

Tolerance at Work at Work

Talk about complexity and difficulty; tolerance could be the icon for the combination. There are so many meanings and so many elements to tolerance. If we deal with the multiplicity of faith-based values, ethics, and beliefs about virtuous living, we find multiple values embedded in the tolerance required. First we must possess a love of others expressed by a respect for the dignity of the individual and a regard for his/her free will or choice in these matters.

Along with that we must exhibit a true desire and search for truth and goodness, that is, we must have an attitude of inquiry toward a full understanding and knowledge of truth and goodness. In my life I have found truth and goodness in others not so much in words—conversations, dialogues, or arguments—but in actions, in lived out values. My knowledge of generosity was expanded from observing a brother's willingness to share possessions that were most dear to him. My understanding of caring for others was expanded by a fellow teacher who took into his home an inner-city student whose home life had become non-existent. My recognition of the role faith could play in daily life expanded when I caught a student hiding in a restroom at lunchtime so he could read his bible in peace.

Some of these lessons were not learned at the moment. The learning waited until I had the humility to accept that I was not perfect, that I might not be right or know the whole truth. I had to be open to learning by recognizing my own limitations. Then the impact of those lessons came to consciousness.

What is this "tolerance" that led to my growth? One definition provided by Bernard Haring in *The Virtues of an Authentic Life* is a "sincere respect for the conscience of others." Perhaps better for the variety of situations in our workplaces is an internet dictionary's definition, "A fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward the opinions and practices that differ from one's own."

Given that, it must be noted that tolerance is not a value of extremes; it requires prudence to avoid being too accepting of evil or potential evil or too intolerant of opinions and practices that differ from one's own. It is not, "I'm right and you're wrong, but I will suffer your presence." Therein lays intolerance and belittling of the other person. It is not, "It makes no difference what you say or believe; I accept you anyway." Therein lays loss of way, loss of growth in truth. It is not the acceptance of evil, the acceptance of the violation of the rights of others. Therein lies harm to individuals and to society.

Tolerance at work could be seen as going beyond faith and morals into the activities of daily living and the interactions with others necessitated by the workplace. This aspect goes to humility and respect and perhaps adds gratitude. It begins with the recognition that we are not perfect and that others live with our imperfections. Respect and love for others includes seeking to help them recognize and overcome their weaknesses. To effectively do this requires that I take on the attitude of actively seeking to know and understand what others know and understand; in a sense, acting on a belief that they might be right and I might be wrong. This takes humility.

Respect and love for others also requires opening ourselves to accepting, learning, and acting on feedback about our own behaviors and levels of knowledge. This takes humility.

In a sense a tolerant person at work has confidence in three things. One, I have an understanding of the truth and proper or acceptable behavior that I am willing to share with others. Two, I am an imperfect human being so what I understand about truth and proper or acceptable behavior might not be fully complete. Three, therefore I must be open to engagement and learning from other in my workplace even as I expect them to be open to engagement and learning with and from me.

In the end, "Tolerance flourishes to the degree we are thankful to our own fellows for accepting us despite our shadows and mistakes" (Haring).

TOLERANCE — A Faith Based Value at Work

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

Jesus teaches a strong lesson on tolerance. See Luke's Gospel, chapter 6, verses 27-38.