

7 Habits of Spiritually-Focused Leaders: How do we put them into action and know the Spirit is leading?

The discussion around habits of spiritually-focused leaders in the Spring of 2021 continued at BELIEVES at the May 11, 2021 BELIEVES session as Roth Kehoe, Partner at Holland & Knight, shared thoughts and engaged with those in attendance around the topic of “7 Habits of Spiritually-Focused Leaders: How do we put them into action and know the Spirit is leading?”



“Easter and Pentecost are interesting from a spirituality standpoint, but also a work standpoint,” Kehoe said to open his remarks.

“I am fascinated by how the apostles felt after Jesus’ death. Did they feel conscripted once Jesus left and were forced to take up the mantle?”

He also commented, “I am interested in how others are influenced by having their spirituality as a part of what they do.”

Then he began transitioning to talking about the habits he identified.

“I don’t necessarily have seven habits like the title infers. There are four though that stand out. The first is **calming leadership.**”

Kehoe remarked that calming reflection and sacrifice is what Jesus showed.

“In terms of applying this myself in a work situation, it starts with understanding the issues my team has,” he said. “Corporate M&A presents some unique challenges. Yesterday an associate panicked because he felt a checklist had been left off a transaction that had closed a few weeks ago. I wasn’t sure this was the case, but what I knew was certain was that panic wasn’t going to do anything about that.”

In his life, Kehoe has found the calming approach and methodology of the Gospels has always been instructive.

“It adds more to the civil discourse in society or with any type of activity.”

The second habit Kehoe then spoke of was **taking the opportunity to direct efforts to civic-minded activities.**

In his legal field, Kehoe commented how lawyers are often encouraged to do pro bono work. However, he believes requiring it does something against what is intended.

A recent example of this second habit in action played itself out for Kehoe during the last 12 months or so during the pandemic.

“How many of you know of the Center for Global Health Innovation?” he asked. “Not many people do, but it was created from the merger of two other health and biotech firms that took place in the Summer/Fall of 2019 and has a Chamber of Commerce element to it to attract and create jobs for Atlanta and convey the importance of Atlanta. The new focus of the organization is on the delivery of health solutions globally – not creating new solutions, but rather focusing on the logistics involved to deliver quality healthcare.”

When the pandemic hit in 2020, the organization faced an extremely daunting task of getting involved with the delivery of PPE, ventilators, and other COVID related items.

“A lot of time was spent dealing with obtaining items from China to get them distributed amidst all the hoarding that was going on by countries,” Kehoe told everyone. “The Center had to focus on identifying shortages in the world and ensuring distribution had a more rational approach. It did so by focusing on equipment at the source and entering into contracts at that point.”

He said that all the efforts to do this were phone calls and virtual meetings.

“It was an amazing set of circumstances.”

Unfortunately, not everything went smoothly or as planned.

Kehoe stated, “In one instance, equipment was purchased in China and arrived at the port to ship, only to then find out that an Italian company had purchased all of the equipment in cash to resell it, so our Letter of Credit was returned.”

Even though it may have been less effective than hoped, Kehoe shared that the motivation of the Center’s efforts was moral and ethical, while health got addressed as a part of it.

“In the face of what might have been some of the most selfish times in our world, the Center was focused on a more ecumenical approach,” he shared in reflection. “It makes me feel great that we stopped some of the equipment from getting into profiteers’ hands. The integrity of the effort was probably the most important aspect.”

Kehoe also commented that amidst all the efforts, sadly he also saw that there were a number of countries’ governments that just didn’t try.

Kehoe then transitioned to the third habit he feels is important for a spiritually-focused leader – **setting expectations of those working with and around you, not just in terms of performance, but how they interact with customers, vendors, colleagues, and others.**

“This is critical both from spreading the calm leadership and projecting the calm leadership approach outside. It’s more civil for those across the table and around you.”

In Kehoe’s industry, he remarked that people often feel bullying or a lack of civil discourse is the way to get stuff done.

“This is not something I buy, or believe reaches resolution,” said Kehoe. “I am not sure if this is some sort of spirituality, maybe it’s just a form of pragmatism. Our country could use some more civil discourse, and we owe it to ourselves as a part of the Catholic religion we are in to do this in society.”

Finally, Kehoe shared about the fourth habit he identified.

“The fourth habit is to just **be a better person every day,**” he said. “It’s really hard. If I point to anything that is a true habit, it is this. If we are called to something as Catholics, it’s this fourth habit.”

What makes it hard, according to Kehoe, is the energy necessary to continue and try.

“The apostles’ initial reaction in Acts was to ‘duck and hide,’” he stated. “I think that’s a normal human response. The disciples were expected to do better everyday despite this. That’s exhausting.”

What makes it possible, or can help to make it possible, said Kehoe, is intentionality to plan and reflect.

“Planning and reflection is required and is a consistent element noticed when it’s done well,” Kehoe mentioned. “I’m a Type A person and love lists. This process helps me to overcome the desire to not ‘duck and hide.’”

CTK Parishioner Felipe Buzeta then asked Kehoe, “How do you keep ego from taking over when things are going well?”

Kehoe answered, “I think life has a way of correcting everything when ego kicks in.”

BELIEVES session attendee Lynn Clark then commented that she loved the calming influence communicated, but wondered when or if it was necessary to channel a bit of the Jesus that flipped over the tables of the money changers.

“I don’t know if I’ve ever flipped tables,” said Kehoe, “but I have encountered harsh response situations.” Most of the time Kehoe said he has been able to do so without yelling, as he does not believe yelling is effective or Christian.

He then added, “Not listening, or intentionally not receiving the message is probably why Jesus flipped the tables.”

Chris Dillon, a colleague of Kehoe’s at Holland & Knight then spoke up saying, “When we get 1-on-1, that’s when civil discourse can take place.”

Furthering the comments on the topic, Kehoe commented that he believes listening is an underappreciated skill – though he has noted that the emphasis on listening in negotiating classes he is familiar with is growing.

Kehoe’s remarks prompted CTK Parishioner Eric Maust to follow with a question.

“How do you rebuild the courage to try again after failing?”

“That’s the prayer every day,” answered Kehoe. “We have to give space to fail. You’re not going to be perfect, and you can’t let today’s failures dictate tomorrow.”

Kehoe was then asked what role he sees repentance playing in all of this.

“That’s a great question. Catholicism gives us a thoughtful framework for how to move past things. Without repentance, it is hard to acknowledge failure. How do we get better without repentance?”