

Openness at Work at Work

Over the years I have found quite a difference between an open door policy and openness. I have worked for and with people who prided themselves that they were willing to talk to anyone who wanted to talk and yet they excelled at keeping things the way they were—“We’ve always done it this way.” On the other hand I’ve also worked for and with people whose door was not necessarily always open but who always considered what was brought to them and willingly made changes to accommodate new information or insights.

This openness seems a result of the faith values of humility, respect, and gratitude. Humility in that the open person accepts that he/she has received some gifts from God but not all gifts; imperfection is part of whom and what we are. The humble person accepts the presence of others in his/her life as a gift from God and respects them as gifted human beings with much to share. The open person offers gratitude for the gifts personally received and gratitude for the gifts that others have received. With awareness and gratitude of and for the gifts of others, the open person can learn ways to direct his/her growth toward perfection.

Openness only begins with noticing the new concerns, new ideas, new experiences, and new relationships presented to us by our God through our daily lives. It sees in all newness opportunities for growth. It culminates with a willingness to change when the change moves one toward goodness, toward being a better person. In a sense openness is about the movement from what I am now to what I want to be, to what I will be.

At work, paid or non-paid, in or out of the home, opportunities abound for improvement if we are alert, aware, and open to change. Sometimes it is the wheelchair bound person whose wheelchair will not move. Do we stop and offer help or walk on by? Recently at Fort Ligonier my son and I saw a woman struggling to move her wheelchair. He offered help and I learned a lesson.

Sometimes it is when we get feedback/evaluations on the work we have done. Do we get defensive and deny the possibility of improvement or do we seek to understand the facts and reasoning underlying the feedback. Or as the giver of feedback/evaluations, do we present it as a final judgment or as tentative and seek to understand the perspective of the one receiving the feedback, in essence, are we open to feedback on our feedback.

One lesson I took a time to learn is expressed very clearly by Max Ehrmann in his *Desiderata*. The lesson is, “Listen to others even the dull and the ignorant—they too have their story.” Most teachers were good students and enjoy the best students, yet they can learn much about teaching from their least able students. Actually, I suspect that is true of any person who works with others. We can learn from best of those we work with and we can learn even more from those who demand the most from us. We can learn to respect from those most respectful around us while the disrespectful give us the best opportunity to become respectful people. We can learn gratitude from those who are most gracious while the ungracious give us the best opportunity to be freely gracious. We can learn humility from the most unassuming among us while the most pride-filled give us the opportunity to recognize the true source of our gifts.

So look around today; see the opportunities that abound in your environment. Be prepared to recognize the gifts that will lead to improvement, seize them, and change yourself for the better.

OPENNESS — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of openness 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 openness in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of openness in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based openness 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?