

2012

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Recommended Citation

Frame, Tracy R., "Through the Eyes of Christ: Serving with Compassion at Work" (2012). *Faculty Integration Papers*. 11.
http://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/faculty_integration_papers/11

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Through the Eyes of Christ: Serving with Compassion at Work

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Imagine you are working on the computer verifying prescriptions while waiting on a call-back from the emergency department regarding an antibiotic dose for a 3-month old, Ben. Despite your careful explanation to Ben's parents, they are still upset because you are taking too much time to fill the prescription, which frustrates you. You also overhear one of your technicians at the prescription pick-up area explaining to a patient that his controlled pain medication cannot be refilled early. Then, one of your best technicians, Linda, comes over to tell you she is being overworked, because a fellow technician is avoiding the "pick-up" station. Out of the corner of your eye you notice Mr. Jones coming to the counter to chat, and even though you love to build relationships with your patients, you just do not have time today. All of a sudden you hear the frustrated patient say, "I would like to speak to the pharmacist right now."

Would you feel overwhelmed, discouraged, and tired? Does this sound like a situation you have recently encountered in your pharmacy? You have choices to make, either acting out of frustration or showing compassion to those around you. Love for patient care is the reason many chose to become pharmacists, but working with others and handling the numerous practice situations that arise can make life complex. It is difficult to maintain your composure and handle these situations in a Christ-like manner. What should our attitude be, as Christians, when relationships become challenging within the pharmacy?

Scriptural Views on Workplace Relationships

Jesus provides the best example of what our attitude should be when life becomes frustrating. Throughout the Gospels, people clamored to see Jesus so they could listen, be healed, or ask questions. In Mark 6:30-46, Jesus and his disciples were so busy one day they had no time to eat. Sound familiar? Jesus took care of the physical and spiritual needs of people, providing food and teaching them, even after He admitted the need to rest. He understood people's needs and had compassion on them (Matthew 14:15-16). Likewise, when we face challenges and overwhelming needs from our co-workers or patients, we should display compassion. For example, when "Mrs. Smith" comes into your pharmacy during the post-work rush and is struggling to understand her new glucometer, do not brush her off or tell her to call the nurse. Show compassion for her and help her figure out how to use the meter. Or, with the patient trying to refill his prescription early, rather than immediately stating, "no early refills," explain your concern for his

health, determine if there is a reason for his request, and then take appropriate action.

Scripture has much to say about our view of and attitudes toward work. In Ephesians, the apostle Paul addresses the servant and master relationship. Bondservants, as described in this passage, worked to pay off a debt and earn their freedom and were often mistreated. The instructions Paul gives to these two groups were intended to inspire Christians to radically change the way they treat each other.

"Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him." (Ephesians 6:5-9, ESV)

As pharmacists, we often are both a "master" and a "bondservant." We have technicians or other personnel working under our authority. On the other hand, we answer to a supervisor, manager, or regulatory agency. Sometimes interpersonal relations in the pharmacy can provide challenges, and as a "boss," we have to deal with difficult situations. In viewing others as Christ does, we lead with a servant's heart and avoid quick decisions out of frustration or anger. In the earlier example, when Linda was frustrated with another technician not "pulling their weight," rather than making a quick decision, set-up a time with her to discuss her concern and address it properly. As a pharmacist you set the tone for the work environment, so create an environment that focuses on serving and encouragement. Specifically acknowledge employees when they solve a difficult problem or go out of their way to help someone. Frequently encourage your team, thanking each of them for their hard work. Likewise, Paul's letter reminds us we are not working for an earthly master. Rather, we are working for our Heavenly Father and should serve our earthly bosses with the same attitude we would when serving Christ, even when asked to complete tasks that seem unnecessary or cause even more challenges. Next time you need to complete "pointless" paperwork or learn the newest pseudoephedrine regulations, do your work accurately and with joy, knowing that you are serving Christ.

In difficult situations, we have the opportunity to glorify God in how we handle ourselves and our relationships. Can we envision a workplace where we honor the people around us by honoring Christ as Paul advised? God has put us in our specific workplace to serve a purpose. Sometimes, it is hard to know exactly what that purpose may be. Today our job may be to comfort a frustrated parent, for others it may be to hold the hand of a widow, and for others, to assist a caregiver in managing yet another aspect of their loved one's life. If you see Mr. Jones stopping by to chat, greet him with a smile and ask him to stop by after he finishes his shopping or wait a few minutes until it slows down, as you never know the impact your chats have or the needs they meet. Rather than becoming frustrated at Ben's parents, find out if you can do anything to make them more comfortable. Ask them if they wish to pick up the prescription later. You can even offer to deliver the medication once the situation is resolved. Not acting out of frustration and showing kindness, even when others do not reciprocate, reflects Christ.

Prepare to Serve with Compassion

How do we prepare to serve others with compassion in challenging or stressful situations? Prayer, spending time daily in God's Word, and fellowship with other believers can help us serve others with compassion and a Christ-like attitude. Once again, Jesus provides us a perfect example. Jesus understood throughout His ministry that time spent in prayer with the Heavenly Father was vital when days became challenging. After taking care of the physical and spiritual needs of the people, Jesus took time at the end of the day to pray:

"...he went into the hills to pray" (Mark 6:46, ESV), and the Gospel writers frequently recount Jesus praying (Matthew 26:36; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16, 6:12, 9:28; John 17). Taking a moment to pray in the middle of frustration or responding to an angry patient can change our response from frustration to compassion and encouragement.

By spending time in God's word, we also can learn from Jesus' example and exemplify His character in our practice. We learn how to demonstrate compassionate service in a challenging world. In pharmacy school, if we did not prepare properly for an exam, we had difficulty passing the test. Similarly, if we do not prepare our hearts through daily devotions, it will be difficult to glorify God fully and respond with compassion to various circumstances.

Fellowship with a body of believers and discipleship partners can help us be accountable for our actions and sharpen

our minds as we seek to serve Christ together. Colossians 3:16 (ESV) says:

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

These partners can point out sinful areas and attitudes in our lives we might not otherwise perceive. They can help us understand what our patients and co-workers see, and inform us if we are truly reflecting a Christ-like attitude.

Our compassion for all people and the avoidance of acting and speaking out of frustration can be a testimony to our patients and co-workers. God has given us His strength and grace for those challenging moments in life. Remembering to ask Him for patience, understanding, and love during these difficult times is crucial, especially when we are tired and discouraged. Learning to see others through God's eyes is an important part of becoming a Christ-follower "disguised as a pharmacist."¹ Even when we are treated poorly or unfairly or encounter challenges, we can be compassionate and serve others in their time of need. 1 Peter 3:8-9 (ESV) calls us to "...be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing." We are not here to be served. Instead we are to serve others in every part of life. We must begin to look at our job as working for our one, true boss, God, as Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV) states,

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ."

Consider starting out every morning with a simple prayer on your drive to work, "Lord, give me the opportunity today to glorify you with my job and let your Spirit work in my heart to reflect your compassion in my interactions. Allow me to see the people that walk into my pharmacy the way you see them and show me how I can serve others."

Acknowledgements: Thank you to Mary E Kiersma PharmD PhD, Manchester College School of Pharmacy, for her review of this article.

Reference:

1. Sweeney M. Cedarville University, School of Pharmacy, New Student Reception. August 19, 2011.