



How to Practice Faith at Work Without Offending Others

Here's How Some Employers Integrate Religion Into the Workplace

By TORY JOHNSON

July 19, 2007 —

The United States has a work force that mirrors the global economy we live in, where diversity, including religious, is more evident than ever before.

We have a president who talks often and openly about his faith on the job. And as a society, more people who don't identify themselves as particularly religious are saying they crave a greater connectivity to spirituality. Employees as a whole are just more comfortable talking about religion today, and many don't believe they should have to check that part of their identity at the reception desk when they arrive for work.

Advocates of programs that support religion in the workplace truly believe that when you embrace an employee as a whole person, which includes his or her religious convictions, you get a better worker — one who is loyal, happy and productive. It's the same theory behind offering benefits to working parents.

Most companies tend to be faith-friendly more so than being faith-based, and they're offering ways for employees to honor their religions.

Ways to Practice Faith at Work

- **Internal groups or prayer space.** Some companies have employee-run faith networks, which are voluntary to join just as employees would participate in a company-sponsored baseball team or a women's group.

They may meet regularly with agendas ranging from Bible studies to the development of service projects that honor God. Sometimes they may take on specific workplace causes that are rooted in religion.

For example, at Ford Motor Co., its Interfaith Network, which represents all faiths, lobbied executives to install special sinks and washrooms to accommodate the prayer needs of Muslim employees. Other companies have small areas designated for private prayer.

- **On-site chaplains.** Like other voluntary employee benefits, more employers are now paying for a visit from a chaplain. [Marketplace Chaplains](#), the largest supplier of corporate chaplains nationwide, says it adds a new client company every 70 hours. It employs more than 2,000 chaplains who make on-site visits to companies, ranging from law firms to chicken-processing plants, where they minister to people of all faiths or no faith at all.

The concept is that people will open up to those they feel comfortable with. Sometimes it starts with chitchat about sports or kids. But then when a problem comes up — such as marital challenges or a sick relative — employees will often turn to the chaplain. Employers know that most of us won't go to our human resources department or our boss with private, personal problems, but many of us will open up to trusted clergy.

Such services and conversations are both confidential and voluntary. There's no pressure to participate in the informal dialogue. Because most of these are two-minute conversations, it's hardly distracting from work. When someone does

have a lengthy issue to discuss, he or she might ask the chaplain to meet during a break or at lunch time.

Don't Impose Religion on Others

The freedom to express religion in the workplace is upheld by the Civil Rights Act. It states that not only can someone not be discriminated against because of religion, but that employers must provide reasonable accommodations of employee's religious beliefs and observances, so long as they do not cause harm to the company. That means reasonable time off for religious holidays or breaks for prayers.

But plenty of employers and employees believe that we go to work to work, and there's no place for religion on the job. They say leave your prayer to churches, temples or other places of worship. While these opponents have no desire to violate any laws, they're just not eager to embrace or promote religion at work.

The freedom to express your religious views shouldn't be at the expense of alienating or harassing someone who doesn't share those views. Religion can be awfully divisive, which can cause problems on the job. Be sure you're honoring yourself and your religion without talking about it or practicing it in a manner that imposes unfairly on co-workers. Don't penalize people for not wanting to partake.

Tory Johnson is the workplace contributor at "Good Morning America" and the CEO of Women for Hire. Connect with her at www.womenforhire.com.

Copyright © 2007 ABC News Internet Ventures