The Appearance of Corporate Chaplains in the Workplace

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Author Note

Abstract

A regional business owner of a large mortgage lending and
brokerage organization is considering employing a corporate
chaplain due to observations and measurements of increased
employee turnover and absences. He has already conducted focus
groups and sent out employee surveys and the initial results
point to personal outside stressors as the primary cause of the
performance problem. In order to address the level of anxiety
his employees are experiencing, he is considering utilizing the
services of a business chaplain. He has asked for research on
what this type of program would entail for a presentation to the
organization's executive board. The systematic approach to
answer the questions of need, results, what, how, do, and
evaluate was employed in this case, followed by use of The
Performance Map, interviews, and Tip of the Iceberg. After the
chaplaincy program had been implemented for four months, there
was a decrease in absenteeism of twenty percent and the turnover
rate had stabilized.

Note: This research is partially based on an actual case study
where a decision was made to implement a business chaplaincy
program in the last year.

During the initial meeting with the business leader, he has shared that there seems to be an elevated level of stress in the organization partially due to the current economic crisis. This additional emotional distress leaves his workforce taking the spillover from personal stress to work with them each day. He has been hearing complaints concerning burnout both from obligations at work and at home, and his discussions with other business owners have led him to believe that even when the economy is strong, the fast pace, pressures, and distractions of everyday life leave employees feeling tired, overwhelmed, and depleted most of the time. All contribute to the fact that many people today have run out of margin in their lives and do not have anyone to turn to during the challenging times of life. Difficulties and challenges that employees face outside of the workplace arrive at the office with them and result in low productivity, decreased morale, and high absenteeism. (Cook, 2010).

While discussing the situation in his office, he confides that there are several people of faith sitting on the executive board of this company in addition to several of the business leaders. He mentions that he had encountered some personal difficulties in his own life and his faith grew much stronger as he went through those trials. He is interested in a chaplaincy

program because he knows the advantages gained from growing stronger in faith and he believes his employees would profit from the benefit of having someone available to help them through personal struggles.

Employing the steps of the systematic approach first requires defining the need. Identify and review the problem. Next, consider results in terms of assessing current performance against expected results and identify requirements for success. Focus on the "what" question, identifying sources of current performance and recommended solutions, followed by the "how" of designing and developing a selected solution. Following this is the "do" of implementing approved solutions and putting change-management processes in place. Finally, evaluate by monitoring performance against the expected results defined initially. (Pershing, 2006)

In order to identify and review the problem, begin by spending time in the work environment obtaining a cultural audit to gain a thorough understanding of the organization. Reviewing organizational materials, the results of the focus group meetings and surveys, and spending time analyzing the internal structure are important first steps in diagnosing the problem. Variables to be considered at the performer or worker level are focused on the actions of the individual. These are relevant to the performer to the execution of the task and include skill or

knowledge, motivation, and other variables such as confidence, preferences, and practices. (Pershing, 2006) Although organizations receive more extensive gains in performance improvement when changes are made across the enterprise, the individual or worker level has to be considered due to one distinct factor in this case: Utilizing a business chaplain cannot be mandated by business leaders because of legal implications. Due to the unique nature of this fact, it is difficult to devise with the client an exact return on investment evaluation tool. Rather, open-ended questions have to be asked concerning the defined requirements for success and how this will translate to being measured and sustained for his business.

One obvious solution is to utilize benchmark criteria for current absences and turnover rates as a comparison after the employment of a business chaplain for an agreed-upon, prescribed amount of time after implementation. During this discussion, the business leader restates that he is interested in this option because of his strong conviction that it will help his employees, whom he thinks of as "extended family." He views chaplaincy as a type of wellness program he can offer as a conduit for assistance with life's demands. He mentions that people spend the majority of their time at work and fewer people are engaging in customary forms of community for support with

the difficult issues life presents. While he is intent on retaining valuable employees and reducing absenteeism, he emphasizes again that he is not looking for the obvious impact to his bottom line. His intention is to show a real investment in his workforce, and he is convinced that morale and productivity will naturally improve. He provides the analogy of painting a house; while there may be no direct monetary benefit realized from making this improvement, the boost in morale is motivation enough.

When the initial data appears to support the case for hiring a corporate chaplain, the next step requires answering the "what" question. As a starting point the Performance Map was selected to examine the four quadrants of structure, motivation, environment, and learning. (Pershing, 2006).

Structure

This process reveals a traditional, conservative business model with a base in Dallas, often associated with the "Bible Belt." Because there have already been meetings and talks held across regions concerning issues of employee burnout and stress in a down economy, it appears that the proposed solution of a chaplaincy program is in accordance with the business culture. In this case there is already support for the initiative in place, implying compatibility for strategic alignment. Few

elements of organizational life are as pervasive as culture
(Pershing, 2006).

Motivation

Consulting with the business owner on the level of
motivation of his employees, some open-ended questions were
asked. From the recent employee survey and focus groups, what
was your overall impression of their job satisfaction with
regard to environment, location, working hours, level of
responsibility, promotional and training opportunities?
Interviewing his workforce to clarify some responses provided on
the survey is the next step. Explain the reasons for involving
everyone in the process. Ask for names of employees he would
consider as Subject Matter Experts. During the cultural audit,
some names should emerge in addition to their potential adopter
categories if the Performance Improvement Specialist was
observing carefully. Because change always creates a sense of
uncertainty, information exchange becomes critical, as it is
supposed to help potential adopters become certain that that the
suggested innovation is advantageous for them and that they are
capable of implementing it (Rogers, 2003).

Environment

Confer with the business leader and employees concerning
external and internal conditions that affect the growth of the
organization. Do employees feel empowered in their positions?

Do they have an adequate physical environment to accomplish their tasks? Are there outside concerns affecting their ability to be at work and perform at their highest level? Is the commute time reasonable? Do they have access to resources that enhance their job performance and ultimately their value to the organization? Do the employees themselves feel valued? (Pershing, 2006). Do they feel there are competitive mortgage products their organization should consider to generate more business in a down economy?

Learning

How open are the performers to a change in their learning organization, even a voluntary one? (Pershing, 2006).

Feedback from the Performance Map indicates an internal gap in understanding between the business leader and his employees regarding working hours. Employing the Tip of the Iceberg tool, longer working hours are shown to be perceived by employees as an unwritten requirement of upper management to show their dedication to their positions, especially in the current economic environment. Junior members of the organization also have the feeling that the more senior members either do not want to share their business strategies because of the competitive factor in the local marketplace or due to time pressures. Once this determination is made, the next task is to proceed to the how of correcting the performance issues; the next step is to

find subject matter experts who are able to provide an explanation of programs and related benefits.

Through this process I learn that there are two seminaries in the country offering business chaplaincy certifications or degree programs:

- Denver Seminary - Specifically emphasizes business/ workplace/ industrial chaplaincy.

. • Liberty University – Offers an online program for a Master of Religious Educations degree with a specialization in workplace chaplaincy.

While performing research online, I locate a chaplain operating his own business as well as a consulting arm for prospective chaplains or potential chaplaincy business owners. I learn from him what a corporate chaplain offers and how their services can impact employee performance in the workplace. A Chaplain Assistance Program (CAP) is a personal, voluntary, and confidential benefit available to employees and their immediate families who choose to participate; sponsored by the company, chaplains are provided by a chaplaincy provider.

Key features of a chaplain assistance program include:

- Benefits at no cost to the employee.

- Chaplains who are available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three-hundred sixty-five days per year.

- Chaplains who are neutral from company operations.

• An assurance of confidentiality. Personal information will not be revealed to management or any other person, except where dictated by law or professional code of ethics.

When I asked if he would elaborate on some tangible benefits his client companies had experienced as a result of having a chaplaincy program in place, he stated that it can be difficult to measure immediate, monetary benefits. He provided information that had been reported by clients of his as well as companies employing the use of chaplains. He pointed out the obvious impact of these benefits to the bottom line of any business. "Take appropriate care of the employee base and they will take care of business." Decreases in anxiety and stress coupled with greater company loyalty all result in a lower turnover rate and higher productivity. Interventions yielding soft benefit results such as these have a direct positive impact on the bottom line. (Cook, 2010)

Real world statistics support the important case for stress reduction realized by balancing work and life as a means of improving retention and attendance efforts. Despite a softening economy and corporate downsizing, seventy-five percent of employers named employee retention as their top benefits objective. Fifty-eight percent of these employers find that developing a benefits program that helps employees balance work and life is the most important way to retain employees (Met Life

Study of Employee Benefit Trends, 2001). Eighty percent of workers feel stress on the job, with nearly half saying they need help learning to manage stress. Forty-two percent say their coworkers need such help. (The Marlin Company, 2000).

"While measuring the tangible, monetary benefits of chaplaincy programs can prove difficult, both {John Tyson, Chairman and CEO of Tyson Foods and Robert Pettus, Jr., Vice Chairman of Coca Cola Bottling Company Consolidated} agreed that the programs were huge successes. After a nine-month study, Coca-Cola Bottling concluded that their newly introduced chaplaincy program contributed to improvements in morale, productivity, safety, and quality. (Culture).

"Pettus has studied the costs and benefits of a workplace chaplaincy program and concluded that they more than pay for themselves in terms of lower turnover, higher morale, and healthier staff. By way of example, Pettus shared that some union employees, who happened to be a group of single mothers, approached him and said that if tough economic conditions meant the workplace chaplaincy program might have to be cut, they were willing to give up other benefits instead so as to keep that one. In thirty years of work in human relations, he had never heard such an offer." (Miller, 2007).

Tim Embry, CEO of American LubeFast, a Georgia-based chain of seventy oil change and auto maintenance shops in the South

that employs approximately five hundred persons, reported that
since he implemented the chaplaincy program, his employee
turnover rate and product shrinkage (losses due to theft),
declined dramatically. He described the chaplaincy program as
"an employee assistance plan on steroids" and recommended that
other business leaders involve their companies. Said Embry, "Do
it. You will be rewarded." (Spohn, 2010).

    After answering the "what" question concerning corporate
chaplaincy, the next phase of how requires an analysis to assess
whether a chaplaincy program is the right intervention to target
the performance issues the business leader is interested in
addressing. There are legal ramifications to consider. (Fry &
Cohen, 2009) indicated that it is important to avoid the
negative consequences of a hostile work environment that may
result when employers emphasize a particular religion in the
workplace. They recommended that more research is needed to
determine how it is possible for companies to avoid conflict
between religious practices and legal statutes. When
considering the legal implications of mixing business and
religion, it is important to realize that US Courts normally try
to balance employers' rights to express their values through
their business and the right of employees not to be
discriminated against (Spragins, 2006). Pursuant to the First
Amendment, employers have rights to be free from government

interference in the exercise of their religion in operating their business, while employees have rights to be free from a religiously hostile work environment (EEOC v. Preferred Management Corporation, 2002). Court reports indicate that EEOC v. Preferred Management Corporation involved the clash of these two sets of religious rights, perhaps to an unprecedented degree. Additionally, this case was the only one found in the LexisNexis Academic Legal Research Case Law database that involved a claim of employee religious harassment against a company that engaged in workplace chaplain activities. (Nimmon, 2009).

Although this appears to be an isolated case of religious harassment that involves workplace chaplain activities in a single organization under somewhat extreme circumstances, two best practices seem apparent:

1.   Supervisors and managers should avoid expression regarding religious activities performed or facilitated by workplace chaplains that might be perceived by subordinates as coercive.

2.   Employers should have an anti-harassment policy that covers religion. The EEOC website indicates that such a policy should:

•   Clearly explain what is prohibited

- Describe procedures for bringing harassment to management's attention.

- Contain an assurance that complaints will be protected from retaliation.

- Include multiple avenues for complaint. (Nimmon, 2009).

During my interview with Steve Cook of Capital Chaplains, he shared that Wisconsin State statutes are silent on workplace chaplaincy. He is exploring the question of what guidelines should be followed legally and ethically. He currently follows the same reporting policy for clergy and counselors and will not engage an employee at a client facility in conversation without his or her permission. When he established his business, the insurance underwriters had no description for his line of work, and it took some time to obtain liability insurance. (Cook, 2010). Another important element to consider is how to integrate a chaplain into the business environment. Chaplaincy business owner Steve Cook approaches this by inviting a prospective chaplain to a prospective client meeting. This gives the candidate an opportunity to view the way the program is introduced to a potential client. There are multiple benefits to this approach on the front end; the company has the chance to meet a potential chaplain, and it allows the chaplain to learn

more about what the company owner is seeking in implementing a chaplaincy program.

When he is asked to establish a chaplaincy program, Chaplain Cook asks human resources or business owners to hold an orientation meeting to introduce the service. Considering the culture of the company and time constraints of the employees, he holds a company-wide orientation or performs this in smaller focus groups. This orientation is usually mandatory for employees, directed by human resources or business owners. Utilizing the service is not mandatory, but attendance at the orientation is so employees have some familiarity ahead of time and confidentiality concerns can be addressed. He always ends with opening the session for questions or invites employees to contact him directly if they do not feel comfortable asking in an open forum. Once the program has been launched, the chaplain begins making weekly visits to the company facility as directed by human resources or business owners.

Placing chaplains in companies is a very delicate process. This is more art than science, and the success of the match is extremely important in order to ease the employee base into the program. An example illustrating the problems that occur when the match is not correct follows:

This case involved a client company whose workforce included several members of the military who had served in Iraq.

A chaplain was assigned whose approach was very outgoing. When he approached the employees, they were standoffish. After some time it became obvious that the personality of the chaplain was a mismatch for the company culture. Some members of the military hold the issue of power very closely, and they often view themselves as the ones who should be asking the questions. When the mismatch became apparent, a new chaplain was assigned who employed more of a slanted rather than a direct approach. (Cook, 2010). When an individual is pitted against the work environment, the environment will win every time. (Gilbert, 1978). In order to complete the due diligence on the "how" question, another serious consideration is what a chaplaincy program costs to implement. Once contracted, the company will pay an average of ten dollars a month per employee to have a chaplain visit offices and shop floors at appointed hours, to build a relationship of trust through informal discussions. (Kahne & Chaloner, 2005).

Consider the offering of a fitness club membership to each employee in an organization. An average cost of ten dollars per employee is reasonably competitive with other benefits. In fact, it could be priceless in terms of diffusing situations and taking them off the backs of managers who do not have the proper training or desire to intervene in personal issues. Organizations have been emphasizing physical wellness in the

last decade and if we are to take a holistic view of business as HRD specialists, a chaplaincy program has the potential to open an equal avenue for mental wellness.

After more than two centuries of growth, it seems that managers are currently changing tack once again. Academic research, (Hicks, 2003), self-improvement books (Jones, 1996), and journal articles (Darling, Parry, & Moore, 2005), are flourishing around a plethora of ideas, models, and personalities from the past: Sun Tsu, Machiavelli, and Jesus have never been so alive. The idea that deeper self-knowledge and an opportunity to offload negative feelings allow an individual to be more in control of his or her life and helps him or her to achieve a greater progression is a common teaching thread in found in many Sacred Texts. These describe the acts of verbalizing pain and difficulty. In their search for external support, companies have tended to call on two categories of specialists of the soul: Management Gurus, and more specifically in the United States, corporate chaplains. It is arguable, however, that the two are in reality only a slightly different expression of the same source. (Kahne & Chaloner, 2005).

Peter Senge, another management thinker who has received worldwide recognition for his book The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, clearly uses not only

a Judeo-Christian filter, but also a distinctively Buddhist one
to explore new ways of looking at the corporate world. Senge
makes figurative comparisons to the "gift of tongues" of the
Quakers, the "pure observation" of the Buddhists, the
"witnessing" of the Hindus and the "awakening" of the Muslims.
(Kahne & Chaloner, 2005). One of the most thought-provoking
parts of Senge's book is a whole discussion on how being part of
a great team has a lasting impact on people. Senge explains how
meaningful this experience is for those who have lived it in
their career or their social life, and how this event stands out
as a particular highlight in their life. He describes how
special it is to feel part of something bigger, to be connected
with one another and altogether to something more. The
discussion then shifts to a sort of mystical teaching. The most
accurate word in Western culture to describe this special
feeling, explains Senge, should be used with much caution and
only sparingly in public. However, in the very next line, Senge
gives this sacrosanct word to several million readers. The word
is "metanoia" which for the early Christians, such as John the
Baptist, meant "having a direct knowledge of God" (Senge, 1990).

       If corporate chaplains are only there to play the role of
consultants and social workers, ten dollars per employee is a
good deal and a worrying trend for the more expensive management
consultants and social workers. If, however, their real purpose

is to gain access to a sitting duck congregation and to continue the work of converting the masses, then ten dollars is outrageously expensive, if not immoral. It comes down to selling salvation, fixing a price on confession and absolution, a practice that was thought to have disappeared in 1562 with the Council or Trent putting an end to the buying and selling of indulgences. (Kahne & Chaloner, 2005).

After stepping through the process of the systematic approach and presenting all of the findings to the business owner, a decision was made to implement a corporate chaplaincy program. He found a chaplain he felt comfortable with bringing into his organization, but he realized after implementation that he should have prepared his employees with more information and background on why he was offering this service and reassurance from him of confidentiality. There was no formalized orientation to introduce the service; the chaplain did not come into the organization until after the program had been launched. He discussed the implementation as an agenda item in a staff meeting which left a lot of people questioning "Why is he doing this?"

To address the issues revealed during the Tip of the Iceberg analysis, mentoring relationships were set up cross-regionally between senior and junior members of the organizational team. Decentralization was of positive value in

this case, because it eliminated the threat of competition in the immediate sales environment and allowed for a more open exchange of ideas and strategies.

Within four months of implementation the business leader saw a twenty-percent reduction in absenteeism, the morale of his employee base seemed to stabilize irrespective of the economy, and he felt an increase in loyalty, productivity, and teamwork in his organization. He said the goals were in progress of being accomplished, and his motivation for offering this to employees was not driven by measurable results. His driver was purely personal.

Some of the academic work questions whether this is indeed purely personal. Even if the framework proposed by the law seems to protect the employee, and even if the majority of the population is in search of greater spirituality, this new trend raises a number of questions that are worth considering: Why are the major chaplain organizations only Evangelical? Are we dealing with businessmen or religious crusaders? If a Chaplain reflects the Director's beliefs, how coercive is this situation for the employee? (Kahne & Chaloner, 2005).

Rick Wells of Business Chaplains of America provides another viewpoint. He first states that "Chaplains are not change gurus." They might intervene on a negative management issue if a trend was statistically noted, but would most likely

recommend referring this issue out to a change manager. He sees

many opportunities where chaplains and change managers could

work in concert, but he recognizes the role of chaplains as

distinctly different. First, they are encouragers, not

counselors. Most of their work is held in the strictest of

confidence. There are exceptions where disclosure would be

required, such as awareness of employee theft or the knowledge

that an employee intends to harm himself. In the case of theft,

their role is to walk the employee through the process by laying

out the consequences for the behavior and providing a practice

session of going to management to report the action (Wells,

2010).

Chaplains are not in place to push one religion in the

workplace. Should there be a need expressed from a client of a

different faith, their network of chaplains is available to

locate a resource for providing the service needed.

There are some commonalities in HRD and chaplaincy related

to the method in which partnerships are formed with clients.

While HRD specialists answer the questions of what, how, and do

when it comes to implementation, corporate chaplains seek to

answer who, how, and what. Luke Witte, Regional Director of the

Carolinas for Marketplace Chaplains, refers to the importance of

knowing who and how they are serving and what this means for the

client. (Witte, 2010). Both HRD specialists and corporate

chaplains employ the three elements of the ACT approach to partnering: access, credibility, and trust. (Robinson & Robinson, 2005).

Because of the growth of the corporate chaplaincy trend, HRD specialists should be aware and think about how they might be able to utilize the data chaplains collect to get a finger on the pulse of an organization. David Miller, founding director of the Princeton University Faith and Work Initiative, points out the unmistakable trend that more and more companies are seeking to create environments where employees are comfortable bringing their whole selves to work. (Miller, 2007).

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