

EVANGELISM IN THE WORKPLACE



HAN JIAYING (JY)

MANAGER, FINANCE TRANSFORMATION
KPMG

Let's be honest – sometimes, we just can't imagine ourselves ever telling a colleague about Jesus. And I don't blame you! Growing up, I used to think evangelism was illegal. Not that I was persecuted for my faith in my family or secular society – there's just a sense that believing in an exclusive truth is extreme, even dangerous. Claiming that "Jesus is the Way" must mean that all other ways are dead ends. "Impolite" is putting it mildly. Surely, we aren't being paid to evangelise, and won't HR be on our case? This isn't helped by the low view we may have of our jobs too. I've been guilty of characterising City workers in the past myself – "those evil bankers". Initially, I vowed not to "sell my soul", aspiring to work for charity (or church). Lo and behold, when I found myself working in the City, I thought this "compromise" had to be justified by the money I could earn and give away. We sell ourselves short of the role we play in the workplace.



And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for “In him we live and move and have our being”; as even some of your own poets have said, “For we are indeed his offspring.”

Acts 17:26–28

Our colleagues might have big titles, sprawling houses, letters behind their name, even happy families and healthy bodies. We might be starting at the bottom, stressing about London rent or a mortgage, burning weekends to get our professional qualifications, even struggling with singleness or chronic illness. And to top it off, we're in the middle of a pandemic! Aren't our colleagues (or at least our bosses) already sorted in life? Surely, there's more pressing personal and public matters to deal with? V28 suggests otherwise – everyone lives and has their being when in Him. Put negatively, everyone without Him doesn't have spiritual life. God doesn't divide the world up between "evil bankers" and "charity workers", or between "sorted bosses" and us. He separates those who are in or without Him, and "commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day which he will just the world in righteousness" (Acts 17: 30-31). Next time you go into the office (or jump onto a Zoom call), imagine your non-Christian colleagues as they are – spiritually lifeless bodies slumped in front of their screens. Not that we're any different. We're made alive only because Jesus took the just punishment of death on our behalf, opening the way to God our Creator and life source (V28a).

What joy we have in relationship with our Father, growing in family likeness even in the workplace (V28b)! Remember often who we were, and pray that God would change our hearts towards speaking about Jesus. For "perhaps [our colleagues will] feel their way towards him and find him" (V27a). And because it's God we want them to find, we may need to take a different approach instead of "using words if necessary". Please don't mishear me – being set apart in your behaviour (aka holy) is congruent to us being God's children, and a great conversation starter. Don't overlook the importance of saying Sorry, avoiding office gossip and exercising self-control at drinks. Yet, we must go further. Where opportunities present themselves, we have to explain the Why behind the What. It's hard for others to make the logical leap from our actions to our Christian faith. Say you held your tongue when your colleague flared up at you.

That colleague is unlikely to understand that you're not angry because God wasn't angry with you (grace) despite having every reason to be (sin). We should fill in the gaps by explaining the gospel motivation behind our deeds. And be encouraged – it's not all down to us either. Even in our silence and stumbling, God is leading our colleagues as they "feel their way to Him".

"Evangelism is necessary, even if we don't feel like it most of the time"





Remembering that our colleagues are made in God's image can help us genuinely care for and listen to them

Where appropriate, I've shared my faith to a wider audience at my clients (being careful to mention that it's my personal view apart from my professional role), and even participated in 3 client Christian groups. Where lunchtime talks were politely declined or not accessible, thoughtful Christmas cards and an Easter book giveaway (City worker testimonies) were still welcomed.

And so it's to this mission that we've been called. I pray the vignettes shared will inspire, rather than induce guilt. What more exciting and important job could there be than to help others "seek God and perhaps find Him?"

I'm in my current role largely because I graduated during the crisis, and my team was the only one offering work visas. Fluke? Not so – V26 reveals that God has determined allotted periods and the boundaries of [my and my colleagues'] dwelling place. While Hawking's Theory of Everything falls short, God has placed us and our colleagues exactly where we should be, that all might seek Him. We're not second-class Christians – we're missionaries from different local churches sent into our offices.

My pastor can't walk into KPMG and tell Jack and Brendan about Jesus on a daily basis. For one, he doesn't know the beer Jack likes, or the ups and downs of raising 2 daughters which Brendan faces. Invest in relationships which is the bridge your words can walk over. In my conversations, I aim to discuss 1 thing other than work – topics such as family, interests or even working arrangements might be good places to start (I do also have to pray not to end up talking about the weather!). This can happen over team drinks, virtual coffee or even a MS Teams message. Sharing about your weekend is also a natural way of letting others know you're a Christian early on – this has led to opportunities for me to comfort the bereaved and discuss life after death, so you never quite know! Regardless of topics and platforms, remembering that our colleagues are made in God's image can help us genuinely care for and listen to them.

And my pastor definitely helps with furthering these conversations. Close to 25 lunchtime talks run by dedicated pastors have been set up within 15 minutes of any central London office to support us reaching the City. Doing the Math, I now have 52 weeks x 2 (Sunday, midweek) = 104 opportunities to share the gospel, enabling me to select the best time, location and topic for specific individuals and groups. Given time pressures at work, it's a big help being able to simply turn up to an event with minimal organising required, so I can focus my energies on praying for and inviting colleagues. And it doesn't stop with colleagues, or lunchtime talks. As a consultant, I have the immense privilege of working with different clients and travelling the world. While this can be disruptive to church and family life, it does bring unique opportunities to embrace.