

# Living Your Faith at Work

How Christian leaders can best serve their workplace mission.



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# Doing Good Work

How Christians should understand their roles at work.

by Caryn Rivadeneira

**Y**ou might call me a work dork. I *love* to work. Mostly, I love the work I'm best at (editing and writing), but actually, the idea of a day filled with most types of productive tasks or any kind of creative thinking jazes me as much as a day at the lake (which I really love too!).

But just because I love to work, doesn't mean work always brings out the best in me. I get competitive and cynical; gossip tempts me; and there's a whole wing at Christianity Today International that could attest to my chattiness. (Perhaps this is why they let me work from home!) When I've worked in Christian environments, it was easy enough to chalk these up as things I needed to work on spiritually and professionally, but in secular environments, these things bring bigger challenges.

Christians at work do more than work hard to make money for our employers and earn a living for ourselves; we work hard for God. This seems lofty, but it simply means that we work well—with kindness, self-control and all the other fruit of the Spirit—because others are watching. Work is our mission field and the work we do, the

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energy we bring to it, and the relationships we maintain at work all have the potential to glorify God. So it's important we have a clear understanding of our role in the workplace.

This downloadable resource offers Christian leaders like yourself a look at some spiritual truths about work, as well as practical guidelines on things like sharing your faith in the office, restraining from gossip, and unnecessary office politics. You'll come away from this booklet clearer in your role and purpose in your place of work—and better equipped to do it for God's glory.

Blessings,

*Caryn Rivandeneira*  
*Managing Editor, GiftedforLeadership.com*  
*Christianity Today International*

# Introduction



GIFTED WOMEN

# Work Is a Sacred Trust

What is the true value of work?

*by Nancy Ortberg*

The summer I was 15, I locked myself in the bathroom. Not for the typical reasons. There was no fight with my parents or disappointing love interest. I wasn't trying to hide tears or cool down a temper. I had just received my first paycheck.

It wasn't just the paycheck I loved. That was just symbolic. It was work I loved. I loved the feeling of doing something that mattered, something that helped other people, something that I could accomplish.

Growing up, I awoke each morning to the smell of coffee and the sight of my dad in his crisp white shirt and tie, sitting at the breakfast table reading the newspaper. His aftershave gently filled the room and there was a sense of anticipation in him as he readied to start the work day. My dad loved what he did, and he was good at it. That was a dynamic combination.

Every morning my mother drove me to school. After she dropped me off, she continued on the few more miles to her workplace. In the 1960s, I had one of the very few moms who worked. She was always dressed up for work and her mood seemed to match. My



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mother loved what she did, and she was good at it. That is a dynamic combination.

“Thank God it’s Friday.”

“I hate my job.”

“Can’t wait until I retire; then I can start living.”

I don’t get that.

I love to work. I love getting up in the morning and getting dressed for work. I love looking over my calendar for the day and seeing what lies ahead. I love working with a team to make things happen. I love the relationships at work; I love the tasks. I love dreaming and imagining what might be, what the future could look like, how we could make a difference. I love starting to change things, and setting things in motion that might make those changes happen. I love celebrating the wins along the way and learning from the losses. I love watching the team getting healthier and happier as it gets better and better at the work it does.

I love when people are led well. Not only do they accomplish great things, but they become better people in the process. There is that kind of redemption in work.

God gave work to Adam and Eve before the fall. Work was not the result of sin; it was another way of working out the image of God that resides in all of us.

Work is a sacred trust, and there are a few things you can do to treat it as such in your role as a leader:

- 1. Yourself.** I first heard the concept of “self-leadership” when I was on staff at a church. Here’s the main idea: You are responsible for carving out a life that has a rhythm that renews you. It is not anybody else’s job. As a leader you take responsibility for your own self-renewal which includes things like reading, planning alone time to do thinking and processing, and maintaining a schedule that allows you to keep your promises, which is one of the key jobs of a leader.

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Self-leadership will not only increase your leadership capacity and skills but will also work to prevent burnout.

**2. Others.** Leadership is the promise of development. People need three things to grow: opportunities, challenges, and relationships. It is your job as a leader to be sure, over time, that your people are getting all three. They need opportunities to use their abilities to make a difference, challenges that stretch them without breaking them, and relationships in which they are known and celebrated and told the truth about themselves.

One of my most memorable moments working on staff at a large hospital was when I was speaking for the first time to one of the top executives. I introduced myself and she immediately said, “I know who you are.” I was 22 years old. I have never forgotten that phrase. It was powerful to be noticed and made me want to do a good job

**3. The Organization.** Organizations—not just individual people—are important. Organizations, as a collection of people, allow us to accomplish things we could not do on our own. As a leader it is your responsibility to make sure that meetings are compelling, that they are places where collaborative (not consensus, which Patrick Lencioni defines as “mutually agreed upon mediocrity”) decisions are processed and made, a place where goals are set and people are held accountable for those, where short-term and long-term gains are celebrated and lack of success is autopsied and learned from.

Leadership is a sacred trust.

*Nancy Ortberg is a founding partner of **Teamworx2**. She and her husband John live in the Bay Area and have three children, Laura, Mallory, and John. This article was first posted at [GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM](http://GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM) on March 22, 2007.*

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### Thought Provokers

- *In what ways have you found work or leadership to be sacramental?*
- *Nancy writes, “You are responsible for carving out a life that has a rhythm that renews you.” What does that statement mean to you?*

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GIFTED WOMEN

# Witnessing from Weakness at Work

What we aren't glorifies the One who is.

*by Caryn Rivadeneira*

One of the greatest shames of my life is that never once during my first job out of college did I share the gospel with any of the people I worked with. While my friends there certainly knew I graduated from a Christian college, went to church, and believed in God, in several years of working together that was all they knew about my faith. At the time, my focus was so much on learning the ins and outs of magazine publishing and meeting my earthly achievement goals (after all, this was my dream), that I failed to see the people around me as lost souls in need of a Savior and instead saw them as people to laugh with and learn from.

Though I know I'm forgiven for this sin, to this day I can't think of certain colleagues without wincing—and praying that they are surrounded by Christians, who, unlike me, dare share their faith at work.

While my self-centered career goals certainly kept the focus off of other people's eternal welfare, it was also that I misunderstood what sharing my faith at work would look like. I didn't learn this until I started working at Christianity Today International (GiftedForLeadership.com's parent company) years ago. Although I was surrounded by once-lost people



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who had *found* their Savior, the sharing of faith was everywhere. We shared personal faith, rather than *the* faith. We talked of mighty ways God had moved, of huge disappointments, of doubts, of praise, of unanswered prayers, of our own often rocky journeys through a life of faith.

In my earlier job, I imagined sharing my faith at work would mean I had John 3:16 printed on business cards or had a huge “Repent or Burn” placard posted on my cubical wall. Maybe I’d have to invite a different coworker to lunch every day and ask—immediately after saying grace loudly—if she knew where she would go if she died right now. Any image I’d conjure up just didn’t jive with my working environment—or my personality—so I passed.

If only I’d have had the wisdom of John Nunes, a professor at Concordia University in River Forest, Illinois. I heard him speak recently on “witnessing out of weakness.” I love this premise—especially for the workplace. It means that you aren’t standing on soapboxes telling coworkers they’re going to burn in hell (this may get you burning in the HR department!), but instead puts you in the drivers seat of conversations with coworkers that are less about personal righteousness and more about how Jesus has worked through your weaknesses.

Especially in a culture that so roundly attacks Christians—sometimes with good reason—it’s important for the world to see Christians as we really are, not as we often pretend to be. They need to see us as messed up, wounded, and hurting people who have found the great Hope and their ever-present source of strength.

If you were to share with your coworkers the ways that God has walked with you through difficult, stressful times at work and in life, it might offer glimpses of how God could embolden their own lives. If they knew that you, too, went through seasons of doubt—wondering if all this stuff about the Son of God rising from the dead could possibly be true—but were sustained by experiencing the Holy Spirit’s work in your life, imagine the impact. And, of course, there’s no better way to shine the irresistible grace that has saved wretches like us than to be willing to open up areas of struggle—and mercy—in our own lives.

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Now, I'm not fool enough to suggest you need to bare your deepest sins to coworkers who may or may not use them against you. But I have come to realize that the strongest witnesses—much like the strongest leaders—are the ones willing to give glory where glory is due.

**Caryn Rivadeneira**, former managing editor of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP, CHRISTIAN PARENTING TODAY, and WOMEN'S AND FAMILY RESOURCES at Christianity Today International, is a freelance editor and writer. This article was first posted at [www.giftedforleadership.com](http://www.giftedforleadership.com) on February 5, 2007.

### Thought Provokers

- *When have you experienced the positive impacts of witnessing from weakness?*
- *What worries you about this concept? What excites you?*

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BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

# Gainfully Employed

Capture the value of vocation in an age of underemployment.

*by Melody Pugh*

In a recent news report about the employment outlook, I heard a term that sent me running to Merriam-Webster: *underemployment*. It's a chilling term—one that describes the condition a growing number of men and women face in the current marketplace.

*Underemployment* refers to those working in jobs that don't utilize their skills. Those skills may indicate distinction in a trade or craft. They may come from a high level of formal education. And for people who've worked hard to master those skills, they indicate commitment and the purposeful pursuit of excellence. But when you're underemployed, the pursuit of satisfying work often leads only to frustration and disappointment.

However, if underemployment is such a big issue, why do so many underemployed people continue in their boring jobs? Do they remain out of necessity? Or do they simply ignore the emptiness? Perhaps some have found a way to deal with the problem by reframing the issues altogether. As one who's felt the squeeze of underemployment, I would venture to guess that at the root of how we respond to underemployment lies a very different kind of problem. The problem I'm thinking of is existential, not economic: theologi-



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cal, rather than political. Underemployment forces us to examine where we find our ultimate meaning.

### Labor Pangs

All of life began with work—it's the reason there was a day one in the first place. For the first six days, God worked. And when he built the garden and placed man inside, God's first gift to that precious creature was work. Though Scripture never tells us directly *why* God asked man to work, the story suggests that the capacity to work—to create, to steward, and to care for what God has given us—is an integral part of the *imago dei*. In the beginning was the Word, the apostle tells us: the *Logos* and our reason for being. If the one who created us works, it should be a joy to be employed in the business of the Creator.

But as a result of the Fall, work came to feel like labor rather than an act of love. When you're toiling through a long day at the office, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking the Curse is the reason we work at all. But the truth is actually far more complex. God called work good, but then cursed the ground, the raw material of our day-to-day activities. That curse condemned us to feelings of longing and lack when we can't quite make those raw materials do what we want.

The workplace offers plenty of venues to air our sinfulness. It's there that we struggle directly with temptations of greed and exploitation. The closed environment of an office offers a crucible for raising and resolving gender conflicts and confronting our own struggles with honesty and integrity. And yet we know the Fall resulted not in these individual sins, but in a heart condition characterized by a longing for meaning.

### Making Meaning

So in spite of our disillusionment, we continue to grasp for meaning in our work. We seek satisfaction in our jobs just as God looked at his creation and pronounced it good. Each of us hopes our work will make a difference, if not to society at large, at least in our own lives. We seek a vocation: employment that meets an inner longing and provides satisfaction beyond the benefits we receive. We celebrate workplaces that encourage our creativity, build our spirits, and offer the opportunity to change our lives and the lives of those around us.

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Does it sound too good to be true? Those jobs exist, in good work environments and bad. In spite of the Fall, the promise of fulfillment in our work remains very real. Sin corrupted our ability to find complete satisfaction in our work; but in the same curse, God inaugurated the story line of redemption. With the promise of the Savior, God gave us the ability to see significance in day-to-day activities. God has promised that one day even our work will be as satisfying as leisure.

But on that day, the work itself will be less important than the one who gave us the work in the beginning. Our work can fulfill us. It can give us a sense of purpose on this earth. But in the long run, our meaning must end where it began. Not until we understand that our truest vocation is to serve Christ will we, too, call our work good. For as each of us continues to work, as we seek ways to blend our occupation with our vocation, we discover more about who God is and who we are. What a gift to find ourselves gainfully employed in becoming the people God created us to be!

*Melody Pugh is a freelance writer. This first appeared in the August 23, 2006, edition of the CHRISTIAN NEWS AND RESEARCH newsletter.*

### Thought Provokers

- *When does your work feel like labor? When does it feel like an “act of love”?*
- *What sort of meaning do you derive from your work? How does it shape your identity?*

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PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

# A Spiritual Growth Industry

More than ever, Christians are bringing faith to bear in the for-profit world.

*by Brad A. Greenberg*

**M**ike Valleskey was struggling to understand how his job at Sears fit into his new life of faith. Valleskey hadn't been asked to perform unethically or kept at work so late that he lost touch with his family. But he couldn't see how a disciple of Jesus Christ could work 9 to 5 inside an office with such a large mission field outside.

"I contemplated going back to Bible school," Valleskey tells *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. But before making the jump, he looked at his sphere of influence—his wife and four children, no surprise there, but the next one blew him away. "The workplace," says Valleskey, who now leads a Christian fellowship at Sears with 150 members. "I was around 5,000 people, every day, 40-plus hours [a week]."

Welcome to Faith in the Workplace 101, one of the fastest growing arenas of Christian ministry. If nonprofits are learning lessons from former for-profit execs, it's also true that Christian workers are learning how better to bring their faith into the for-profit world.

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Like many before, and even more since, Valleskey discovered in 1994 that the largest mission field in his life was inside his Chicago office building. He didn't need a Master of Divinity degree. He just needed to work with a higher mission than receiving that Friday paycheck.

“People don't just want to park their car [and] their soul in the lot outside. They want their personal values, their faith values, to be aligned with the values of the office,” says David W. Miller, executive director of Yale University's Center for Faith and Culture and author of the book *God at Work* (Oxford, 2006). “They don't want to live a compartmentalized life.”

That much has become clear. With an explosion of regular Bible studies meeting in American offices, the number of nonprofits supporting those Bible studies has mushroomed to more than 800, according to the International Coalition of Workplace Ministries (ICWM). In 2000, there were 79 books published about faith and work; ICWM has counted 2,000 titles in the past two years. The next new position to be salaried at larger churches will be seminary-trained pastors of workplace ministry, says Stephen Christensen, founder of Concordia University's Center for Faith and Business.

“This will be one of the major issues that will determine the history of the church,” says Kent Humphreys, president of the Fellowship of Companies for Christ International.

The business community has taken notice. Articles about increasing expressions of faith at work have appeared on the cover of *BusinessWeek* and in *Fortune*, *Newsweek*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *The New York Times*, among others.

### **Ignorance about Rights**

Still, the market has substantial room for growth, experts say, largely because Christian employers and employees are ignorant about religious protections under the law—and many work hard to refrain from any overt religious expression.

“Most Christians sort of cower at this toothless lion called separation of church and state, because they don't understand their freedom and their limits,” says Os Hillman, president of ICWM

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That's where Brad Dacus steps into the picture. The founder and president of Pacific Justice Institute, a legal-defense organization, Dacus travels throughout California and occasionally out of state to provide free seminars about what Christians can and can't do at work.

Under federal law, Dacus says, employees can share their faith with non-Christian employees off the clock, use available conference rooms for meetings before work and during breaks, keep religious items on their desks, and redirect union dues to a charity.

Employers have even more latitude. They can begin a chaplaincy, hold Christian-themed corporate retreats, sponsor summer Bible camps for employees' children, and establish scholarships to selected Christian colleges, says Dacus.

But Dacus notes the limitations. "It has to be voluntary, and no employee can ever be punished for not participating in a religious-based activity."

Many Christian workplace fellowships are served by ministries like ICWM, the Fellowship of Companies for Christ, and Christian Business Men's Committee.

But there are also private businesses that add a Christian touch to client services. Giant Partners, an Oklahoma City-based growth consulting firm, helps clients improve their businesses by using a model Jesus lays out in Matthew 9 and 10—whether the company is Christian-led or not. Giant enters a village (business) and tries to heal the sick (fix problems), cast out demons (alleviate anxiety), and preach the Good News (encourage executives to live righteously).

"If we can transform CEOs, it will affect all their employees," says Giant cofounder Jeremie Kubicek.

At the Coca-Cola Company, Christians have congregated for a weekly Bible study for as long as anyone can remember. What was a small group now numbers 429 people at the global headquarters in Atlanta and in field offices. Coke—which recently promoted the creation of affinity groups such as the African American Forum, Hispanic Employee Forum, and Women's Forum—has quietly supported the Coca-Cola Christian Fellowship, which began in 2001.

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The global headquarters fellowship meets in an open conference room each Wednesday during lunch. Members host occasional lectures after work led by successful Christian business leaders. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the fellowship donated supplies, furniture, food, and clothing to a colleague's extended family. And when an executive assistant's daughter was hospitalized near death after a car crash, the fellowship asked its members for prayer. She recovered.

"The No. 1 thing a Christian can do is live our faith, so people can see our faith coming through. That is going to be the biggest witness. It is not through banging on a person's door and saying, 'The only way to heaven is Jesus Christ,'" says Steve Hyland, director of retail merchandising for Coca-Cola North America and leader of its Christian fellowship. "It's living it versus saying it."

*Brad A. Greenberg is a religion reporter for the Los Angeles Daily News. This article first appeared in the March 2007 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.*

## Thought Provokers

- *Were you surprised by the ways Christians are legally allowed to share their faith at work? If so, what surprised you? If not, how have you utilized these rights?*
- *Jeremie Kubicek says in the article, "If we can transform CEOs, it will affect all their employees." As a Christian leader, how can you influence and ultimately transform other leaders?*

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PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

# Rumor Has It ...

Keep reading to get all the juicy details  
on avoiding office gossip.

*by Rhonda Wilson*

**N**ot long ago, a coworker crept into my office and quietly closed my door. Judging by the look on her face, I knew she was about to give me the latest scoop on something big. She began to divulge some unsavory details about a person whom I'd always thought was happily married. But apparently this colleague had been involved in multiple covert affairs.

I was shocked by this revelation—and should have ended the conversation then and there. But unfortunately, I didn't. My eyes grew big as saucers as my coworker began naming names. But what was so titillating in the moment has left me full of regret. Now I'm faced with some very negative information about a person I once admired. And I don't even know if the accusations are true!

Gossip—that chatty talk about other people's intimate matters—is a favorite pastime around many office lunch tables and water coolers. If asked point blank, most of us would say gossip is a bad habit, yet our culture treats it lightly. Every day we can access websites, watch television shows, or read tabloids to get the latest scandal scoop on celebrities and politicians. Some websites even send you an e-mail alert on late-breaking gossip. In our voyeuristic world of reality TV, being privy to intimate details of a person's life is socially acceptable.



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But while we may innocently “dish,” “get the goods,” or hear “the dirt” on someone, God doesn’t take gossip lightly. He says our tongues are set on fire by hell (James 3:6) and commands us not to gossip. For example, Proverbs 4:24 reminds us to keep corrupt talk from our lips. And God doesn’t want us listening to gossip, either. Hearing gossip is about as bad as spreading it, since you can’t erase the negative words you’ve heard about a person. Proverbs 26:22 says, “The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.”

### **Gossip Just Plain Hurts**

Simply put, gossip hurts people. When my dearest friend and coworker went through a divorce, many of our colleagues came to me for information. It was the “juiciest” story to rock my office in a long time. Married only six months, my friend’s husband moved to another country, came back for a day to file for divorce, and then left again. Discussing her hurt and raw emotions with others seemed unthinkable. Furthermore, I ran the risk of circulating rumors. Human resources specialist Cassie Dibiase, owner of Resources and Results Consulting in Houston, Texas, points out, “Think back to the playground, when someone spread untrue tales around the schoolyard. They were hurtful, unproductive, and damaged friendships. Playground rules still apply. The only difference is professional reputations are taken more seriously, and the stakes are higher.”

Cassie adds that workplace gossip is probably the single most destructive behavior in which anyone in the marketplace can engage.

Consider these key points:

- Workplace gossips are viewed as untrustworthy and are less likely to receive promotions or key assignments.
- Important lines of communication between employees and supervisors often are disrupted because of a lack of trust created by gossip.
- What might appear to be simple gossip often can result in a full-blown investigation, causing irreparable damage to an individual’s reputation, and to the gossiper’s reputation as well.

It’s obvious that not only is God displeased when we gossip, but so is our employer. So how do you avoid the office rumor mill?

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### Define Gossip

There's a good rule of thumb to help you determine whether you're gossiping: Ask yourself how you'd feel if the person you're discussing suddenly happened upon your conversation. Would you be embarrassed? Chances are, as a Christian, you *know* when you're gossiping. You get that unsettled feeling from the Holy Spirit that tells you what you're discussing isn't quite appropriate.

To discern what is and isn't acceptable to discuss, use Philippians 4:8 as a guide: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." While the apostle Paul's talking about our thought life here, Philippians 4:8 is a good way to measure our conversations, too.

### Restrain Loose Talk

Surrounding yourself with like-minded Christian friends keeps gossip in check. For example, Sarah and her friend Stacy are close confidantes. As Christians, they worried about crossing the line of gossip in their daily conversations. This became of particular concern when they both became involved in a ministry to moms and a not-so-congenial member of the group became a frequent topic of their discussions. It seemed ironic that they found themselves participating in unproductive talk about this person when all three of them were involved in ministry. So Sarah and Stacy came up with a few guidelines to follow in their conversations

- They allowed no excuses for gossiping about a person's unlovable characteristics, because God loves us all, quirks and annoying habits included.
- They granted permission to call each other on it when one of them crossed the line into gossiping.

Sarah and Stacy also asked themselves four questions based on the Rotary International's Four Way Test: Is what we're saying the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build better relationships? Is the talk beneficial?

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When their speech began to tread into gossip territory, one gently reminded the other that they needed to steer their conversation toward a more edifying topic

### Switch Conversational Tracks

While maintaining ties with fellow believers helps keep our tongues in check, we don't always share office space with other Christians. How do we keep gossip under control when we're with people who aren't necessarily focused on guarding their talk? While my first impulse is to try to stay away from situations that put me in the midst of gossip, I'm reminded that Jesus broke bread with nonbelievers, including gossipers.

When gossip begins around you, try to cut it off with a gentle remark to sway the conversation. Or, better still, turn to your gossiping coworker and ask her about what's happening in *her* life. It's been said a gossip is one who talks to you about others, a bore is one who talks to you about herself, and a brilliant conversationalist is one who talks to you about you. Getting her to talk about herself is an almost guaranteed way to change the conversation

### Tame That Tongue

No matter how hard we try to avoid gossip, we'll still catch ourselves slipping every now and then. As Sarah puts it, "Gossiping is something we always have to keep in check with the Lord."

The best way to do that is through committing your heart, mind, and tongue to God daily. As Beth Moore writes in **When Godly People Do Ungodly Things**, "Prayer keeps the mouth open before God on the matter, rather than open before others ... We have no business gossiping about members of the Body of Christ [or nonbelievers for that matter]. If we would turn the time we spent discussing the other's life into prayer time instead, no telling what would happen to the glory of God."

Why not pray in faith and release control of your speech into God's hands? Confess when you've failed, then ask him for the ability to say only wholesome things that benefit your listeners, that build others up according to their needs (Ephesians 4:29). Ask God for the strength to take not only every thought but also every word captive to make them obedient to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5). Surrender your thoughts and words for him to use for *his* glory, not yours.

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My perspective on gossip's devastating power changed drastically in junior high when I started an ugly rumor about a girl whom I found kissing the boy I liked. By day's end, the gossip had reached every corner of my middle school, and my victim was in tears at the news that everyone knew she'd been "making out" with this boy. She was so upset that she hyperventilated, had to go the school nurse's office, and then was sent home for the day. When my mom found out about what I did, she asked me if this was how a Christian behaved. "No," I said feebly.

I'm an adult in the workplace now; I understand adult problems. So I continue to try my best—with the Holy Spirit's help—to avoid ever again participating in something so damaging.

The truth is, gossip isn't any different now than it was when we were in junior high. Only now the stakes, as Cassie Dibiase points out, are much higher. Careers, marriages, children, church unity, testimonies, and other important areas that could be irreparably damaged by loose talk are on the line.

As I try to focus on what's good to discuss, I remember to put it to the test of Philippians 4:8. And what if there's nothing good to say? Then in the words of our mothers' age-old advice, "If you can't find anything good to say, then say nothing at all!"

*Rhonda Wilson is a freelance writer who lives with her family in Texas. This article first appeared in the November/December 2005 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.*

## Thought Provokers

- *How have you been affected by office gossip?*
- *What are two things you could do today to stave off gossip when tempted by it?*

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*'What's a Good Way for me to Share my Faith at Work?'*

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FOR REFLECTION

# 'What's a Good Way for me to Share my Faith at Work?'

Try earning the respect of your coworkers.

*from ChristianBibleStudies.com*

*N*ow about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, dear friends, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."

—1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, TNIV

Hard work implies selflessness, dedication, problem-solving, and concern for coworkers. All these qualities demonstrate faith in God. Hard work invites respect, even from those who have no faith of their own. Sure, you'll find coworkers who respect no one, no matter how hard they work. You'll also find coworkers who will try to dump their work on you because you work hard. But most recognize selfless work as a good quality.

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Hard work—coupled with quiet living and a respect for others—is a way to demonstrate that each person belongs to a team. It invites cooperation and recognizes and appreciates the efforts of others. These qualities show you care less about who gets the credit than that the job is well done.

In all these ways, you can give testimony to your Lord. When people ask you why you're so diligent, you can explain you do it to honor God. You can invite them to become part of God's team where everyone has a place and a job to do. But even if no one ever speaks to you about your work, you'll still be giving a picture of God and what God designed work to be. (See also 2 Corinthians 4:1–15; 1 Timothy 5:17–6:2; 2 Timothy 1:6–14.)

## Thought Provokers

- *Does your life and work ethic earn the respect of your coworkers? Why, or why not?*
- *How have you experienced the “spiritual” payoff of a job well done?*

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FOR REFLECTION

# How Can I Rise Above Office Politics?

Put yourself at risk if it will prevent harm to others.

*from ChristianBibleStudies.com*

*So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, “Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.”*

*Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.”*

*King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?”*

*Esther said, “The adversary and enemy is this vile Haman.”*

*Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.*

—Esther 7:1–6



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*How Can I Rise Above Office Politics?*

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In today's climate of corporate downsizing and high job turnover, we women who work must guard our jobs as carefully as we guard our bank accounts. So when a dangerous problem erupts, should you hope someone else steps forward to solve it? Or should you confront it yourself and risk losing your job?

One factor to consider is the impact of a particular problem on other people. When Esther was forced into a harem, she didn't resist. (It probably would have done her no good.) But when the conflict between Mordecai and Haman became a threat to the life of all Jews, Esther took action. For years, Mordecai had warned her never to reveal that she was a Jew. But now, after careful preparation, she took that risk. Even though Ahasuerus had offered her half his kingdom, she asked for mere safety for herself and her people (7:3).

Esther could have died for her efforts. Ahasuerus could have executed her for simply entering his court without his summons. Or he could have backed his powerful official Haman and sent Esther to the streets to be slaughtered with the rest of the Jews. But he did neither.

Office politics says, "Manipulate others to get what's best for me." But Esther's example tells you to put yourself at risk for the sake of others. Sure, it may mean losing a promotion, or even a job. But it's the godly way. (See also Deuteronomy 5:20, 21; Matthew 20:20–28; Galatians 5:13–16; Colossians 3:22–4:1; James 3:5–18.)

### Thought Provokers

- *Have you put yourself at risk for a coworker? If so, when?*
- *When have you felt manipulated by a coworker? What was your response?*

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Features



LEADERSHIP TOOLS

# Working 9 to 5



5 surprising ways you can survive—  
and thrive—in your job.

by Verla Gillmor

During my early years as a journalist, I was given the opportunity to work as a general assignment reporter for NBC's powerful 50,000-watt radio station in Chicago. The job catapulted me into broadcasting's big leagues, and I was determined to work hard, think smart, and wow everybody with my excellent reporting skills.

One of my first assignments was a "breaking" news story of a pleasure boat sinking in a storm on Lake Michigan. Several passengers drowned. The Coast Guard dramatically rescued the rest. I raced to the scene where a Coast Guard cutter was bringing survivors ashore, interviewed anyone who would talk to me, then hurried back to the station to get the story on the air as quickly as possible.

My editor, a crusty fellow with more than 20 years at NBC, had a reputation for making the lives of on-air staffers as miserable as possible—especially the women. Humiliation and intimidation were his weapons of choice.

As I scrambled to finish my report for the fast-approaching newscast, he seized on the fact I'd failed—in my rush to file the story—to get the Coast Guard spokesman's first name. It was a careless error on my part, but not one that merited what happened next.



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The editor stood in the middle of the newsroom in front of about a dozen people and began to shout insults at me in the ugliest display of meanness I'd ever experienced. I stood facing him like a deer caught in the headlights and silently prayed, *Dear God, don't let me cry.* Finally, he turned and stalked out of the newsroom.

I was so stunned, I started to shake. As I walked into a side office to privately regain my composure, I thought, with deep resignation, *This is just part of the job. Guess I'll have to pray and "hang in there" until this passes.*

Now, with the hindsight of 35 years in the marketplace, I've learned no one has a perfect job. But I've also discovered—the hard way—that there *are* alternate ways to handle the inevitable workplace conflicts or stresses we all encounter. The surprising news is that the five problem-solving tips below don't depend on anyone's cooperation but your own!

### 1. Identify the Real Problem: Is It You?

Much as I hate to admit it, some job stress is self-inflicted. My first memory of this was a situation that began quite innocently.

I clipped out a business-related magazine article to give to my boss. I'd run across the article the night before while thumbing through a magazine for relaxation. He was delighted and urged me to continue to pass along anything I thought might be useful. His praise felt so good, I started scanning magazines I never would have read, searching for more articles. They were such a hit, he decided the practice should be formalized into a daily briefing book distributed to senior staff.

What started as a casual gesture became a major project on top of my regular duties. No one offered to help, and I didn't ask for any. I relished the affirmation and couldn't bear the thought of handing it off to someone else. That didn't stop me, however, from harboring anger and resentment over the added work.

It wasn't until much later that I realized the problem wasn't the workload. The problem was me—my need for affirmation, my penchant for people-pleasing, my reluctance to ask for help.



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When you clarify exactly what the issue is behind your workplace stress, it can lessen your sense of victimization, even if the revelation isn't particularly welcome.

**SELF CHECK: What is the main source of my work-related stress? How am I contributing to the problem?**

## 2. Take Charge of Your Attitude

How many times have you sat in the employee lunchroom with coworkers when a person starts to complain about a change in the office hours, the vacation schedule, or the telephone rotation? Within five minutes, everyone sitting around the table feels obliged to chime in with their own litany of job gripes. Complaining is contagious. It's hard not to become a carrier.

Complaining gives the appearance of offering relief—a chance to vent. But rehashing a stressful situation in a setting that offers no opportunity for correcting the problem takes emotional energy and doesn't change the problem. In fact, it can make a problem seem worse than it is.

The Bible says, in essence, to save your breath. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 12:36 that someday we'll have to answer for every careless word we've ever spoken. So vow instead to be a carrier of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). If you have a suggested solution, go to the person with the power to execute the solution, and make your case. Relish being part of the solution, not part of the problem.

**SELF CHECK: Who is the appropriate person with whom to discuss this? Is there another way I can look at this situation? What can I do to help eliminate this stress rather than rehash it?**

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### 3. Sort Out What Can and Can't Change

If you're a person who loves clear instructions and an even flow of work, then working in an advertising agency or a sales office full of hard-charging free spirits is definitely migraine material. Since it's doubtful that your environment's going to change, any change must take place in you.

I was totally clueless about this concept of "job fit" until, as a young adult, I temped for three months in an office where the median age of the employees was 55 and the office mantra was, "We've always done it this way."

My boss held a brainstorming session to discuss ways to "fast track" a particular project. I'm a big-picture idea person and joyfully showered him with suggestions. He didn't like any of them. In fact, he thought I was a little too innovative for my own good.

I eventually learned he really didn't want to improve things or use this project as an opportunity to implement permanent change. That might expose the reality that his time-honored procedures had been ineffectual all along. Rather, he chose a temporary maneuver to get us through the project, after which things could return to "normal."

I had two choices—neither of which I liked. I could stay—and stuff down all the gifts and talents God wrote on my DNA so I wouldn't be seen as a troublemaker. Or I could leave and find a more compatible job.

We always have choices. The question is whether we *like* the choices we're given. I didn't want to leave; I wasn't the problem. The reality, however, was that *they* weren't going to change

**SELF CHECK: What's within my power to change about my situation? If nothing changes, can I stay and still be true to myself, as God created me? If I should leave, what needs to happen for me to be prepared?**



### 4. Detach from the Problem

I once worked for a large corporation in a job that required me to prepare month-end reports with input from other people. Every month, despite clearly defined deadlines, the information came to me at the last minute. I always ended up staying late on Friday night to complete the report while everyone else was off enjoying their weekend. I was certain my colleagues' failure to meet the deadline was a form of thoughtlessness toward me and carelessness toward their job. It felt personal.

One day a coworker said to me in frustration, "You know, the reason this information is always late is because the cycle for capturing this data is totally out of sync with the deadline for the report. Is there any reason why the report can't be due the 5th of the month instead of the 1st? Then, meeting your deadline would be no problem."

It turned out my boss didn't care if it was the 5th or even the 10th of the month, as long as it came in on time every 30 days. I sheepishly abandoned my paranoia and feelings of rejection. It wasn't personal after all.

Is your reaction to a stressful situation disproportionate to the circumstances? Maybe it's a sign something else is going on. In this particular situation, I realized my job responsibilities had nearly doubled over the last 18 months. It wasn't just the monthly reports—it felt as though my whole job had run amok! I couldn't see the real problem until I was forced to step back and look at the situation as a detached observer

**SELF CHECK: If I stepped outside myself and observed this situation, would I see it differently? What mental "prompts" can I give myself to stop taking problems too personally?**

### 5. Live in the Present

Stress is more manageable if it doesn't also carry the weight of all past and future problems that bear any resemblance to it: "My boss *always* waits until the last minute to do these mailings." "My team leader *never* asks my opinion."



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Such “kitchen sink” thinking—piling onto the present problem “everything but the kitchen sink”—sabotages solutions by sheer pound weight. Jesus reminded us in Matthew 6:34 to live in the present because “Each day has enough trouble of its own.” The current moment may be tough. But soon it will pass and, chances are, a better moment will take its place.

**SELF CHECK: Has “piling on” problems ever solved anything? Whom can I ask to hold me accountable for changing this behavior pattern? Am I willing to deal with my present situation without attaching baggage to it?**

### **The Bottom Line**

If you’re waiting for your job to behave, expect a long wait. We live in a fallen world. Instead, over and over I remind myself, *How much of this will matter in 5, 10, or 100 years?* In the midst of the ups and downs of work, if our life is anchored to the One who doesn’t move—Christ, the solid Rock—then we can survive ... and even thrive. He promised.

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# Resources

More places for more information.

**Talking About God in the 21st Century Marketplace**, from **ChristianBibleStudies.com**. These compelling, in-depth Bible studies based on the book, **Talking About God in the 21st Century Marketplace**, help you see the urgency for sharing your hope in Jesus Christ in the workplace.

**Working with the Opposite Sex**, from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**. This practical ministry skills set includes handouts designed to equip men and women to work together smoothly in the church. Use this download for a training session or give to key people who work on mixed-gender teams.

**Finding Your Purpose at Work**, from **TodaysChristianWomanStore.com**. This downloadable guide offers helpful articles to show how to move from frustration and discontentment to meaning and joy at work.

**The Walk at Work**, by Andria Hall (Random House, 2003). Helping you become an effective follower of Christ on the job, this book combines daily inspirational readings with a seven-step plan for personal spiritual growth.



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