Hiring Returning Citizens

By Mike Dykstra

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven… (Colossians 1:19-20)

Heading into the county jail to visit a team member that worked for our company, I was thinking that business school does not prepare you for this.

All things are to be renewed for the mission of Jesus. Advancing the kingdom of God requires us to be mindful that all things are to be reconciled and renewed on this side of eternity. Too often, business work has been given a backseat to other vocations, such as pastor, teacher, nurse, or missionary. We are called to be everyday missionaries in the workplace.

One way our company has attempted to live out this calling is by hiring returning citizens—those who have been previously incarcerated for a felony. The label “returning citizen” is more uplifting than frequently used terms such as ex-con or ex-felon. When we decided to change our hiring policy to allow for returning citizens to be considered for work, we had to change our prejudices.

By age 23, one in three Americans has been arrested, resulting in between 70-100 million people in the US who have a criminal record. Two people could commit the same crime, and one get a misdemeanor and one a felony, depending on race, socio-economics, access to legal expertise, and other factors. Returning citizens are found to be successful, good, loyal, solid workers, with no data showing that there is any increasing danger to workplace violence. Bottom line for us: returning citizens make up over 30 of our 400 team members and we have experienced great results. Recidivism is reduced by 90% if a returning citizen has a job and housing. We have worked with non-profit organizations on other aspects of life that would help these individuals achieve success.

We believe that we can utilize our business to transform lives and communities—both in selling and servicing builders and construction companies—and in making all of us better as we develop those around us to their fullest potential. Many people come to work with different stressors in their lives and potential barriers to work. We have recently partnered with a non-profit that seeks to serve businesses as a concierge to varying social services to reduce barriers that prevent them from coming to work. These barriers could be financial, housing, child-care, transportation, among other things. We provide this service so that our team members get the help they need when they need it. This approach extends beyond basic benefits of health care and retirement benefits.

The individual that I visited is serving a prison sentence and the criminal justice system is not kind to repeat offenders. After working for our company for five years, he is back in prison because he made a bad decision. We would rather that he worked for our company, but life is messy on this side of eternity.

Our company is on a journey to honor God with our business. We are not perfect and make mistakes all the time. However, we would not have the mentality to transform the workplace to advance the kingdom of God if we did not believe that “all things” are to be renewed.

Mike Dykstra is President/CEO of Zeeland Lumber and Supply based in Zeeland, MI, serving the building industry with lumber and building materials, and truss and components. Mike is married to Jodi and they have three children. He can be reached at miked@zeelandlumber.com.

PRESIDENT’S CORNER

I am immediately aware whenever I say or do something that is not pleasing to God. I’ve been convicted over and over again! This is what he wants for all of us—to develop sensitivity and obedience to his voice as he leads each of our lives by the Holy Spirit.

God is not looking for spiritual robots. He gave us free will because he loves us—and everything he asks us to do, or not do, is for our good. We just need to learn to follow his lead through his gift—the helper and advocate—the Holy Spirit.

Life is never boring when we follow the Holy Spirit. He always leads according to the plans God has for our lives but there’s no guarantee that it will be easy. Three words we should say throughout the day are: “Come Holy Spirit.” Acting on his prompts, we’ll be led in the right direction.

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And let us not become weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. (Galatians 6:9)

“No money, no mission,” is common rhetoric in the business world. While we must balance money with mission, it is easy to lose sight of the relevance of faith in the business world.

One of the highlights of my career was my appointment as CEO for a health clinic for the poor and uninsured in Fresno County. Our mission was to provide and improve access to quality health care regardless of one’s ability to pay. Over several years, we managed to increase access to more Fresno residents, almost doubling our service in the community. We exceeded our mission!

Simultaneously, we began to experience cash flow crises as costs exceeded revenue. The clinic board and I first considered the logical business decision; reduce access to clients by reducing hours of service. This strategy is the prudent business approach to services exceeding revenues. “No money; no mission.”

The impact of this decision would require staff layoffs as well as reduced care to patients and families in need of basic health care services. Emergency rooms would see an increase in uninsured residents needing basic primary care services.

Thankfully, a local bank extended a line of credit that allowed some time to consider alternative strategies to our financial crisis.

During another sleepless and prayerful night, the thought occurred to me to meet directly with our primary federal funder. God answered my prayers for direction during this crisis. The clinic board didn’t believe this strategy would work at all as funding increases were rare. However, the board supported my decision to follow God’s lead. They agreed to hold off on staff and service reductions until I returned from this important meeting.

Our medical director joined me. Together, we appealed for more financial support based on much improved access to health care for our residents. The public health officer listened to our situation thoughtfully and asked many appropriate business questions. He acknowledged that he was amazed and pleased by the increased number of clients we had served and applauded our commitment to our mission.

Within three weeks, I received a letter from the Federal Bureau of Public Health Services informing us that the decision was made to allot a $3 million increase to our clinic and to continue expansion of services to low income residents in Fresno County. This answer was nothing short of a miracle!

We continued our mission without staff layoffs and increased dental services that were sorely lacking in our community.

None of this success was possible without God’s leading. We took a risk and followed a path of faith—a path that has contributed to the continuation of quality of services to low income residents in our community 20 years later.

Never doubt God’s savvy in the business world. He leads us to impossible realities that serve his Kingdom on Earth.

Laurie Primavera has been a member of the Fresno Women’s Chapter since 2016. As a nurse practitioner she worked in the health care field in Fresno for 33 years and now volunteers for the Stephen Ministry program at her parish. She is married to a clinical psychologist and enjoys her two rescue terriers. Laurie can be reached at lauriepmsn@aol.com.

Lord, we pray for your guidance in today’s business world. May business successes be measured by the good works we offer in your holy name.
Refocusing on Jesus

By Steve Fein

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. (Romans 12:3)

I was fortunate to have physical gifts that led me to a professional career in distance running. But in pursuit of my dream, I ran away from God and chased the idol of winning. I enjoyed the teamwork and development of the next generation in competitive sports, but as I progressed to the professional level, I focused more on winning and less on God and others.

There were consequences in not remaining faithful to my relationship with Jesus. I was no longer grateful for being the best I could be. Consumed by the all-encompassing goal of beating the competition, the center of every decision was about me. As my mind wandered further away from Jesus, I began struggling with injuries and other personal setbacks.

Refocusing on Jesus, I developed other gifts. I recommitted to a career as a CPA, and over time it led to more Spirit-led service to others at the center of every decision. God opened my eyes to many ways I could use my gifts to serve others. I’m now learning to run for the highest prize—salvation.

We all have an important role and are given special gifts for building other believers. God works through each of us in a unique way. As we utilize the gifts we know we have, God further reveals our spiritual gifts so we can serve and bless others.

Healing

By Laurie Primavera

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor 4:18)

Living the Spirit-led life means living a miraculous life. As a Christian nurse, I learned to surrender my professional will to the Holy Spirit and was led to positions in health care I never imagined nor desired.

Two years ago, as I began to prepare for retirement, the Lord led me to join the Stephen Ministry at my church.

PRAY:

Lord, help me to realize the spiritual gifts you have provided to me so that I can serve and bless others.

REFLECT:

Do I search for and act on the spiritual gifts that God has blessed me with?

DISCUSS:

What is my unique role in building God’s kingdom?
Prayer and God’s Will  
By Steve Fein

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him. (John 5:14-15)

My early understanding of the workplace was that accomplishing financial objectives and doing God’s work were often in conflict. Through reflections with my CIC brothers, I’ve realized that it’s actually the perfect place for me to use my many gifts from God, and they’ve since inspired me to daily prayer, and now praying over my calendar and before most meetings.

As a leader of almost 400 people in my region, I pray for their success and God’s grace to guide and speak through me.

We recently received a call from the father of a young employee, Brian, relaying that he had unexpectedly passed away the night before. I prayed for God to guide me as I shared this with my coworkers, and help me be his spokesperson as we mourned the loss of a friend and colleague.

God gave me an opportunity to have a conversation with Brian’s father to share memories of him and how grateful we were that he had been a part of our professional family. We also spoke about how Brian, his family, and his family’s friends felt blessed that they had been able to spend an entire week recently on vacation, noting that because of that amazing gift of quality time together, Brian certainly did not die alone.

God provided me with opportunities over the next couple weeks to walk alongside others as they struggled with emotions and stress. I received many responses that my words had provided comfort and peace, allowing focus on how blessed we’d been to provide Brian another family of companionship in the workplace.

I felt spirit-led in prayer, a calling to serve others in all I do, and a deeper understanding that financial goals in the workplace are simply a means to an end. The ultimate goal is creating opportunities to be Christ to others in our mission of service.

**PRAY:**
Lord, I pray you open my heart and mind to fulfill your will in all that I do personally and professionally.

**REFLECT:**
Do I have a daily relationship with Jesus, allowing him to influence and impact others through me?

**DISCUSS:**
How do I surrender control to God, learn to let go of simply managing others, and allow him to lead others through me?
Steve's story is a witness to the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, prayer, and the support and brotherhood of men in his San Jose Chapter of Christians in Commerce (CIC). It is only one of many stories that has evolved from the CIC ministry since 1983.

**Fighting for Worldly Success**

Steve had been a long-time, often unrelenting competitive professional in the insurance industry. He had a “stormtrooper” countenance, which played well in the marketplace and enabled him to experience a great deal of worldly success. He was like a bull in a china shop, stopping at nothing to secure the sale and make money. His lifestyle proved costly.

Steve made some bad decisions regarding investments and they landed him in prison. He lost everything: two homes, his boat, all of his friends, his wife, his children, his business license. He was a completely broken man. When he arrived at his jail cell, he met his cellmate perched on the bed reading the Bible. That was just the beginning.

Miles away, two members of the San Jose Chapter were meeting at one of their favorite restaurants to discuss the Lord’s work in their lives. One of the men had been in direct competition with Steve and knew about his imprisonment. The two men decided to pray for Steve. One made an appointment to visit Steve and take him a Bible. That began Steve’s journey into the Scriptures and on to prayer. Those same two men were there when Steve was released from prison. This provided the impetus for God to transform Steve’s life through CIC and the Holy Spirit.

**Transforming a Stony Heart**

Shortly after Steve’s release from prison, Steve attended a CIC Challenge Weekend. Steve left that weekend with a renewed relationship with God, some valuable tools for daily prayer and a group of new friends to hold him accountable. It was humbling to witness Steve’s stony heart become tender and compassionate.

The CIC weekly gatherings provided an accountability he had never known. Week in and week out, Christian brothers walked with him toward friendship in Christ and life in the Spirit. Steve took the challenge of personal prayer to heart. By committing to daily prayer, reading the Scriptures and sharing with brothers in the Challenge Group, Steve did a 360 degree turn and became a new man. And the Lord showed his faithfulness through his new-found friendships in the San Jose Chapter.

**Experiencing God’s Faithfulness**

Steve’s spiritual antenna tuned in to the Lord and he began to impact the lives of others. He started working as an insurance consultant, which allowed him multiple opportunities to pray with potential customers and fellow employees. Steve also helped form a lunchtime fellowship group at that office. He was encouraging to others, generous, kind and remarkably understanding. He adopted the prayer tools shared with him by his CIC brothers and faithfully leaned into prayer, intercession, and fellowship.

Steve rarely missed a small group or CIC meeting in over a dozen years. When he shared his story with newcomers on the numerous Challenge Weekends he helped facilitate, one could hear a pin drop. He humbly revealed the power of God’s voice to put him on a new path and turn his life upside down.

Steve witnessed God’s faithfulness in numerous ways. Although the state tried to prove that he was breaking his probation by selling insurance without a license, his lawyer was able to show that he was not, which allowed him to continue working.

Within a year, Steve experienced more of God’s love, when the state renewed his insurance license. This gave Steve an opportunity to be successful again, and to do it by living out his faith at work and by fulfilling God’s purpose for his life.

**Spreading the Impact**

Moreover, Steve experienced a precious healing in his family. God helped Steve regain shared custody of his two children and also orchestrated a healing in the relationship with his ex-wife, which enabled them to move forward together. Miracle upon miracle was experienced and shared.

The impact of CIC on Steve’s life was a “pebble in the pond” that spread across every aspect of his day and with everyone he encountered. It impacted him so much that Steve was living out his faith, to the very end, by helping his family, friends and customers.

Steve served as the chapter president for CIC twice, embracing the organization and its power to transform lives. It was his passionate drive for God’s Word and God’s purpose for his life that energized him.

He was serving his second term as CIC chapter president when he died. So, it is only fitting that the men from the San Jose Chapter had the privilege of visiting Steve at his home to pray with him prior to his passing. Their friendship with Steve, God’s good and faithful servant, is a treasure for each of them. It’s a treasure that continues to fuel their own commitment to daily prayer, Scripture, and their ongoing work in CIC. Steve’s life and death bear witness to the transformative work that God always does when one opens their heart and life to him.

Steve not only encountered Jesus through a marketplace ministry called Christians in Commerce, but obtained eternal life.

For more on Steve’s story go to: 
bit.ly/UnexpectedConsequences

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More to the Story by Jack McCall, San Jose Chapter
I am a firm believer in leading by example and part of that is having a morning ritual...For me in the mornings, I sit in my "prayer chair" with my two devotionals and a journal. Psalm 46:10, ‘Be still and know that I am God,’ is always in view when I sit there. I often reflect on this verse in addition to reading and journaling. My journal consists mostly of prayers, thanking the Lord for his blessings, and asking him to guide me that day. And so then, as I am setting up for my day in my sessions, I pray over every chair, asking the Lord to bless whoever sits there. I always leave an extra chair empty in the corner where God sits. This serves as a visual reminder to always be mindful of God's presence.
While I was in the hospital, whenever my family would tell me the story of what happened, I would always return with the same response, “I bet you I scared the living daylights out of my coworkers.” And that’s one of the hardest things from a humility standpoint for me to even talk about.

I had three coworkers that were with me when I went into cardiac arrest and really jumped into action and saved my life. That all happened within 10 minutes and I was driven away in an ambulance and left the three of them standing there on the sidewalk. The shock of everything was enormous.

They found the nearest park bench and sat down. First, they prayed for me, and then they prayed for themselves and their fellow coworkers on how to deal with the circumstances. They were then in a situation where they did not know and were not allowed to find out what happened to me for the next 24 hours. They were worried, up all night, and went back to work the next day where counselors had been provided by my employer.

My son showed up and was able to give them the good news that I was doing well. It was a wonderful time for them. They had planned to spend most of the day discussing what had happened to me, the new guy in the office, just three weeks on the job.

So, a few weeks later, it was my turn to come back into the office. I was afraid of how to handle this moment of meeting these three individuals that saved my life. I had only known them for a short time and we didn’t have a deep relationship, but it was still a tearful moment. I worked very hard to stay silent and allow my coworkers to walk through the story with me present and to just give them a hug and see what God had done through this experience for all of us.

I had decided going into this that I wasn’t going to hold back my faith and I was going to share my story, the fingerprints of God in the midst of it all. The opportunity to do that, not only with these three people, but with my whole team was real grace-filled. It gave everyone an opportunity to share their own feelings and their faith. It really opened a door wide-open for all these people to feel comfortable to share their own faith and experiences, not just with me, but with others in the office. It really gave us a camaraderie.

This reflection is based on an episode of the Nine to Five Podcast. You can listen to the full episode at bit.ly/GodsFingerprints
“But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Matthew 7:14)

Katie O’Leary is a self-employed strategic growth consultant for small businesses who started her career in the corporate world. “There weren’t many other women in my workplace,” Katie said, “and I had no examples of how Christian women in the workplace act. I felt I had to do my job the same way my male coworkers did and do it better. People had to know that I ate nails for breakfast.”

Katie kept this up for as long as she could. “Eventually, I broke,” she said. “It was exhausting, it was idol worship, and I broke. Now, years later, I can see that, while the breaking process was incredibly painful, it set me free to follow Christ.

“One day, my boss, a wonderful Christian man, asked me, ‘What if you just walked into so-and-so’s office, smiled, and asked nicely for that report?’ I realized I would rather be nice to my colleagues. I would rather not act like a man because I’m not a man. Through my boss’s words, through that community, I was able to realize that I did not need to act this way.

“I had to listen to God to find clarity in how to change my life. God is not trying to confuse us. We just don’t often take the time to really listen for his whisper in our hearts.

“The cost to follow the path that Christ set before me was great. It cost me my pride, my former way of life, and the security of a regular paycheck. I am now self-employed, and it took me a long time to be ok with the way people treat me when they hear that.

“It also took a lot of courage. Not courage that came from myself, but courage that came from trusting the Lord. God lovingly ripped out my bad habits, and I had no choice but to rely on him and draw my strength from him.”

These are the Four C’s: clarity, courage, cost, and community. All are important to living a life fully following Christ. You need clarity to know where God is calling you, courage to follow that call, community to help you follow that call, and willingness to pay the cost in order to fulfill the call.

This reflection is based on an episode of the Nine to Five Podcast. You can listen to the full episode at bit.ly/ClarityCourage

**Clarity, Courage, Cost, Community**

By Margaret Gonzalez

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OCTOBER CONFERENCE UPDATE

This year’s Annual Conference with the theme “Shine Bright! Light the Darkness” will be held on October 4-5 at the Embassy Suites, Bloomington, MN.

Our theme and mission are a direct response to Jesus’s call—“Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

On Friday morning of the conference we’re excited to unveil a new communication campaign to reach the next generation. It brings together all of our content— including reflections, newsletter, podcasts, and the video series Working for Our Father—under a shared identity.

As we reach the next generation in new ways, this is the best opportunity for everyone to experience first-hand the latest development in revitalizing our efforts to engage more people in our mission.

A local marketing agency has generously donated their time and talent to help us. The owners share our passion for the mission God has given us to help create a movement of the Holy Spirit. At the conference, you’ll witness how this effort embraces our core values and expands our efforts into new audiences.

Building on last year’s success, the conference will be filled with inspiring lightning talks, Christ at Work stories, useful workshops, informative panel discussions, and fellowship with coworkers in Christ.

On Friday afternoon, we’re creating another “Coworker’s in Christ Gathering” for the local Christian community. It will feature insightful speakers and first-hand accounts of brothers and sisters shining bright in their workplaces. Examples of both the talks and sharings have been aired on our Nine to Five podcast.

We are planning talks and workshops for the second day. A special “Life in the Holy Spirit” workshop will feature sharings about how to pray with people for the release of the Spirit and make use of different types of opportunities to bring this about.

The conference goal is to present practical ways to light the darkness in our own situations at work. We want to radiate his light every day in everything we do, and proclaim life everlasting.

For hotel room registration and information go to CICINTL.ORG/CONFERENCE.

2019 Annual Conference

Shine Bright!
LIGHT THE DARKNESS

MEN’S CHALLENGE WEEKENDS

Greater Sacramento
September 20-21, 2019
Salinas Valley
November 15-17, 2019

WOMEN’S CHALLENGE WEEKENDS

Gilroy/Morgan Hill
May 17-18, 2019
Orange County
August 16-18, 2019

CIC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

October 4-5, 2019

This year’s CIC Annual Conference will be held on October 4-5 at the Embassy Suites Bloomington, MN.

Building on last year’s fresh approach, the conference will be filled with inspiring lightning talks, Christ at Work stories, useful workshops, informative panel discussions, and fellowship with coworkers in Christ.

Let’s come together and glorify the Father!

For hotel room registration and information: CICINTL.ORG/CONFERENCE
“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

Galatians 2:20

CHRISTIANS IN COMMERCE PRAYER

Father,
You are my Lord and Creator.
You entrust me with a place of stewardship in your creation.
Fill me with your Holy Spirit:
That he may teach me to pray and live in Christ and as Christ;
That he may teach me love for family, friends and all people.
   A love that is selfless, humble, and wise;
That he may teach me stewardship of the talents, time, money and possessions you have given me.
   A stewardship that serves, is generous, and brings honor to your name;
That he may teach me faithfulness to your call to Christians in Commerce.
   A call that unites us and builds your Kingdom in the marketplace.
Through Jesus Christ who is Lord.
   Amen

VISION: Being Christ in the workplace
MISSION: To encourage and equip Christians to be God’s presence in the workplace
          by the power of the Holy Spirit, exercising faith, integrity, and excellence
VALUES: Christians in Commerce is an ecumenical organization committed to:
   • Growing and being transformed in Jesus Christ
   • Manifesting the gifts of the Holy Spirit
   • Building strong brotherhood and sisterhood
   • Serving God and expanding his Kingdom in all aspects of our lives