



Bringing Christ's Love into your Business

What does a company and culture look like that has been intentionally transformed to be based on Christ and Christian principles?

Perhaps, Donnelly Communications (www.donnellycommunications.com), founded by Martin Tighe speaker at BELIEVES on Tuesday, January 13, 2015, might be an example to look at.

“For 32 years my faith life was mostly separate from my work life,” Tighe shared in some of his opening remarks. “I was running the business all those years without allowing Christ into the business in a meaningful way – and that’s not to say that we were doing things wrong. The things we were doing I thought were right, but a love for Christ was not a focus in the business. In the last three years we have been running it with Christ clearly at the center.”



Tighe, who grew up a Catholic in Alabama and is the father of two sons, started his business in college in his bedroom in 1981. Today it has hundreds of employees and is trusted by many leading brands to deliver an exceptional call center customer experience as recognized by Donnelly’s clients and their customers, as well as Donnelly’s associates and competitors.

Under the leadership of Tighe’s partner and CEO, Dennis McMaster, the company began to state their values boldly, printing posters and putting the company’s values on all business cards. Those values include Faith and Stewardship as bookends to the more traditional company values. Tighe said the moment that changed things for he and his business, leading to Donnelly’s foundation being established in Christ, is when a Catholic priest introduced him to His Way at Work (www.hwaw.com).

“For me, since what was shared came through a Catholic priest, I read it,” Tighe recalled. “By the time I had read through just the first half of the material the priest gave me, I was so moved that I gave it to Dennis to read. Now that we have been given the gift of His Way at Work (HWAW), I want to share it with others, and am doing so all over the world.”

Tighe shared that like it or not, a culture gets created with or without management support, so he felt it is important to be intentional about the culture that his company has.

“We’re in a call center business,” Tighe stated. With over 500 employees and two locations, I don’t know everybody. One thing we did to make a very small step to say we’re about God. Putting Faith and stewardship on our business cards is the little move is what led us here now.”

Initially Tighe said even this little step made him feel like he was standing on the edge of a cliff, but it’s really all they needed to do. Over time the culture evolved to where they began opening business in prayer. Then Donnelly adopted other elements of HWAW such as bringing on a corporate chaplain, creating a chapel in the office, establishing an employee caring committee, and utilizing a HWAW coach.

“When the chaplain came into the picture, one of the first things he said was ‘I don’t care what your denomination or religion is, when I am here, I am going to love you with Christ’s love,’” Tighe recalled.

Peter Friezzel, the founder and creator and founder of HWAW Tighe emulated at Donnelly, spent six years to put all the components of HWAW in place that were implemented at Donnelly. Tighe and his team did it in six months. He says now it could be done in just three months with the help of a HWAW coach.

“One of the most eye opening things was what we saw with the chaplain’s presence,” Tighe began to explain. “In 32 years, I went to the hospital 10-12 times to visit employees or their family members. In the first 18 months of having a chaplain at our company, he went 282 times. Can you imagine how much I missed in 32 years?”

Another stat Tighe said was astonishing was that since the chaplain has been implemented, employees have called the chaplain 1,285 times to say they wanted to talk. Tighe said there’s really no limit to the chaplain’s reach, responding to request of employees for themselves or their family members 24 x 7.

The creation of the employee-led caring committee, which was budgeted with \$100K in the last 18 months to allocate to employees in need, has also been impactful.

“There’s pain and suffering among employees everywhere,” said Tighe. “On the first day when chaplaincy was introduced, the chaplain received a page from an employee. That night an employee had a friend over to their home and they brought their baby. Later that night the baby was accidentally killed. The chaplain responded immediately to the call, helped arrange the funeral, requested that the caring committee provide resources for funeral expenses and ministered to the grieving family. Without the chaplain in place, we may have never heard of this terrible tragedy or the opportunity to show Christ’s love in action.

Tighe then began to tear up as he shared, “As a company, to be able to touch an employee at that level” and then had to pause from the emotion. “We exchange labor for pay, but if you can touch people at that level, you can create family.”

He went on to add, “There’s a lot of suffering, but we as employers don’t see it. Are we showing Christ’s love? I thought I was for 32 years. I wasn’t.”



One thing that Tighe makes a point to do to keep instilling the culture, and knowing his employees, is meeting new training classes of new hires that join Donnelly.

“In the class I tell them, ‘If we’re not living up to our values, call me directly,’” he said.

One time, a 25-year-old new hire did just that – and he was crying. He told Tighe that when he had finished work the previous day, he went to the parking lot and found his car was broken into. Then when he got home, he had an eviction notice on his door. In short, the employee needed about \$1K to deal with these unexpected happenings.

“It turns out, the employee was a temp,” Tighe stated. “We’re not allowed to pay him.”

Since Tighe had spoken with the 25-year-old employee, however, he called the temp agency and said, “You have a problem. I will backstop \$500, and you all do the same.”

He said the temp agency told him they don’t do that.

Tighe’s response – Well you need to. Call it goodwill.

“Today, this guy is still working in or call center, and is a beautiful young man,” Tighe shared with a smile.

These examples of Christ’s love in action at Donnelly are just a few of the hundreds that Tighe says are out there in his company now.

On a more macro level in his business, Tighe shared that recently they had a key customer go bankrupt.

“One thing about being in business for 35 years is we take action,” he said. “We decided we’d have to take 7-10% pay cuts to avoid laying people off when this customer went bankrupt. We met with each employee face-to-face to share this with them. I was actually comforted by the employees – I got more hugs after these conversations than I could have ever imagined.”

Tighe said one lady who had just taken a pay cut told him ‘Thank you for my job. I have five kids. I’ll find a way to make it.’

“When you bring Christ’s love in your business ... everything changes.”

He added that if he was starting a business, he would now start here with Christ’s love.

“If you told me I would have a priest giving a healing Mass for our CEO’s wife in our office a few years ago, I would have told you, you were crazy,” Tighe chuckled and shared.



On a personal level, Tighe said the transformation over the last 18 months has been very rewarding to be a part of.

“A job all of a sudden becomes more than a paycheck,” he said. “If you sit next to people who are all bought in, it helps to create a more pleasant work environment. We’ve never been sued by an employee or customer in 32 years. Being a business owner and knowing your work is more than a transaction – it’s very satisfying.”

With this, Tighe ended his remarks and took questions from the audience.

Patrick Moore, Founder and Managing Partner at Set Consulting, asked Tighe how long it took for the stories of Christ’s love at work in his company to begin coming in.

Tighe responded, "Within months, within six month we were going. No pushback."

He added a key was that their CEO was bought in to all that was being implemented.

John Monroe, CFO at TradeRocket, then asked, "How have you balanced tough love in a business environment, especially at the management level?"

"That's a great question," Tighe replied. "Our chaplain will do financial counseling with employees, as well as provide other counsel. We think that if we are giving an employee money, we need to look at why he/she is in the situation to begin with so that he/she can get out of it."

Tighe said at the management level it's not unusual to have some conflict. In fact, Donnelly's CEO and President recently switched roles four months ago on the CEO's suggestion to help the company improve operations.

"We're polite and collegial, but honest. If we have to talk tough, we do it – behind closed doors."

Carl Macko, President of Synergy Capital Management, shifted the direction of the questions a bit because he was curious to know if having a chapel or Mass in the office had led to anyone converting their faith. Tighe said that actually one of the chaplain's report cards is on conversions.

"I don't watch it much," Tighe said. "To me the key is just to make sure Christ's love is in action. I think you show you are Christian by how you love."

Elaine Szeto, CTK parishioner, followed by asking Tighe what advice he could give to employees who want to implement some of what he's done at Donnelly.

"The question there is, 'Is there a leader who would be open to it some?'" Tighe said. "There are so many excuses – including fear – but is someone open? You must have a leader open to it. Once it gets shot down, it's hard to bring it back up."

Yovany Jerez, AT&T Training Manager, took the discussion back to a more financial perspective when he next asked, "From an ROI perspective, where are you now after HAWA?"

Tighe stated that they have spent about \$100K to give to employees through the employee-led caring committee and \$5K for the chapel. For Tighe, the ROI is infinite.

"We shut down an office and very few left," he said firmly. "To live and work in an environment that is positive – how can you put a price on that?"

He further added that one employee asked him, 'if you are cutting salaries (when the key customer went bankrupt recently), shouldn't the chapel and caring committee be cut?'

"We talked about that," Tighe mentioned, "and actually we boosted them."



Maureen Becker, CTK parishioner, then asked, "Have you seen the transformation within your company also take place in your customers?"

This question led Tighe to recall an interaction with a key customer.

"A key customer came to our office," he recalled. "We were about to do a business presentation for them when they asked, 'What is this faith stuff we see in your office?' As a result, we gave them the HWAW presentation instead, and I had a few HWAW books available to give them. On the way out, a few of the customer's executives asked, 'Do you have any extra books?'"

Tighe took one additional question from Yovany Jerez asking how Tighe has been able to discern legitimate from non-legitimate requests from employees seeking assistance, and then he fielded one final question from George Koenig, Principal at the Koenig Law Group.

"You've shared how you have challenges in business and this helps," Koenig said. "What about when things go good?"

"Great question," Tighe responded. "I do think about that, especially related to when we come out of this slight downturn as a result of the bankrupt customer. What can we do for our employees?"



To have a unique opportunity to view Tighe's presentation at BELIEVES that has just been recapped, click on the two following links which will allow you to see the full presentation in two parts:

Part 1: <http://vimeo.com/hwaw/1of2martintighectk13jan2015>

Part 2: <http://vimeo.com/hwaw/2of2martintighectk13jan2015>