



Living out Faith in Work

It's not often that the President of an automotive company, the CFO of a financial software company, the sales manager of a high-end hotel, and an outstanding high school student are all on a panel together... but it happened on June 14th as all four servant leaders took part in a panel discussion at BELIEVES on "Living Out Faith in Work."

The session began with the panelists introducing themselves and sharing a few thoughts on what it meant to them to "Live Out the Faith in Work" and how they each arrived at that understanding.



John Monroe, a married father of three children, is the Chief Financial Officer of TradeRocket, Inc., a start-up that provides invoice processing and payment services to companies; has over 30 years of experience in finance, accounting, and treasury; and is actively involved in the community through his engagement with Ignatius House Retreat Center, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, his home parish of Christ the King, and more.

"For me, I would drop the word workplace and just live the faith. It's just about being consistent," said Monroe. "One of the most formative experiences I have had professionally to live out the faith professionally is when I worked for Wells Real Estate Fund. Their mission was to 'glorify God and care for people.'"

Peter Hennessy, a father of three who just celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary with his wife, Anne, is a co-owner of Hennessy Automobile Companies, which operates 11 dealerships representing 12 brands and 17 franchises in metro Atlanta.

Peter, who is also involved in the community as Board Chair of Mercy Care, and is a founding board member of Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School, said for him living out his faith involves a sense of alignment between home, personal, and professional.

"We have been in business for 50 years, and my siblings and I who lead the business really follow what our dad demonstrated," Hennessy said. "Our father was not overtly faith-based, but just lived in a manner where he wouldn't treat a child different than a spouse, than a customer. It's really treating people the way you want to be treated. Not a new concept and it's treated us well. If our people are doing right versus doing what's profitable, we won't question that."



Elaine Szeto, a devoted parishioner at Christ the King, is a Sales and Catering Manager at the Hyatt Regency Atlanta Perimeter at Villa Christina since 2014. She was on the grand opening team, bringing more than 10+ years of hospitality experience to her role.

“Prior to coming to Atlanta, I lived my faith on Sundays at best,” Szeto shared. “We must treat each person as a child of God. For me, this starts with praying each day and asking the Holy Spirit to guide me through the day.”

Tanya Mbugua, a native of Nairobi, Kenya, who moved to America when she was two years old, currently lives with her mother and younger brother, while the rest of the family lives in Kenya. Tanya Mbugua is a junior at Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School, where she works five full days a month at Cox Automotive through the Cristo Rey's work study program. Because of Cristo Rey's generosity, Tanya has decided to pay it forward by creating an NGO to create a network of youth that care and support hospitalized children through reading and other exceptional activities. “Living out faith for me means bringing faith out in all aspects of life,” Tanya said.

As the panelists have navigated their career paths, what were things they listened to in order to navigate?

“I listen to God,” said Monroe. “A spiritual director can help with this. We need community because in my own head, I can spin things many ways. Also, key is prayer each day. I work for a startup, so there's always fear, a chance for a homerun, the whole mix.”

Eric Maust, VP of Business Banking for JPMorgan Chase Bank, found Monroe's remark intriguing and asked how Monroe draws the line between family and work time.



“Companies have no morals,” Monroe responded. “They're a legal entity. Morals are from people within them. There was a time in my career when my boss said I was going to have to travel somewhere on a Sunday and I said, ‘No.’ The boss backed off. He could have said, ‘You're fired,’ but didn't. For me, family was more important.”

Even though Monroe's hope is that in the long-term the balance between work and family points more towards family, he did acknowledge that there are definitely different seasons throughout the journey.

“I am going to be honest though, when our kids were younger I was like ‘thank God it's Monday.’ It's tough at home sometime. That's when we as men need to man up.”

Hennessy related with Monroe's recognition of the importance of prioritizing around family, but from a different perspective.

“I realize how demoralizing it can be to have to reprioritize priorities for work over family, especially in the retail world which can be very demanding. We pride ourselves on a sustainable approach.”

And how did Mbugua and Szeto weigh in on the topic?

Each shared reflections with a common theme of sustainability, but from a more personal and spiritual well-being perspectives.

“In prior jobs, when I decided to take Sundays off, my career actually got better,” Szeto said. “Five years ago, if I had someone tell me faith first, I would have said very funny. But Jesus is a good business partner.”

Then Mbugua remarked, “We get 3-5 hours of homework each night at Cristo Rey. The first year or two as a freshman and sophomore, all I did was homework. After sophomore year, I learned to find the balance to stay sane.”

She also added that when she had the chance to work with the CFO at Cox Automotive, she learned that if you make a decision it will go affect others so you have to think about it. She also learned that not everything’s going to go as planned.

“It may, or it may not.”

The conversation then shifted with the panelists being asked about what model/example from the Bible each related to when seeking to live out faith in work.

“Psalm 46:10 is what always comes up for me – Be still, and know that I am God,” said Szeto.

Hennessy said he turns to the gospel of Mark.

“In Mark, when they speak about ‘Love God through loving one’s neighbor’ that resonates. A lot of folks operate in a way that is based on ‘if we do this, this will happen.’ We go with, ‘if we treat customers like this, the bottom line will come.’ It’s not success first, then deal with consequences.”

Monroe turned to a different verse. “I believe it is in 1 Peter where scripture says, ‘cast your worries upon the Lord because He cares.’ Also, the story of David stands out because he committed the top sins but when confronted he sought forgiveness.”

Mbugua closed out the responses from the panel mentioning that she often is drawn to the story of the prodigal son.

“The reason the prodigal son story is my favorite is because I found it weird how a father who gave the first son all the money and it was wasted, would present a party and offer forgiveness to the son when he returned,” said Mbugua. “Forgiveness is what God wants.”

As the panelists spoke, the audience of close to 30 attendees continued to engage actively, keeping the session fairly discussion-focused.

CTK parishioner Maureen Becker commented on how we are inundated with technology in today’s society – often with a lot of the human element taken out of it. She wanted to know how each of the servant leaders on the panel is able to maintain a focus on people being human in today’s culture.

Hennessy responded, “People may buy a car every 5 years. There are lots of efficiency consultants that tell you to put all calls in a call center. However, we’ve always put a priority on the relationship between the client and the service advisor. We try to run a very relationship-oriented business. We have the luxury of looking at the long run. It allows us to value people, versus just monetize a seat.”

Cristo Rey’s VP of Advancement, Camille Naughton, who was in attendance, added in from the audience, “If you work virtually, how do you learn by watching? Cristo Rey is special because kids will learn more in day-to-day operations. I can’t imagine our Cristo Rey model working in a totally virtual world.”



Panelist John Monroe continued the dialogue, with an emphasis on the importance of relationships in his remarks.

“I used to manage accountants in a prior role. I’d say to them ‘get up and go make relationships’ – and specifically go make relationships with Executive Assistants. They’ll bail you out a lot,” commented Monroe.

He did state, however, that Google Hangouts is a technology that has helped because you can see people with video when talking – but there’s always need for relationships.

Szeto dialed things back a bit to Monroe’s comment about the importance of Executive Assistance, and offered support when she acknowledged, “Executive Assistants are my lifeline.”

Then she also added, “Sometimes people will say, I was the only person who said something nice to them that day.”

This last remark of Szeto’s led Hennessy to recall something Father Lopez said recently during Mass that he was impacted by.

“Father Lopez mentioned something in a recent homily at the 9 AM Mass about the last question on a nursing exam being ‘what’s the name of the janitor who cleans up at the end of the day.’ That made me think.”

The importance of personal interaction struck home with the audience, including Natalie Grasso, Board Relations & Development Manager at the Woodruff Arts Center.

“When Terry Neal was the interim president/CEO of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, he came around every day to see how things were going. He did that with everyone, every day. This resonated.”

As the session neared its end, the panelists were asked two final questions:

- “What advice would you give to live out the faith in work to someone who seeks to do so?” and
- “What’s the one thing that the panelists would want someone who is one day feeling called to live out faith in work to know that hasn’t been said?”

Hennessy and Mbugua spoke up with crisp responses on the first question.

“Actions speak louder than words,” Hennessy said.

Mbugua added, “Never go against your morals.”

Then on the question of what would they want someone to know that hasn’t been said, Monroe responded, “Live your faith as you can ... not as someone else says. Knowing one’s self starts with self-awareness.”

Mbugua mentioned, “Throughout the workplace there are other Christians seeking and struggling with the same things you are – so you’re not alone.”

And last but not least, Szeto closed with these words “Life’s hard and challenging, but by believing in God, he surprises me all the time.”