



C-Suite View of Reconciling Faith, Business, and Ethics

What's it like to be in the C-Suite of an organization seeking to reconcile faith, business, and ethics?

This was the perspective that Alan LeBlanc, President of Brewed to Serve Restaurant Group, and Jay Wolverton, CEO of Wolverton & Associates, shared as a part of an engaging panel discussion on Tuesday, August 8th at BELIEVES on the topic of a "C-Suite View of Reconciling Faith, Business, and Ethics."



LeBlanc, who founded Brewed to Serve in the mid-1990s and has grown it to an organization with multiple restaurants and over 150 employees, was raised a cradle Catholic, growing up in western Massachusetts as a youth and taught by Polish nuns in school.

When asked 'What is prayer?' and 'What is reconciling?' LeBlanc said, "I don't like the word reconciling. I like integration because integrating your faith into all you do is I think the most important thing you do."

He added, "Reconciling is looking backwards. I guess that's where prayer comes in. I am the creative type, so I am trying to be disciplined in prayer and faith. I'm about 60% there. Bible study on Wednesday AM has been a big thing."

Wolverton, who is originally from Tennessee, and has had all his kids graduate from Pius High School, founded Wolverton & Associates in 1989 just a few years out of college.

"I'd concentrate on prayer personally," Wolverton said in sharing his thoughts on what prayer is. "The greatest gift God gives us is prayer. I try to think of it as one-on-one conversation with him sitting there."

Wolverton said when he was driving to and from work in the past he used to listen to the radio, but over the years he found more peace in turning it off and just listening to God to talk with him during those times.



The two leaders not only shared thoughts on prayer from a personal basis, but also how prayer continues for them in their work.

“I set up a structure to help with that,” LeBlanc stated. “Everyone knows Wednesday morning is bible study, and management meetings are right after that, so it helps to get me prepared for those meetings.”

Wolverton said, “If you’re living prayerfully, and faithfully, there’s a prayer in there somewhere. It’s woven in there.”

John Monroe, CFO of TradeRocket, then asked Wolverton and LeBlanc, “You all lead totally different organizations with different employee bases, but both about 100-200 employees. How do you deal with faith with so many different people involved?”

“There are always lots of contradictions – one being around focusing on the lone sheep versus the herd,” replied LeBlanc. “I used to go after the lone sheep a lot. I also used to be more compassionate and flexible, but then I realized it’s impacting everything else and people’s lives depend on it. I hate rules, but you have to have them. There’s should versus can. It’s hard.”

Wolverton followed by stating, “I try not to preach from the pulpit, but I will say this is God’s business and we’re blessed. I try to have things centered on the Golden Rule, and live by it.”

Building on Wolverton’s remarks, LeBlanc furthered the insights.

“We have an economic obligation but we don’t run our business for the money. We love what we do and run on mission. The question is, ‘Is the business true to the mission?’ because that leads to sustainability, and that comes from core values. We created our company based on a mission to serve.”

The two leaders were then asked to share about the guiding truths from Christ they turn to the most when navigating through professional ethical dilemmas.



“We have codes in our profession we have to go by,” said Wolverton. “Our work must be for the public good. In engineering, we’ll develop projects, so people in the real estate business always want to know where the next development is. We’ve been approached by people saying, ‘Tell me where the next one is and you can be in the LLC.’ We say, ‘It’s been a pleasure doing business with you.’ It is subtle stuff like that – 2-3 slips and you’re done.”

LeBlanc said, “You have little things all day long, but closing a business is a big one. With banks you come to a point where you almost have no control. The only control when going bankrupt is to say ‘please’ to the banks. In the end, the best way to not have ethical dilemmas is to take steps to avoid them. Deal with the technical dilemmas early on, or you’ll end up with an ethical dilemma. Deal with the problems of the day in the day they exist. Don’t kick things down the road.”

LeBlanc then said with a smile, “I feel so blessed. I tell people ‘Stop using up my blessings, because it scares me they might run out.’”

Chadwick Smith, a business intelligence consultant who regularly attends BELIEVES, asked Wolverton and LeBlanc, “Have you ever had a situation where an employee ran afoul of your ethics?”

Wolverton went first in responding.

“The mom of my son’s friend came on board in the past, but shortly after she did, she ran afoul. We discovered that she was doing things on a personal level that put our business at risk since she was an officer of our company. Therefore there was not only business/professional stuff that we had to deal with, but there was also the human side as well.”

LeBlanc spoke next.

“We try to look at the person. Perhaps the most clear-cut example was a situation with a high-level employee,” he said. “We were in the process of having a contract for him to be a partner, and were traveling and visiting a sushi kitchen in another city. While we were there, the high-level employee took a spoon from the back of the sushi kitchen. Wow! People do strange things. He had a problem. The action we took was for his own good, and was needed for his growth.”



LeBlanc went on to share his view that businesses are complex, and people are always the most challenging part.

“People want to be told what to do. They’ll say, ‘Tell me what to do.’ My response is, ‘No, what do you think you should do?’”

The way LeBlanc addresses this in his company is through culture.

“Culture is key – this is why I hate rules,” he said. “We have three restaurants but the training is the same for all. People must know products and services, and live culture. You will make mistakes. If not, you’re not learning.”

CTK Parishioner Jim King then asked LeBlanc and Wolverton how they apply all they shared about reconciling faith, business, and ethics, when it comes to working with external partners.

LeBlanc’s answer was straight forward – use people who aren’t in it just for the money.

“They need to do it for mission too,” he stated. “You also have to educate your vendors. If I call a vendor in, usually it’s to separate because the issue is trust. As long as we have the relationship of trust that we began with, we’re good. We tell them this up front. If I have to call you in it is probably to terminate.”

Wolverton commented, “Five years ago we had to focus on culture. I got a coach that’s faith-based. She began working with me first, then the Executive Team, and now the top 20% of our company.”

As the discussion wound down, there was time to ask Wolverton and LeBlanc one more question about what they believed is the most common misconception or fear people have when it comes to reconciling faith and ethics professionally.

“I’ll explode this question a bit,” responded LeBlanc. “We’re focusing on fear, and it affects our lives so much. I try to jettison fear from life at all times. If we’re following our faith fully – minimize fear, maximize faith. I try to replace fear with love when reading the Bible.”

“I couldn’t agree with Alan more,” Wolverton tossed in, “and the importance of faith in all this.”

“Know God’s the greatest resource to go to, whether it’s to say, ‘Lord, I screwed this up,’ or whatever the case.”