



*"...That What We Do Flows Directly From Who We Are..."*

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When I first started my career at Pepperdine eighteen years ago, I was interviewing a woman, and I wanted to explain to her the importance of the Christian mission at work. Like many things when I was young and just out of law school, I was sure I had some insights to offer. I had grown up around Pepperdine, attended Seaver College, attended the University Church, worked on campus as a student, and attended law school at Pepperdine. Despite all of that, I went blank. I could not explain how our mission would affect her work. I felt that I understood on some level what it meant to work at a Christian University, but I could not articulate it. I found myself stumbling and fumbling. I am embarrassed to say that I believe I resorted to talking about vices we stay away from and the fact that we maintain a “dry” campus! It still haunts me because I know that I mis-conveyed our mission, and misrepresented who we are. How could I have done that, when the mission is the reason so many of us choose to make our careers here?

The fact is, even when we understand our mission and appreciate it, it can be hard to articulate how it affects our work – how we take our values and apply them in the work environment. Interpreting, articulating, applying – it is not easy for some of us. After that interview, I embarked on a quest to possess not only an internal understanding, but also the ability to articulate what it means to work at a Christian institution – specifically Pepperdine. I began to collect written pieces in a file and discuss the topic with my colleagues – for the better part of two decades. I collected certain pieces I had read from Pepperdine’s history and certain pieces that Andrew Benton wrote. Gary A. Hanson, my mentor, shared with me invaluable insights. In 2001, a Pepperdine professor, Richard Hughes, published *How the Christian Faith Can Sustain the Life of the Mind*. That piece went deeper and broader than I had previously discovered. Then Tim Perrin and Darryl Tippens put together Pepperdine’s Ethics Policy that articulated the intersection of our work and our mission with beautiful eloquence.

In recent years, I wanted to share some of what I have collected with my colleagues. I talked to Sean Michael Phillips about compiling some of the collection in a graphical way that may appeal to and intrigue the cross section of people with whom we work. Sean Michael found a wonderfully talented Seaver student, Bryan Evans, to bring this to fruition. The idea is to bring life, thought, and intentionality to the way our mission defines who we are and what we do. You will see that Bryan is exceptionally talented. Not surprising, Bryan has been recognized by his teachers and in competition for his designs. I am also grateful to Matt Midura and his group for putting it into a workable format. Together we created this piece: Sean Michael likes to call it the “Soul Poem;” I just call it the “mission book.”

## *Gospel* **GOSPEL — THE SOURCE**

The Ethics Policy tells us that Holy Scripture provides the ultimate source for our ethical standards. In other words, as a Christian university, we must find as the source for our values scripture or the gospel. Otherwise, there is no meaning to the label. When I say “gospel,” I am using it in a broad sense, meaning all of Holy Scripture viewed with Christ and his message as the centerpiece. So, as a Christian university, the gospel defines us. And, we are reminded in the Ethics Policy, “that what we do flows directly from who we are.” So according to the gospel, who are we? There are countless ideas to discuss in this context, but we can mention a few.

## *Openness* **OPENNESS**

We are an open community; yet, one that is bound together. You can find open universities with no tie that binds; but we are an open community bound together. It is much harder and more meaningful to be the latter. Christ preached a radical openness. He defended those who were scorned. Today our hearts break for those who find themselves in lives of prostitution because we have learned as a society that they have been forced there through circumstances often beyond themselves. But, in Christ’s day and culture, prostitutes and adulteresses were despised -- sometimes to the point of death. Yet, Jesus protects the woman caught in adultery when the townspeople want to kill her. And he says, “neither do I condemn you.”

He uses a Samaritan as the hero of a story. Jesus was a Hebrew, but the Hebrew establishment reviled the Samaritans, calling them dogs and believing them to be such. Jesus flips it upside down when he tells a story of a Hebrew priest who fails to help his neighbor, and a hated Samaritan who rescues his neighbor.

There are many more examples -- label it what you want: valuing all people, openness -- but we are called to it. We state on our Web site about welcoming those of various faiths, “God’s truth as revealed in both the observable and invisible worlds is universal and nonnegotiable, and an individual’s pursuit of that truth is respected and honored.” We honor those of different faiths. How many other Christian universities that are serious about their Christian mission welcome non-Christian students and employees, and honor them? Pepperdine welcomes and sees as its own, its Jewish faculty, staff, and students; Muslims; Buddhists; agnostics. Not despite our Christian mission, but because of it. It is one of the greatest pieces of who we are.

## *Dignity and Respect* **DIGNITY AND RESPECT**

Related is the concept of showing dignity and respect to all. Jesus gave dignity and showed respect to those who had neither in that culture and that era -- children, tax collectors (abhorred as traitors), the sick, the poor, the broken, those who were marginalized. Jesus broke bread with them -- reclined at the table with them. Much different than sharing a meal today, his act said, “You are my friend; you are accepted.” Jesus knew that dignity and respect stemmed from one being created in God’s image and loved by God. In our community, we do not treat others with respect and dignity based just on behavior or achievement; they deserve dignity and respect because of their humanity. We enjoy a culture here where managers and supervisors treat subordinates with respect, dignity, and honor.



I meet with every Public Safety officer before he or she is hired, and in every one of those meetings we talk about this culture of honor. Our students, faculty, staff, visitors, all deserve respect and dignity for the reasons we discussed...especially when they are in trouble, when they have used bad judgment, or made a mistake. We want to show them respect and dignity especially in those circumstances. And in a community of PhD's, Juris Doctorates, MBA's, and scholars, where the faculty member ought to be the one who is honored and held in esteem, we look to the student, the one who has not yet achieved, and we say, "You are the heart of what we do."

## *Striving* **STRIVING**

The gospel calls us to strive. We reject complacency and mediocrity. We set high goals, and when we achieve them, we set higher goals. If we fail to reach them, we try harder. We want to set our eyes on the highest mark. We are never satisfied with "good enough." The gospel actually calls us to seek perfection, and to do so as though it is attainable. Some would ask, "Why endeavor for something unreachable?" and they would refuse to participate. But as a Christian university, and especially when it comes to our behavior in the work place, we strive for this perfection as if we can achieve it – these qualities of love, commitment, honor, and patience. But we embrace one another and ourselves when we fail – as one failure to another. And so, we live between this endless striving for perfection on the one hand and grace for failure on the other.

## *Transcending Self* **TRANSCENDING SELF**

The Christian concepts of grace, forgiveness, and sacrifice all involve this idea of transcending self. Whether Muslim, Jew, or Christian, one of the ideas that draws people to Pepperdine as students or as employees is the idea of being a part of something that is bigger than one's self – something that transcends self. It is more than just clocking in and doing our time. We believe in what this institution is about, and we want to do our part. So many of you and your colleagues could earn more money doing something else; but you choose to make your career here because you want something more. This motivates a certain brand of person, and we attract that brand of person.

## *Application* **APPLICATION**

We are just scratching the surface on a few of many, many relevant precepts that flow from the gospel. Notice that Christianity does not have an exclusive claim on many of the qualities. Other faiths share many of them, thus facilitating our rich openness. We could go on and on about the values that flow from the gospel. But, let's shift and talk a bit about applying some of these values in the work place. There are two parts to the concept "what we do flows directly from who we are": The values from the gospel, they speak to who we are. Now we must link who we are to what we do. In other words, how do we apply these values in our actions?

Conflict in the Christian institution: I always tell new employees and students, "Just because we are a Christian institution does not mean we do not have conflict; but, it should affect how we respond to it." With regard to conflict, I believe we should assume good motives for those with whom we have conflict. To attack another's character at this place may generate a serious reaction because character is so important to us. To question another's integrity in our community is something that one should do only with the greatest of care and certainty. It should never be done as a lazy fallback or as baseless speculation. Our integrity goes to who we are.

Of course we continue to show respect to those with whom we are in conflict. By showing those who disagree with us dignity and respect, we show ourselves different than other communities where attacks can become ugly and personal. Years ago I had to dismiss a gentleman, who had been found engaging in embarrassing behavior that offended others. To be caught the way he was caught was extremely humiliating and demeaning. But, when his immediate supervisor and I met with him, the first thing we did was to tell him and show him that we continued to respect him. His behavior did not warrant it, but he deserved it nonetheless. This is what sets us apart.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

This leads me to topic that deserves some attention: accountability in a Christian work place. When I served as the associate dean of the law school, student discipline was one of my responsibilities. Every case included the student stating, "I thought this was a Christian school." As though who we were as Christians would not or should not allow us to dispense consequences. You can see where this comes from. It comes from the concepts of forgiveness, grace, and redemption. How do you answer? I am aware of a belief held by some supervisors who are hesitant to discipline or correct employees because they are not sure it would be consistent with our Christian mission. The truth is just the opposite. We should stretch our employees, encourage them to grow even when it is difficult, and offer discipline when called for – for the sake of the institution and the sake of the employee. We should do this because we are Christian, not despite being Christian. When disciplining students, I found it to be one of the most meaningful opportunities for student growth.

Certainly, those who watch Sharon Beard and Mark Davis manage student discipline at Seaver or Jim Gash at the law school know that it is a ministry to them. They perform this delicate balance caring for the institution and the student – the group and the individual. We must approach employee discipline the same way. As supervisors, we must ensure fairness and equity in the workplace. This cannot be done without correction and discipline. We have a duty to the institution. We also have a duty to the employee.

We are called to love our neighbor. We are called to act with love when it comes to our employees. I submit it is an unloving act when we fail to discipline an employee who should be disciplined. We must be willing to put the employee first, even when the correction proves difficult and time-consuming for us. When we fail to discipline, we fail in our duty to the institution, and we fail the employee. But, how we discipline is critically important. When we discipline, we remain steadfastly honest, we struggle, we pray, we lose sleep, we seek counsel, we go back and forth, we take courage, we exercise patience and self-control, and we treat with dignity and respect. Many of you have gone through these difficult situations where you have to discipline. You agonize over it.

In many companies, this is not the picture at all. If dismissal is expedient, it is executed quickly and without a great deal of attention. But, the struggle we go through is good. Discipline, especially dismissal, should be hard. We should check ourselves over and over again. In the struggle, we help ensure that what we do flows from who we are.

## **ONE BUT NOT THE SAME**

Some will interpret this discussion one way, and others will interpret it a different way. In the end, there is a brilliance that stems from us all living out the mission in our own ways; yet, as one. Each of us approaches it differently. Each of us emphasizes different aspects of our mission.



We incorporate it differently in our work. We come together, we discuss, we persuade, we envision, we disagree, we agree, sometimes we argue, we forgive. But, somehow we do this as one. We are one, but we are not the same.

If I had the chance to speak to that woman I interviewed again. If I had another chance to give her a glimpse of how our mission plays out in the work place, I would say, "It's the people. It's who they are. And what they do flows from who they are."

It is every one of us; it is every one of our staff. It is the way we work, the way we dedicate ourselves, the way we sacrifice, the way we encourage, the way we forgive, the way we care. Separate, but together. Different, but as one. In Ephesians 2:10, we are called God's workmanship, created for good works in Christ Jesus. This word "workmanship" in the Greek, has its root in "poetry" or "work of art." You are God's poetry.

### **"SIGH NO MORE: A REFLECTION OF BEAUTY"**

In closing, I want to leave you with an image -- a picture of the fruit. If we are poetry as we work together, this film is the poetry about the fruit of our labor. I am going to show you my favorite JJ Starr film, "Sigh No More: A Reflection of Beauty." JJ Starr, a 2010 Seaver graduate is a filmmaker, and he is an artist. In a sense for me, his film represents all that is beautiful about our mission, our work, and our community.

On one level I see our students, I see the issues young people struggle with, I see transparency, and at once I see the vibrancy and fragility of youth. On another level I see the gospel, I see redemption, I see transformation in Christ.

I also see you and your work. Your service, your sacrifice, your dedication, your living out the mission in your various ways is inseparable from our students and their stories. God bless you, each and every one of you for your unique contribution.

