

Beliefs, Behavior, and Being: A Cognitive-Behavioral Application for Corporate Chaplaincy

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Most clinical pastoral education occurs in the context of a hospital. One of the biggest differences between the medical models of chaplaincy and corporate chaplaincy is the length of time we get to invest in the patient versus team member. Since hospitals are doing more outpatient surgery, chaplains concentrate on the diminishing number of inpatients. Of course, they also minister to hospital staff, which has a parallel in corporate chaplaincy.

In medical settings and corporate/industrial chaplaincy, chaplains have almost daily contact with team members. And, if, on my way home while reflecting on a conversation, I realize that I missed a very important comment or took it in a different direction, I have the luxury of coming back to that team member later and beginning there. The hospital chaplain may not have that luxury due to shortened hospitalizations.

Our chaplaincy program grew out of and is sustained by one of our corporate values, which is that we “strive to be faith-friendly and inclusive.” We are free to hire chaplains from all faith traditions—from the three Abrahamic traditions (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) as well as any of the other major world religions. Our only requirement is that we expect chaplains, no matter what their faith tradition, to be able to provide basic pastoral care to all team members no matter what that team member’s belief system is. I ad-

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vertise for chaplains with an MDiv or equivalent and four units of clinical pastoral education. If they are board certified, that is a plus, and being bilingual or knowing an additional language that is significant in the particular location is a double bonus, as is cross-cultural experience. While one of Tyson's core values is that we "strive to be faith-friendly and inclusive," one of the ways I try to help people, especially those who do not claim a particular faith stream, is to talk about belief systems. Every person has beliefs and values, a worldview, even if they find it hard to articulate.

When corporate chaplains engage with team members, it generally begins with their life (not a medical condition or pending surgery), some event that has or is or will be taking place. It begins at the behavioral level. If it has already occurred, there is nothing that can be done to change it. There can be a flood of emotions and/or a time of just trying to make sense of it all. Because events are often static and one's being is merely a barometer of how one's beliefs and one's behaviors are in or out of congruence, I generally start with a belief system kind of question: "Tell me how your beliefs are helping you to cope with what is happening." The responses give me insight into the depth and breadth of the person's beliefs, of the person's sense of the Other, the Holy, and themselves. After their responses, I usually ask the flip-side question, "How do your beliefs not help you with this?" For instance, when I asked the father of a terminally ill child this question, he asked me, "What did I do that was so bad that God would do this to my child?" We spent many rich conversations unpacking some of his unhelpful beliefs.

Like other chaplains, I have quickly become aware that there are often no answers, no Sunday school certitudes, for some of life's moments. Job has become my friend. I have prayed I will not be like his friends. In clinical development, we learn that advice-giving may have its place but is probably best withheld. Learning to discern questions that lead to or seek new possibilities might be more effective. And, there are just plain times when being is all there is: being with, being alone, being together, being who we are in Christ, being fully human.

I love Henri Nouwen and am reminded of a passage from his book *A Living Reminder*:

The minister, as a living memory of God's great deeds in history, is called to heal by reminding people of their wounded past and by connecting their wounds with the wounds of all humanity. . . . When we speak about the minister as a living reminder of God, we are not speaking about a technical specialty which can be mastered through the acquisition of spe-

cific tools, techniques, and skills, but about a way of being which embraces the totality of life: working and resting, eating and drinking, praying and playing, acting and waiting. Before any professional skill, we need a spirituality, a way of living in the spirit by which all we are and all we do becomes a form of reminding.¹

As we all have experienced, people react to us because we remind them of God . . . and sometimes those reactions are harsh, sometimes inviting.

Chaplains receive specialized training in being a “non-anxious presence,” being comfortable with “just being.” They are able to withstand and appropriately respond to others who see them as a representative of God, whatever that looks like to them and however they define God. That can be one of the first and most uncomfortable transference experiences of a new chaplain.

We cannot control how others see us; taking time to explain who we are changes the focus. So, we learn to walk alongside others whose belief systems can range from well thought out to almost nonexistent. And yet, somehow, our presence can provide hope in the most desperate dark nights.

Tyson Foods chaplains are specially trained to get comfortable with the uncomfortable and to have integrity within themselves and with who they are without having to make sure others know they are “orthodox.” They know they aren’t God, but certainly, as persons created in God’s image and set apart by a faith group, they represent the Holy. As a “living reminder,” chaplains are privileged to stand on holy ground, whether that means being present in death or invited into the sanctuary of the beliefs that help one of our team members cope with life.

I think there are some employees, though, who see our chaplains as people who help keep morale high, that they are an “always happy.” I wish they would follow our chaplains for a week. They’d discover that probably 70 percent of our time is spent doing grief or crisis ministry. So, what would give someone the impression that chaplains are always happy?

I wonder if this comes from is the observation that the chaplain must also do the work of living out their hope, being prepared to “give a reason for the hope that lies within” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV), being a person who chooses gratitude that comes from a deep faith that connects them to hope. It is that “faith is the substance and evidence of things hoped for” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV).

There is a reason why chaplains are clergy, not social workers, psychologists, or other behavioral specialists. I hire clergy because of the theologi-

cal reflection they bring to the purposeful, greater story. We work because God works. We create because God creates.

Industrial or corporate or workplace chaplains, whichever title you prefer, are first of all chaplains. The locus of their ministry is adaptable. The language of the plant or industry may distinguish it from the language of palliative or urgent care. But at its heart is the care for human beings and the narrative that weaves itself through their lives. I believe corporate chaplains assist in the interpretation of life and the barometer that sounds the call to “come see; come listen; come follow.” I learned in my work in hospice that most of my patients wanted to know if their lives had mattered. Industrial chaplains hope to help the living know that their lives have meaning, that they matter, long before they are dying.

So, whether in the beginning or in the end of life, *work is deeply theological, and the chaplain finds open space there.*

NOTES

- 1 Henri Nouwen, *The Living Reminder: Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ* (New York: Harper, 2009), 22.