

Faith in the workplace

Once upon a time, business was about making as much money as possible. Full stop. Period. End of discussion. This 'maximum profits no matter what' philosophy was epitomised by the American economist and Nobel laureate, Milton Friedman who asserted that the only social responsibility of a business is to "engage in activities designed to increase its profits, so long as it stays within the rules of the game."

But the rules of the game have changed.

Paul Palmer, Professor of Voluntary Sector Management, and Associate Dean for Ethics, Sustainability and Engagement at the Cass Business School noted in 2012 that "businesses today are expected to optimise profits in a sustainable fashion, not just to maximise them."

Yet sustainability relates to more than just environmental concerns.

Corporate Britain faces profound challenges in rebuilding its reputation with the public. From the Credit Crunch to Libor, the Financial Services industry is still working to expunge the stain of scandal, greed and immoral practices. Every company has a code of conduct which demands that all employees not only behave within the law but aspire to a set of principles such as integrity, trust and openness – values which the former Group Chief Executive of Barclays, John Varley called the 'soul' of the business.

'Soul' implies something beyond the corporate nitty gritty of business deals and money making. It relates to the moral voice of trade, the conscience behind the deals, the spirit rather than the letter of the law. It applies both externally in terms of business practice and internally in terms of how each employer treats their employees.

While my full time job is to serve as a community rabbi for the New West End Synagogue in Central London, for the last four years I have worked part time as the Jewish Chaplain at Canary Wharf, London's famous East End business district.

The Multifaith Chaplaincy team includes Anglican, Catholic and Muslim chaplains and together we serve approximately 110,000 people who work on the estate. This workforce has quadrupled in the last decade and while the majority work in some of the world's largest multinational companies, around 4,000 work in the shopping malls that meander between the office blocks.

Our role is twofold. We provide pastoral support for people of all faiths and none and offer a free, independent, confidential, face to face service to those who wish to seek help and advice, whether in their personal lives or at work. In addition though, we consult with every major company on the Canary Wharf estate regarding the challenges of catering for a diverse workforce.

Our core principle is integrity. While this concept is used to refer to virtues such as trustworthiness, uprightness and honour its etymology is from the Latin *integer* meaning whole or complete. The word integrate carries the same meaning - to unify different parts. Someone who has integrity is someone whose principles are in tandem with their behaviour but its fundamental meaning is that a person should not live a compartmentalised life.

It seems obvious that feeling the need to suppress who we really are while presenting a false image of whom we think people want to see, causes enormous psychological strain. It is deeply unhealthy to feel unable to express every aspect of one's identity regardless of the setting.

This is where religion in the workplace becomes important.

While a person's identity includes among others, their gender, sexuality, skin colour and marital status, employers are increasingly recognising the fact that it also includes their religion. Adherence to Divine law is not a choice for a person of faith, it is a need.

Just as it is unacceptable for employees to feel discriminated against because of their gender or sexuality, it is unacceptable to discriminate against the genuine established religious needs of employees of faith.

While there is a long way to go, the conversation about diversity and inclusion is developing rapidly. Many companies acknowledge the duty of care they have in accommodating the religious needs of their employees. But moreover, they recognise the advantages of a diverse workforce who feel confident about expressing their whole selves at work and can contribute fully, with integrity to the business in which they are employed.

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