Set a Higher Standard

By Lou Gionfriddo

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

When we were a young family living in Maryland and Virginia, we taught our children to embrace these traits—be true, noble, pure, lovely, and admirable. Early on, we encouraged them to "set a higher standard." After all, we are the Gionfriddo Family.

I have strived to live by this throughout my career as a project manager and program manager on commercial telecom projects and federal IT contracts. Federal contracting is an ever-changing profession. Living from contract to contract was challenging and exciting at the same time. I felt I was living on the edge of a riverbank…always looking for the contract to carry me through the next two to three years. If nothing came through, into the river I would fall. I moved from contract to contract and company to company. Because of this, I was out of work many times. For most of my career, I landed on my feet. Throughout that time, Christ was my vision and example of perseverance and I was often able to encourage fellow employees who were also struggling.

There was one time I was managing an IT/Office Support contract with a federal agency and was asked to perform a task which was not within the scope of our contract. The request was clearly unethical and I refused to do what was asked. Eventually the request was rescinded and the contract successfully moved forward. The request had come to the president of my company from the government program manager and my refusal to comply with the request was a risk. However, I knew the right thing to do, and I did it.

Toward the end of my career, because of changing contracts, it was difficult to maintain a good salary. I was in positions where I felt misplaced and over qualified. Still, at one point one of my children said in a family honoring, "We never really knew growing up we had financial difficulties. You never showed the troubles in the way you lived, nor in the way we lived as a family."

I thank God for that. We faced challenging times. Yet, we were always hopeful, humbly trusting in God in all circumstances. We always brought the best to our situation, and never lost sight of the high standard we had set for ourselves. No matter what, we were the standard Christ set for us.

We are now retired and living in South Bend, IN. I am still involved in federal contracting, though in a different role. My company, Third Coast Federal, helps companies in Indiana and Southwestern Michigan to build, grow, and maintain a federal contracting business.

I faced many challenges in my career, yet, by the grace of God, I have continued to hold fast to whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable. With a new job, and four adult children and four grandchildren, setting a higher standard has worked for us.

Lou Gionfriddo lives in South Bend, IN, and is a member of the South Bend Chapter. He and his wife, Ginni, have been married since 1975 and have four grown children and four grandchildren. Lou is the Director of Client Relationships for Third Coast Federal, a consultant firm which helps companies in Indiana and Southwestern Michigan with federal contracting. He can be reached at lougio6@yahoo.com.
Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. (1 John 3:18)

I like my own company and that does not work well when you are an educator, and teamwork and collaboration demand that you interact with different personalities daily. Mother Teresa once said, “Not all of us can do great things. But we can do small things with great love.” I have found that it is in the small things done with love that something wonderful emerges. Repeatedly God has placed me in spaces that extend me and challenge me to act in love and plant seeds where his grace may be evident.

Over the course of an academic year, my colleagues and I share stories of the daily stresses and challenges we encounter as we maneuver the battle field of teaching, administrative duties, and life outside of school. There are times when there seems to be no reprieve. I do not believe that in sharing our struggles we are looking for a solution or an escape; but sometimes a listening ear is enough consolation to go forth and face the rest of the day, or the weeks ahead. It is difficult to know how you can offer support at these times and so, some years ago, I resolved to create comfort.

I placed a bright pink basket on the corner of my desk and regularly fill it with goodies including chips, light cookies, health bars, exotic teas, and a note that says “help yourself.” By the end of the day most items are gone and with an internal smile, I refill it. The gesture has taken on a life of its own as there are days when I am unable to refill the basket and some anonymous person will place some tidbits in it.

One of my colleagues, quiet and unassuming, started a basket of sweets on her desk and anyone in need of a sugar rush knew where to go. She even took note of some people’s favorite sweets and would occasionally place a special stash on their desks. Last summer, she died unexpectedly and returning to work was difficult for many of us who had come to know and love her. Her desk remained empty, with her basket still in place. Without being asked, someone tidied her desk, switched her basket for a brilliant yellow bucket, and has continued the tradition of filling it with sweets.

The individual commitment to carry forward the goodwill of our deceased colleague has had a significant impact on many of us. When I reflect on it, I realize that God has called us to “plant seeds where we are planted” and often what grows may never be for our benefit but for the benefit of others. Someone said to me quite recently that she doesn’t know how I find time to think of my colleagues, but it really makes a difference when she knows at least one person has thought of her that day. A pink basket and a yellow bucket did that, not me.

Anna-Lisa Rodriguez lives in Kingston, Jamaica, and has worked as an educator for over 13 years. She and her husband, Kevin, have three children. Anna can be reached at keavrodriguez@gmail.com

PRAY:
Lord, may I be open to move and act in love for the benefit of those around me.

REFLECT:
Do I see and respond to the needs of those I work with?

DISCUSS:
Think of ways in which you can act in love in the workplace to bring comfort to your coworkers.

START A CHALLENGE GROUP

Bring Christian coworkers together. Start a small group. Our Challenge Newsletter and workday reflections help you support and encourage one another.

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**Multiplying Your Praying Power**  
By Gaston Cignetti

Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 18:18-19)

After many months of praying for kids, in September 2016 my wife and I were happy to be finishing room preparations for our son to be born in November. At our 31-week visit, the doctor saw that Max’s heart rate dropped when my wife had a small contraction. He rushed us to the delivery room and after a few scary moments and hours of monitoring, the medical team decided that our son would be born that night. He was so small and was transferred to a hospital with a better neonatology unit (NICU).

My wife and I prayed in tears hoping that God would take care of our son. It was the scariest night of my life. My boy needed more than our prayers—so I reached out to an army. My office has a policy of praying for coworkers in need. I sent an email to a couple of coworkers to ask for help in praying for Max. By the next day our prayers had multiplied among our family and friends. Max began to get stronger each day. After a long month in the NICU, he finally came home and now he is a healthy boy.

Throughout the ordeal my coworkers were amazing. They asked about Max’s progress and reached out to us to help. They prayed for him to come home. They shared my workload so I could accompany my wife who almost lived at the hospital watching Max.

This is a great example of the value of our relationships with coworkers. Anyone can complain about little things. But I am extremely blessed to know that our family has an army of prayer warriors ready when we need them.

**REFLECTIONS: WEEK 2**

**Clothed in Humility**  
By Anna-Lisa Rodriguez

In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” (1 Peter 5:5)

I was asked to take on a leadership role at my school when I was still new to the profession—three years into teaching. This position meant being in communication with most stakeholders in the school community throughout the academic year. The reality of this was daunting.

**REFLECT:**

Do I respond with a heart of Christ to situations?

Father, teach me to die to self and lead with humility.

**DISCUSS:**

We often have no idea the impact our actions or reactions may have on the persons we encounter.

**REFLECTIONS: WEEK 3**

In many ways I consider myself a reserved person and my new role meant challenging conversations with colleagues who failed to meet their responsibilities. At one point I had to make a decision to request schedules and timetables from my coworkers. The decision was difficult because I knew the extent of the work I was asking of them and though I expected backlash, nothing prepared me for the onslaught to come. A handful of colleagues were particularly aggrieved and there was no way to avoid a conversation with the ringleader.

I found myself asking God to give me the right words. “Help me to speak with firmness and a spirit of love and understanding. Help me to see beyond my personal hurt and speak professionally to my colleagues. Help me to be humble.”

Surprisingly the conversation was not as difficult as I anticipated. Some weeks later the ringleader approached me to share a concern she was struggling with. It seemed strange that she would want to share with me. She began by stating that my response to the previous incident assured her that I would not judge her and, my response and advice would come from a heart of honesty and humility.

God taught me in a moment of distress the value of acting with humility and in turn used me as a blessing to my coworker.
**Building a Community of Help**

By Gaston Cignetti

*Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)*

Early this year we had a request from one of our coworkers to pray for her as she was facing a difficult health situation. Clients and coworkers love her because of her great attitude and her predisposition to help others. We are fortunate to have her husband work with us too. After a few days, they felt comfortable sharing more about her health issue and why she was going to be out of the office for a few weeks on medical leave.

First, we got together at the office and prayed for her. We also were encouraged to pray on our own time as she was not sure when she would be ready to return to work. Since my coworker was not there to comfort in person, I continued to pray for her.

Second, since her movement was going to be medically restricted, our office staff set up a schedule to provide meals for the family. They have kids and the husband is busy at work. Our office volunteered their time and picked days to help them. Other coworkers helped by buying groceries. I was happy to contribute and I told my wife how lucky we were to work in a Christian office. Many times I take this for granted and think that it is normal when the reality is that it is an exception in today’s world.

By bearing one another’s burdens does not mean to take away their pain. We were simply holding others up and pointing them to God. By praying and helping others in need we can definitely build a community of help in our workplaces.

**PRAY:**

Lord, give me the strength to build a better community of help everywhere I go.

**REFLECT:**

Think of those who are suffering in your community or your workplace. How can other people at work trust us with their needs?

**DISCUSS:**

Share a time when you received help from a coworker. How can we encourage others to be open when they need help?

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Give Her Your Shoes!

“Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:30-31)

I work as a counselor and the clients that I serve often have very chaotic, challenging lives. In love, we do the best we can to meet their many needs, but we are not a specifically or outwardly Christian organization. I will often begin a conversation with a client by saying a quick prayer under my breath as I walk into a counseling room. I pray that the Lord, who knows each person I serve so intimately, leads me.

About a month ago, I had a client come in who had some serious physical and mental challenges. I ended up spending a good bit of time with her. Her story was hard, though not uncommon, and there was a limited amount of good I could do for her on that day beyond listening with love, and offering her our immediate services. I prayed often for her that afternoon.

Toward the end of the next day, I was the only counselor in the building. It was cold and windy and I was eager to get home. Suddenly the client I had seen the day before burst in the front door in hysterics. She was crying, clearly distraught and upset. I couldn’t make sense of her story.

I got her a cup of water and a granola bar. I suggested she sit down and collect herself so that we could talk. It took quite a while and I sat nearby praying under my breath. I noticed that she didn’t have a coat and was thinly dressed. She must have been cold. She also didn’t have any socks or shoes on her feet, and they were really dirty. I thought about how cold her feet must be without shoes.

As the woman calmed herself, she began to share that the situation in her home had turned violent. She had found herself needing to grab her keys and run out the door. She drove to the office knowing that it was a safe place. As she poured out her heart to me, I realized that there was really very little I could do professionally to change her situation. I was struggling to hold myself together in light of her chaotic tragedy.

As we came to the end of our conversation, I was still fixated on her feet and as I said another little prayer for her, the Lord told me clearly, “Give her your shoes.” That was not what I expected to hear and I paused. I didn’t want to insult her or make her uncomfortable.

Finally, I said, “Your feet must be very cold, would you let me give you my shoes?” She was shocked. She didn’t know what to say. She got really quiet, but eventually she nodded up and down, “yes.” She mentioned that they looked like good shoes, which ironically they were not compared to others in my closet. But they were clean as I had washed them the night before. She said over and over, “I can’t believe you would just take your shoes off your feet and give them to me. No one has ever done anything like that for me.” I took off the shoes, knelt down and tied them onto her dirty feet.

She left that day without everything fixed, without the chaotic challenges of her life all righted, but with my shoes. It made a huge impact on me! My heart was pierced with the Lord’s love for her. I was humbled to be his hands reaching out to serve her.

Jen Havard is a counselor who for the past three years has worked with women and their families. She and her husband have four children.
"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. Settle matters quickly with your adversary…. (Matthew 5:23-25)

At last, I had decided the right time had come to turn in my resignation to my employer. I wanted it to be an easy transition for the company, so I had taken all the work, made notes, organized, and prioritized projects. Throughout my tenure, I carried a heavy workload and always refused to compromise my integrity and character. Culturally the company wasn’t in alignment with what was important to me, so I prepared to resign gracefully.

A week into my final two weeks of employment, a colleague informed me that my manager had made a disparaging statement regarding my departure. He had said, “He just can’t handle the pressure that is inherent with this industry.” The resignation letter that I had written never indicated professional pressure being the issue. In fact, my expressed reason was that I was “disheartened” by the culture.

This immediately got under my skin. After a deep breath, I remembered that I had just read a CIC workday reflection that challenged the reader to consider “Is there someone you need to stand up to or stand up for?” I knew I needed to get to the bottom of this before this falsehood became my legacy. I asked my colleague if she had heard him correctly and once confirmed, I asked for and gained her approval to confront him.

Ten minutes later my manager showed up at my desk. I took the opportunity to stand up for myself to ask him why he said what he said. He acted confused so I quoted the statement to jog his memory. He flew off the handle, angrily denying he had said anything and yelled at me to get out to the shop where we could discuss the matter further.

I reluctantly went. He continued to deny the statement until I said, “I understand if you said something and didn’t mean it.” He then confessed to the statement and said he truly didn’t mean it. After I explained that I didn’t want to leave with any negative footprints, he calmed down. I asked genuinely, “How do you really feel?”

He lost it again. This time in tears, he said that he was hurt and felt like he had let me down. He didn’t know how to deal with the fallout of my departure. It had put a lot of extra stress on him and he could not show any signs of weakness or distress to the remaining employees. I sincerely forgave him on the spot.

Later he called to apologize and reassure me that my transition and theirs would be handled positively moving forward. Mine would be an amicable departure and moreover, he would be honored to write a professional letter of recommendation should I need it.

God wanted me to use the previous CIC reflection as a tool of inspiration on that day and turn something that could have ended in division and anger, to create unity and a stronger friendship.

A week later I received a text on my personal phone from him. It was a screenshot of a group text he sent to the whole department on my last day with the company. In it he publicly honored my work and my character to the glory of God. In closing he had written, “I and others are better people for having worked with you.”

Matt Hardwick works as an Electrical Operations Branch Manager in Indianapolis, IN. He and his wife, Erin, have two daughters.
Wholeheartedness has become an important word for me over the years. When I first heard it in the early 2000s, it really knocked me off balance. I remember thinking, “What is this?”—this invitation to a life of wholeness from the inside out. I was living my life for the days off and the weeks off. I was a busy pastor who would crave the vacation time or a Saturday where I could take a long nap or sit down and watch a college football game. I was constantly pushing myself for six days a week and then maybe got a little bit of rest when I could find time. What wholeheartedness invited me to was this perspective that God is here and now.

As Saint Augustine says, “God is more intimate to me than I am to myself.” This means that as many theologians have said over the years, it is not God who goes away. It is I who goes away. I am not present to God. But you don’t have to be a pastor, a priest, a Christian educator, or a professor at a seminary to feel the nearness of God. God is infinitely available to each and every one of us right where we are.

This thinking can be disrupted by our bad habits of thinking. I love how Martin Laird, a quiet Augustinian monk calls it “the cocktail party of the mind.” He says, “We get up in our heads, and are constantly ruminating, thinking, and analyzing.” It really keeps us from the present moment. Because when I am in my head, I am generally thinking about something stupid I said an hour ago in a meeting or something for work that I need to get done later today.

Instead, one of the things I try to do every time I sit down for a conversation or interview I am having is to say to myself, “Be here now.” Be right here because that is the only place that God wants to be is with me right here and right now. Instead of ruminating on the past and stressing about the future, be here now.

I try and wake up every day remembering that oneness with God is not something to be acquired. I don’t have to get myself together and prove to God that I am ready. No, God’s already present. I imagine sometimes that God is smiling at me and saying “I’m here. I know you are busy with work, but I’m here.”

Chuck DeGroat is Professor of Counseling and Christian Spirituality at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, MI, and Co-Founder and a Senior Fellow at Newbigin House of Studies in San Francisco.
Hugh Whelchel, Executive Director of the Institute for Faith, Work, and Economics, gave this definition while discussing shalom in the workplace. He continued, “God created everything for one purpose: to glorify himself. Creation reflects the glory of God. God is most glorified when creation works the way it was supposed to, when creation is in shalom.

“Shalom is a tapestry—a beautiful, intricate tapestry, and it has come unravelled. We can see all around us that creation is not working the way it was created to, pulled apart by sin.

Whelchel issues us a challenge, stating, "It is our job to attempt to reweave shalom. We will never be able to fully reweave it. Perfect shalom only existed before the Fall and will only ever exist again after Jesus returns. However, we need to try to get as close as possible. Our goal is to experience and give tastes of shalom.

“The question we should be asking is, ‘What can I be doing to put this back together? What can I do to try to get shalom?’ You can’t go out with a self-centered attitude. You can only get shalom by striving to help others flourish. It’s not about us. It’s about bringing shalom to others. Only that way can we experience shalom ourselves.

“This purpose of reweaving shalom is what gives our work purpose,” Whelchel concludes. “We have our ultimate goal in mind. Now we just have to figure out exactly which part of shalom God is calling us to fix and how he wants us to do that. We have to listen with an open heart, knowing that our calling is going to be difficult at times. However, because we have our ultimate goal of shalom, we know that all the hardship has a purpose in this intricate tapestry God is weaving.”

This reflection is based on two Nine to Five Podcasts: bit.ly/GodsInclusiveCall and bit.ly/ReweavingShalom

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)

Author Cornelius Plantinga defines Biblical shalom as “the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in… universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts are fruitfully employed. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be.”
ALOYSIUS MUGISA
Hired as CIC Employee

We are happy to announce that as of July 1, Aloysius Mugisa is now a full-time employee of CIC. He has made a five-year commitment to lead the CIC team in Uganda.

Serving as a teacher of English and Literature for the past 19 years, Aloysius had been praying and discerning about his job. He felt the Lord was inviting him to relinquish his teaching position and ask CIC to consider hiring him full-time. His time outside of teaching was too limited to meet the needs of the community through the work of CIC. In June, the board voted to move forward with his employment after they received financial commitments from several members.

Let’s all pray for Aloysius as he begins this new role for the brothers and sisters in Uganda.

WORKING FOR OUR FATHER WORKSHOP IMPACTS GILROY, CA

Members of the Gilroy-Morgan Hill Women’s Chapter reached out to friends, churches, businesses, and other CIC chapters, to invite them to their February Working for Our Father (W4RF) series. Members of other northern CA chapters drove two to three hours to attend the event held in the banquet room of a popular restaurant to learn more about how to conduct a series.

Pamela Garcia, Kevin McGinty, Beverly Blount and Nick Kim shared personal workplace stories that illustrated the messages in the four W4RF videos. Attendees were encouraged to start a Challenge Group in their workplace, and at least one new group was formed. Each participant received a copy of the Challenge Newsletter and learned how to use the weekly reflections.

After eight chapter members attended a W4RF series hosted by the Monterey Chapter, they developed effective promotional and advertising tools. Their promotions began three months in advance and included meeting with local church leaders; running posts in weekly bulletins featuring each weekly topic; posting ads with photos on local community bulletin boards; submitting press releases; and securing donated advertising materials from local merchants. Meeting with the church leaders and offering follow up materials for small groups seemed to have the greatest impact. About 25 of the 68 participants who attended had no prior connection to CIC.

2019 Annual Conference

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
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

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”
Galatians 2:20