

How Do You Wear Your Faith at Work

By Bonnie Dassing--8/11/2013

The Seven Principles which are displayed on the wall to my right ultimately define how Unitarian Universalists live their lives. They are not a creed, they are not a "do this or else" list. They are a guideline on how to live your life, what to focus on and what you can expect from others in our faith. What better way to navigate our daily activities, thoughts and goals?

Part of the Unitarian Universalist faith is the "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" as stated in the 4th principle. If you know who you are, if you know what you truly believe in, you can put your faith in action each day. Live what you believe. Show others who you are by your actions.

Today's sermon is not about the search for what you believe. We have discussed that in other sermons and I hope we are all on a path that fine tunes what is important to us, in what direction we want to take our lives. Today's sermon is what we do with these beliefs, these core values, once we have identified them.

Every day is an expression of what we believe, whether we do this consciously or not. The YOU inside shows through your word and actions, or your lack of words and actions. Your faith and your values should not be limited to 2 hours on a Sunday morning, but should be allowed to shine every minute of every day.

Many of us here today spend 40+ hours a week at a job. Maybe those work hours total more than we spend anywhere else in the week. Shouldn't we be making an effort to show others who we really are, and what we believe?

Now don't get worried. I am not advocating that you bring the UU hymnal in and read the verses in the back during lunch. And I am not asking you to hand out pamphlets or give 30 second elevator speeches out of the blue to total strangers. But shouldn't the people that you work with day after day know a little bit about what is important to you, where you spend your efforts after 5:00?

Work can be a difficult place to reveal yourself, to show what you believe in, for many reasons. Some companies encourage employees to compete with each other for salaries, bonuses, promotions. In these cases you may be reluctant to show the inner you for fear that you won't get ahead. You may work for a company where the majority of the employees are of the same faith and you feel intimidated to be the odd man out. Your company's goals or products may even conflict with your own beliefs. So how do we show our faith in a way that does not conflict with our jobs and our company? Let's go back to our 7 principles.

Our 1st principle is the "inherent worth and dignity of every person". How often is gossip or negative thinking part of your day at work? How often is someone vilified because they don't fit in or because their job performance does not mesh with your expectations? You may be saying to yourself, "What are we back in kindergarten? People don't act that way in the professional world." Well I think they do, and if you think about it for a minute, you may recall some conversations along these lines.

I work for a software development company who hires educated, logical, scientific individuals with degrees and years of work experience. Yet I hear on a daily basis, some sort of negative comments. Programmers call quality control employees **idiots** because they don't know how to test the developer's code. Business analysts **demean** the programmers for not following their specifications and programming the way they feel it should work, and quality control members call programmers **arrogant**. Why all the name calling? Does it make us feel better to deny the dignity of others? Do you chime in with the crowd? Do you sit back and listen, maybe even judge, but do nothing to stop the bashing? Isn't this a great opportunity to put our 1st principle in action?

So what do you do when a group is making fun of a co-worker? Or when one co-worker bashes another in a private conversation? I am reminded of a quote delivered a couple weeks ago by Terri Willingham. The quote is from Mr. Rogers: There are three ways to ultimate success: The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind.

So be kind when speaking about others. Ask others to be kind as well. Remind them that we are all in this world together and that it is easier to work with others than to battle against them. Pretty simple stuff! You will be surprised how the negative chatter diminishes and how others will follow your lead if you just start them off.

Let's move on to Principle 2, "justice, equality and compassion in human relations". I'd like to share a story about a friend named Mary who worked in a cubical environment. You could hear a conversation three cubicles away and often conversations were

intentionally spoken loudly so the whole room could hear. A fellow worker, John, would come by and shoot the breeze with Mary's cube neighbor Mark and every so often John's conversation would include homophobic remarks. Mary did not say anything at first because the conversation was not directed toward her, or was it? It was obvious that John liked the audience he attracted by his comments. Mary decided she had enough one day and explained to John that she was offended by his use of homophobic slurs. She explained that while she could not change his mind, she would insist that these kinds of conversations be shared elsewhere. John was quite surprised and claimed that he was not homophobic. After John left, others in the area thanked her for speaking up when they had not. Mary had taken the opportunity to show her coworkers what she believed. Her actions went beyond her own thoughts and behavior to influence the behavior of others. So why was Mary the first to speak out? Why didn't the other who congratulated her speak out earlier? Because living your faith on the outside of your skin is not always easy.

Principle 3 states that we should show "acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth." Peter owned the company where I worked for many years. He lived in New York City and came to Florida 4 days a month to meet with management. I knew him to be a devout Jew who refused to travel after sundown on Fridays and who was active in his temple. Peter hired North Americans, Asians, and East Indians. He seemed very tolerant concerning diverse cultures and religions.

He did not force his religious beliefs on his employees and sought to encourage the same among co-workers. He did this by sponsoring a Holiday Party every December and insisted we not refer to it as the Christmas party. He instructed that No Christmas or Chanukah decorations be displayed and that workers should not bring in decorations for their desks. At a time when it was politically correct to include all religions in the seasonal displays, Peter decided to not play that game. When I asked him why we gave these instructions, he said that no matter how many December holidays were represented, someone was going to be left out. Someone's faith was going to be neglected and he did not want that person to feel like an outsider. You may say that it was a small gesture to make, but I really appreciated it. I don't think my co-workers knew that I was not a Christian. They probably assumed that as one of the North Americans, I probably was. But by not celebrating Christmas at the office, I did not have to pretend to be something I was not. The non Christians did not have watch from the sidelines as the Christian majority celebrated. Encouragement to spiritual growth can also mean not imposing your own beliefs on other.

Each of us can put our own beliefs into action in so many different ways. Sometimes the trouble is remembering them.

So how can we remind ourselves at work what we believe?

- Why not find a quote that exemplifies one of your values and pin it to your wall, or stick it on your computer monitor. My friend Del ends all his emails with the phrase: Do the best that you can ... With whatever you have ... Where ever you are. Theodore Roosevelt. If you can't find one you like, make one up.
- You can sign up for a Quote of the Day email. Every day a new and inspiring quote will be delivered. Some may fit and some may not, but it would certainly give you the opportunity to explore what rings true and what you want to adopt as your own.
- How about a quote for the day desk calendar? They are always around before Christmas and you can choose from titles like "I Can DO It", "Zen Quotes", "Keep Calm and Carry On", or whatever speaks to you.
- You can do a walking meditation during lunch. Walking clears you mind and could be used focus on a behavior you wish to modify or promote while at work.
- An acquaintance Sam, keeps a few inspirational books at work that he has already read. At lunch, he takes one of them out and randomly turns to a page and reads it. That is his thought for the day. That is what he focuses on to make sure he is living his beliefs.

In conclusion, I'd like to urge you to show other what you believe. You don't have to wear a chalice to work, although I have seen many pretty necklaces and pins. You don't have to drive into the office parking lot with a UU bumper stickers on your car, although I think we have some for sale in the kitchen. You don't even have to announce that you are a Unitarian Universalist. Actions speak much louder than words. When you are asked what you are doing this weekend, it speaks volumes when you say "I am marching in the Martin Luther King Jr parade, or attending a Separation of Church and State lecture, or volunteering at my local animal shelter." Living what you believe is only the first part of living your faith. The icing on the cake is showing what you believe to others.