



Professional Ethics

Facing situations at work where seeking to reconcile faith, business, and ethics is involved can be gut-wrenching.

On Tuesday, May 9th at BELIEVES, an almost completely packed house had the chance to be a part of an interactive dialogue on professional ethics, and hear insights from Mike Cote (President and CEO of SecureWorks), Jeff Haidet (Chairman of Denton's US), and Jay Mitchell (Senior Counsel for King & Spalding's Healthcare practice) on the topic.



Mitchell, an Atlanta-native who has been a parishioner at the Cathedral of Christ the King since age 18, joined the King & Spalding team in the Fall of 2016 after previously serving as the Chief Legal Officer for Piedmont Healthcare for 15 years, and working at HCA prior to that.

"I really got into healthcare by accident," Mitchell told everyone as he introduced himself.

Haidet, a convert to Catholicism, also spoke of a long-term relationship with the Cathedral of Christ the King. He and his wife got married at CTK, and all their kids went to school at CTK.

"We've been very honored at Denton's to be the pro bono counsel for the Archdiocese of Atlanta," said Haidet, Chairman of Denton's USA, a firm he has been a part of since finishing law school.

Cote, who has been leading SecureWorks for close to 15 years, just recently completed chairing the capital campaign for Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Atlanta.

"All four of our kids are graduates of Marist High School, and then all also graduated from Boston College, where my wife and I also went and earned our degrees."

Following the introductions, each of the leaders shared about the frameworks they use to think about ethics, and if that varied any when thinking about professional ethics.

"I try to make sure it's not different," said Mitchell. "When I was a young lawyer, I had a discussion about church life with a fellow lawyer in the firm I was at. The other lawyer said, 'I don't think what's learned in church is applicable in professional life.' When I heard this I thought, 'This can't be right.' I have never been able to put on different coats."

Mitchell said that in healthcare in particular, he feels that doing right aligns with faith.

"I would rather defend keeping someone alive than pulling the plug."

Haidet commented that we all have different layers and aspects of ethics we go by – such as professional codes, business ethics, and personal ethics.

“They don’t always have to do with doing right, sometimes their just rules. They often intersect, but not always. As a leader you have to look at things through all the lenses and be able to justify decisions in all – hopefully they all come out together.”

Cote told the audience he would take a different route in speaking about the framework he uses to think about ethics since he doesn’t have a legal background.

“My dad told me two words that stuck with me – ‘never change.’ The world’s gotten gray, but I try to see black and white and do what’s right.”

Cote added, “Mark Twain is quoted as saying, ‘Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.’”



Hearing what Mitchell, Cote, and Haidet stated, CTK Parishioner Jim King wondered how the three leaders handle situations where they need to recuse themselves.

“There is always an option to recuse,” Haidet replied. “You can also say I don’t want to be a leader, but that won’t last too long if you want to be a good leader.”

Haidet added that in listening to Mitchell’s earlier comments about law in healthcare, he feels the corporate law matters he deals with vary from the life and death situations in healthcare.

“In corporate law it is different. I never really feel I have an option to walk away. It’s a discussion to get through it.”

TradeRocket CFO John Monroe then asked, “What about external influences? You may have public investors and they may want to go one way, and you want to go another. How do you handle it?”

“We’re in internet security,” Cote responded as he spoke up first based on his experience from SecureWorks. “We had an opportunity to protect a porn site – a really large company and potential client. I made the decision that we’re not going to do it. Just not going to do it.”

Mitchell added, “If I wanted I could set up a dummy LLC and create invoices to get approved and then go buy my wife jewelry, or stuff like that. However, for me I have beliefs. Another part is fear. Little stuff can create a slippery slope and before you know it, it’s too late. You can’t serve two masters.”

As the dialogue progressed, Cote turned to his fellow panelists and commented, “It seems like as lawyers this is front and center all the time for you. You all deal with this all the time.”

Haidet acknowledged this to be the case.

“We have rules all the time, but there’s always temptation.”

Michael Kirchner, Regional Sales Manager at Principal Financial, then asked, “How do we get things back to people owning up to stuff? It Seems like this started to slip after the mortgage crisis.”

Cote again spoke up first.

“I’d take it to this thing – the cell phone,” he said as he pointed to his. “It’s a different conversation than if you’re looking someone in the eye. I try to explain the importance and value of human interaction to my kids all the time.”

Acknowledging the underlying sense that there’s been a decline in people owning up to things, CTK Parishioner Sharon Zukauckas mused about the legal profession getting us back to “true north.”

Mitchell responded first by seeking to share what he felt many may not be aware of in his field.

“95% of legal matters reach settlement in some way,” he stated. “I don’t think as a society we hear about settlements because it’s not sexy for the media to cover. Since I have gotten out of law school there’s been an abundance of mediation centers that have developed all throughout the country.”

Cote drew from a personal time in his mid-30’s when everything in his professional and financial world was crumbling, and shared this experience led him to shift to trust in the Lord more rather than focusing on money.

“This has allowed me tremendous freedom.”

He also stated, “I’ve had a situation come up where our general counsel committed insider trading, and I had to fire them. On the other side, I have had a situation come up with a different general counsel who had three kids and was diagnosed with terminal cancer. We voted to keep him on salary, but then the Board said ‘no,’ so I had to come back and say it’s the right thing to do to keep him on salary.”

In short, Cote said it’s up to each of us to lead and have faith – not just the lawyers.



The panelists were then asked if success ever got to a point where it was so good that they could throw ethics and God’s standard out the window?

Haidet responded simply, “When ethics aren’t good, things get under strain.”

The question the panelists were asked on the flip side was how they instilled ethics and God’s standard in their firms and sustained compliance.

Haidet again responded.

“We have rewards systems that reinforce messages, but it’s how you lead. You don’t always prevail. You may face a situation where you have to walk from an organization,” he said. “Fortunately, I have never had to do this though.”

Building off of Haidet's remarks, Cote stated, "I've been fired twice and it's been great. Guys are told we plow through, but quitting is not a bad thing. You're not a failure."

He again went back to the situation when he was in his mid-30s and his world was crumbling in the firm.

"I knew I was in the wrong place, but lacked the courage to quit. I think all of this is particularly incumbent on men."

Mitchell added, "I think it's on us as people for how we live."

The panelists then fielded a few questions to dig deeper on what processes they put in place and steps they take to audit what's going on, handle challenging matters, and learn from what happens.



Mitchell commented that the healthcare field utilizes root cause analysis so there's always a focus on learning from what's happened. He indicated he also always tries to come up with options to present to people because then it's about choices and consequences.

Haidet's remarks stemmed from reflecting on relationships.

"Sometimes we've gotten in relationships we shouldn't have been in. Maybe not enough diligence was done upfront, or we chose to look the other way."

Cote focused bluntly on dealing with gray.

"Anytime something's gray, I know I need help so I call people for advice – at least two."

He also shared when in the role of CEO with the risk of isolation he needs people around him to call balls and strikes.

Haidet concurred with Cote saying isolation is a horrible thing.

"Once you start living inside your head, crazy things happen. I engage civically, and that reinforces servant leadership. In my firm, I don't get paid the most, and I'm glad I don't. We had to make tough decisions on compensation recently, and I have to have credibility if I am going to ask others to do the same. It's about seeking to be servant leaders."

Before the session closed, Elaine Szeto, Director of Sales for Wyndham Worldwide asked, "How do you make sure ego doesn't get in the way – especially when I know I'm right?"

Everyone laughed.

Haidet responded, "I go home and my wife keeps me in check."

Mitchell recalled a scene from a Holly Hunter movie where one of the characters turned to another and sarcastically asked if it was great to always be right. The response – No, it's horrible.

Mitchell's takeaway ...

"I think God has a way of checking us."