

Don't be condescending to other's faiths Works

Gregory G. Clark

Greg Clark is a partner in the Houston-area office of the law firm of Hughes, Fields & Stoby, a premiere law firm in Guyana representing the oil and gas industry and other industries seeking to do business in Guyana. Greg has worked on international legal matters for the past 30 years, and he lived overseas for 24 of those 30 years in Ecuador, Qatar, Mexico, Peru, Brazil and Dominican Republic.

The General Counsel of my oil and gas company wanted to meet with me in his office at corporate headquarters, in Los Angeles, and they were sending the corporate jet to take me there. The acting General Counsel of our international oil and gas division had been removed and I wondered if I was being interviewed for that key position.

As I was escorted into the office of our corporate General Counsel (whom I will refer to as Donald), I was a bit surprised at the mountain of clutter on his desk. However, the diplomas on his wall were prominently displayed so that all visitors could see that he was a Princeton and Duke graduate. He also patently advertised that he had served as an officer in the United States Navy.

While my undergraduate (BYU) and law school (University of Idaho) education would be viewed by Donald as inferior to his Ivy-league education, I suddenly felt secure in my military pedigree - I had served as an officer in the United States Marine Corps, and I had humorous recollections of disparaging jokes we would sometimes make about wimpy "Navy pukes" (Navy Seals, excluded).

My research on Donald told me that he had served as General Counsel in Salk Lake City for a number of years for a major manufacturing company. I also learned that he was *not* a member of my faith, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but I hoped that he had positive experience with members of my faith while living in Utah.

Early on in the interview with him, he began to brag about his work experience in Utah, and his important personal connections with people of prominence in Utah and within my Church. I was a bit surprised and shocked when he proceeded to counsel me and my Church on how we should present ourselves before the public. He said: *"You guys should downplay your history and emphasize your good track-record with humanitarian projects"*.

I had no idea on what he meant by downplaying our history, and I had no idea on where this conversation would lead or how it might end for me since I felt it was a matter of honor (or duty) not to let that comment go unanswered. I seriously wondered if any response might cause me to lose out on the General Counsel position in my international division, or whether I might even be fired. However, at that point, it did not matter. I would assume the risks: my religious integrity was more important than whether I continued to be employed by that company.

I asked Donald what he meant by his (unsolicited) suggestion that us "Mormons" should *"downplay our history"*. He responded: *"You know what I mean - all that stuff about Joseph Smith having visions, seeing angels, translating gold plates - you know what I mean - all that stuff."* Now, it was even more important for me to respond.

I said: *"Donald, with all due respect, all that 'stuff' to which you refer is core to our doctrinal beliefs. We believe Joseph Smith did, in fact, see our Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ, and that he was told by them not to join any of the other churches of his day. We do believe that Joseph Smith translated an ancient record, written on golden plates in an ancient language, by the power of God,*

which we hold to be sacred along with the Bible, which is titled after the man (Mormon) who anciently compiled this record - "The Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Christ". We also believe that Joseph Smith received priesthood authority from resurrected beings who previously held that authority in their own day. We further believe that Joseph Smith and others were instruments in the hands of God to restore Christ's church upon the earth, which now has the same foundation as Christ's original Church - 12 Apostles and prophets who receive direct revelation from Christ. I, like millions of other members of our Church, have received a personal confirmation from the Holy Ghost (personal revelation) that all of this is true.

I further said: "Now Donald, if all of what I just said were NOT true, if it did NOT happen, then our Church and faith would be a sham and a fraud, and who cares about all the good humanitarian projects that are carried out in the name of our Church if its just a huge scam and fraud. However, if this message were true, as I testify to you that it is, then it would be the most important message on earth today, and way more important than any of the humanitarian projects we advance."

I guess I was not too surprised that Donald suddenly changed the subject, and we proceeded with the interview.

However, I marveled that any General Counsel of a major company (or any supervisor in any company) would be so foolish and so tone-deaf to religious diversity that they would think it would be appropriate to launch a doctrinal or disparaging attack on the faith of their subordinates or against any other employees.

In the end I was not offered a promotion to General Counsel for the international oil and gas division, but I was sent to Qatar to manage the legal affairs of our company's largest international operation.

Whether you agree with someone's religious views, to belittle or condemn them creates a caustic workplace environment. That's certainly not good for business.