

LOVE — A Faith Based Value at Work

“Love your neighbor as yourself,” was given by Christ as the second greatest commandment. For many years I struggled with what this meant; how this worked in real life. Loving myself I frequently and easily allowed myself to stray from right paths, to put my pleasure before all else. Was I to express my love for my neighbor, my fellow workers, by accepting whatever they did without reservation if what they did gave them pleasure? Was I to accept or ignore the poor performance of co-workers even when that poor performance affected me and others? Was I never to hurt their feelings?

Deep into my career as an educator, I came across an analogy helped me understand and better apply this teaching of Christ. The analogy is that of a grandparent with a grandchild. Some infants learn to move, stand, and walk relatively quickly; others struggle and take what seems like forever to rollover, stand, and take the first steps. With the infants who struggle, it is the grandparents who have complete confidence in the final achievement. They pick up the infant time after time, no matter how often he/she falls down. They hold the infant’s hands and assist with first movements repeatedly, until the child masters the physical skill.

Again, some children learn to speak early and others are much delayed. Grandparents have the confidence that the child will speak and accept all the early attempts as progress toward speaking. Grandparents reward every effort and continuously and endlessly repeat words and phrases so that the child experiences the desired sound(s).

The grandparents do not express frustration or anger that the infant’s early or latest efforts are not perfect. They love the child. They see the effort; they endure the imperfect results with joy and a deeply felt expectation that the child will succeed. They love the child so much that there is no question of rejection of the child. The child is accepted, and the child’s lack of certain abilities and attitudes are continually attended to until success is achieved.

So it should be, I believe, in applying Christ’s commandment at work. Co-workers, whether peers, subordinates, or supervisors, should be treated as beloved grandchildren. I don’t mean they should be looked down on as beginners in life. Rather they should be accepted and worked with as people worthy of our consideration and our repeated efforts to help them succeed in their responsibilities. As peers, we should offer feedback and suggestions about how their work appears to us and how it affects us. As supervisors, we should provide truthful evaluations of performance with directions and help for the improvement of that performance.

A flip side for all is that of being the subordinate. All, from the entry job employee to the CEO, have one or more people making judgments about our performance usually with thoughts about how we could do better. As a grandchild accepts the assistance of his/her grandparent as natural and supportive, so we need to see and accept evaluation and criticisms as efforts by others to support our own development.

Love in the workplace is about attitude. It is about the attitude we hold as we interact with those around us. No matter how people treat us, the attitudes they express about us, verbally or non-verbally, we always can choose the attitude we project. We can choose to be angry, vindictive, and in denial. Alternatively, we can choose to caring, accepting, and supportive. In short, we can interact with the attitudes that grandparents and grandchildren take with each other.

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1. What does applying the faith-based value of love in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of love in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How could you apply the concept of grandparent love in your workplace(s)? How could you apply the attitudes involved in the grandparent-grandchild relationship in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the attitudes of the grandparent-grandchild relationship in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?