should in fact be a company sanctioned ERG versus a community interest group. Evidence that faith is the core identity for employees of all backgrounds is what makes it an equally important aspect of diversity and inclusion.

### **Establishing an Interfaith ERG**

PayPal's former SVP, General Counsel and fellow Christian Wanji Walcott came to PayPal from Amex and was surprised to find no faith-based ERG's existed given such ERG's had been in place at Amex for 25+ years. With Wanji's executive leadership, we secured the attention of PayPal's Diversity & Inclusion team to explore starting a faith-based D&I community (PayPal's version of ERG's).

Excited to establish such groups at your company, but not sure where to start? Our first challenge was demonstrating sufficient interest to warrant being an official ERG versus a community interest group. After sharing with them the story that unfolded during Conscious Inclusion training, they agreed and reported similar experiences. We formed a diverse working group of employees from Sikh, Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Jewish faiths.

Our interfaith working group believed the benefits of company sponsorship, financial support and corporate communication avenues outweighed relinquishing some control of our activities and sustaining the resources required to maintain sanctioned status. More importantly, that call from God to enable all employees to bring their whole and best selves to work, including their faith, was not intended to stop at the four walls of my company. Influence and impact would be minimized in an under-the-radar community interest group.

Having cleared the hurdle of becoming an official D&I Community, next came the decision of whether to establish one Interfaith D&I Community or separate communities by faith background. Through connections obtained attending the Faith & Work Movement Retreat weeks before, I benchmarked this structure with Salesforce, Google and Apple - one Interfaith from the start, one subsequently added Inter-belief umbrella, and one maintained separate faith communities. Admittedly, I first felt conflicted about helping promote other faiths when my own faith teaches only one path – by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Thankfully my internal struggle with this was short-lived as the Holy Spirit lead me to John 1:12-13 NIV “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.” Leading with inclusivity, we opted for an Interfaith D&I Community with sub-groups by faith-background under the umbrella of the Interfaith Community.

On the path to being official with structure determined, we shifted focus to our mission, charter and name. A healthy debate ensued over inclusive terminology in both name and mission statement. For example, would agnostics and humanists feel excluded by the words “faith” and “belief”? Once again benchmarking with other companies proved invaluable learning from their experiences. We sought feedback on iterations of the mission statement from colleagues who we knew did not identify with a major world religion. As for the name, all of PayPal's D&I Communities are branded with a one word action verb. Based on input from our interfaith working group, the PayPal Brand team developed several options. The interfaith working group voted, narrowing to top two options without a consensus – Believe and Embrace. In a progress update to Wanji, she pointed out that Believe was in fact bolder and

more courageous in this environment where people of faith felt forced to compartmentalize their lives, checking their faith at the door when entering the workplace.

During that Conscious Inclusion training, I took the opportunity to announce that we were in the process of establishing faith-based D&I Community. A gentleman approached me after the training and asked, "Are you concerned that atheists will feel alienated by this group? They have beliefs too." He quickly realized that he had answered his own question as our interfaith D&I Community is open to people of all "beliefs". With the input of our Executive Sponsors and D&I Leadership, we settled on the name Believe.

#### **Believe Mission**

We believe all employees have the right to bring their whole self to work. Faith and worldviews are core to who we are – our values and beliefs – and to how we conduct business. The mission of Believe is to foster an inclusive workplace and to promote holistic wellbeing by providing a forum to openly exercise and celebrate all faiths and worldviews in the workplace. Believe exists to create awareness and understanding of faith, hope, love, empathy, respect for one another and service toward our customers, communities and co-workers.

People of all faiths and worldviews are welcome.

#### **Believe Pillars**

- Embrace – Create a safe environment where our faith and worldviews are intrinsically valued and supported
- Transcend – Increase understanding, awareness and cultural sensitivity to our diverse faiths and worldviews
- Celebrate – Share our traditions and holidays in a fun and engaging way
- Open to All – Welcome people of all faiths and worldviews, including all interested in experiencing or learning, so employees can bring their whole self to work

#### **Operating an Interfaith ERG**

The most common question I received when describing this group was not "why" but "what", what would this group do? At the time of this essay, it has been a year and a half since initiating the request for faith-based D&I Community at PayPal. An interfaith working group co-created the official Believe Interfaith D&I Community; launched Believe at our corporate headquarters celebrating Christmas, Chanukah and Kwanza; established year 1 priorities; formalized Muslim, Christian and Sikh resource groups; partnered with other D&I Communities like the Ugandan's children's choir performing during the Black History Month pop-up market; hosted a well-attended globally broadcast virtual speaker event on "Understanding Ramadan to Build Inclusion on Your Team"; and are in the process of establishing local chapters in Omaha, DC and Singapore. My favorite comment on our internal Slack channel regarding the Ramadan event, "My ah-ha moment was to see so many people of other faiths showing up and asking how they could support Muslim employees - felt very empowering!"

I also knew our Christian group was on mission when a member thereof said just a few months after we began meeting Thursdays during lunch for fellowship and prayer, "Coming to work each day used to be just a job for me. Now I love coming to work."

#### **CONCLUSION**

Just as I literally had a change of heart, so did my company. Promoting the right to religious freedom and the ability to bring your whole self to work starts in our companies and does not stop within those proverbial four walls. I believe the private sector is best resourced and best positioned to solve the problems facing our world today, including religious and belief intolerance. Change your company, change your community, change your country, heal the world.

**Addendum: Success Factors for forming Faith-based employee resource groups**

**Executive Sponsorship**

- Called sponsors and leaders
- Engage early and often
- Clear roadblocks
- Persuade Legal if needed

**Clear Mission**

- Divinely Inspired
- Engage promoters and detractors globally
- Defined pillars

**Frame Business Value**

- Employee Engagement
- Employee Recruitment and Retention
- Education and Awareness
- Community Outreach
- Business Outreach

**Align to D&I Initiatives**

- Identity rooted in one's faith
- Company Values
- Benchmarking and research

**Establish Parameters**

- What it is
- What it is not
- Governance structure and guidelines

**Focused Priorities**

- Be a magnet not a deterrent
- Realistic year 1 program
- Comprehensive communication strategy