

## Leading redemptively

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Leading an organisation as a Christian throws up some difficult ethical dilemmas at times. One of the organisations that I lead in Africa has a small number of people working in different regions mostly on their own rather than in an office. This poses its own challenges of accountability and ensuring that staff are functioning well and are supported in their work. Part of the solution lies in recruiting people who are self starters and mature in their faith and commitment. Some time ago we decided to provide an opportunity for a young man to work with us helping train pastors in farming. He had grown up in the slums with no father and we had been involved in supporting him through his education and later through Agricultural college. Here was someone who had become a believer and had begun to demonstrate leadership abilities whilst at college and was enthusiastic about teaching others. All went very well for the first year but I had always had some concerns about the lack of day to day accountability and supervision as this person was required to be out and about often travelling some distance from other staff.

#### **When staff fall into sin**

Following up on these concerns we uncovered the fact that this person had been led astray in the manner of the youth described in the first few chapters of Proverbs. This had also led to drinking and smoking and eventually to no work being done. Reports and some expense claims had been falsified and all of the misdemeanours were confessed when the individual was challenged. Our employment contracts have clauses to cover such gross misconduct and as there was an unequivocal admission of the offences the staff member could be dismissed immediately without any breach of their legal employment rights. Such rights of course vary from country to country and it's important that we are cognisant of the laws of the country in which we operate and that employment contracts reflect required practice.

#### **A leaders response**

The challenge for the leaders was to decide, in the light of the facts, what course of action to take. The witness of the organisation had been compromised and time and money stolen yet we also felt that instant dismissal would likely see the individual slide further into sin as we lost any opportunity to influence his behaviour. In a church context the teaching is fairly clear about how we should deal with persistent sin in the life of a believer.

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” Matthew 18:15-17

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church we learn of a man who is having an incestuous relationship with his stepmother but who is unrepentant. It seems that the church had done nothing about this so Paul chastises them and insists that this man be put out of the church. There is clearly a principle of retaining the purity of the church and also of warning the members of the serious consequences of sin.

“As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.” 1 Timothy 5:20

In the case of a Christian organisation the purity and integrity of the organisation is surely also at stake when a staff member persists in sin and in our case it was clear that the testimony of our organisation was in danger of being compromised.

## **Restoring the fallen**

The restoration of someone who has fallen into a pattern of sin has a number of stages:

- confession
- repentance
- restitution

Given that the individual in our case had openly confessed to their sin we had in the words of Matthew's gospel "gained a brother". Although legally we had the right to dismiss the person was this the right thing to do, would this just amount to ostracising them, treating them as an outsider (a Gentile and a tax collector)? In the church the clear purpose of discipline is to see a brother or sister restored and walking again with our Lord and ultimately to protect the purity of the church and it's testimony. In Paul's letter to the Galatians he makes it clear that we need to go beyond confronting someone with sin and that we should seek to restore them.

"Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Galatians 6:1-2

### **A call to action**

Repentance is not a statement but rather a restored pattern of behaviour consistent with a follower of Jesus. If we are to help someone who has fallen into a pattern of sin and they desire to repent, restoration must be a process where we come alongside, offer practical goals and objectives for the individual that will help them turn around, walk and continue to walk in the right direction.

As we discussed within the leadership team our options of dismissal or an attempt at restoration, a key component was what would a programme of restoration look like for this young man. The situation was complex because we were not dealing with one specific sin but a breakdown in behaviour that impacted several areas of his private and work life. As we reflected and prayed a programme involving reassignment to another part of the country and with close supervision provided by one of the mature pastors in training who had a good agricultural background began to emerge. The objective was to provide an environment where good work practices could be re-established and monitored and where there would be some personal moral accountability.

### **Actions have consequences**

In deciding to opt for the restoration option we believed that it was right to suspend the worker on half pay and offer a three month trial period as part of the process of financial restitution for falsely claimed expenses. This would also enable us to see if his repentance was working out in practice and would also signal the seriousness of the situation that he had gotten into. A further complication was a relationship that we also felt needed to be regularised to enable him to walk uprightly before God and both for his own testimony and that of the organisation.

Part of the process that we felt we needed to go through was to make public amongst the rest of the staff and volunteers what had happened, what we planned to do about it and why. In attempting a programme of restoration it is important to ensure that other staff workers and the wider community that we serve is not left with the impression that sin doesn't count and that these things are swept under the carpet. As we embarked down this track we were affirmed by staff and volunteers as we sought to model a what we believed to be a redemptive course that Jesus, our great redeemer, would want us to take. A further step was making public amongst the pastors that we serve this course of action so that there is a testimony of how we as an organisation seek to deal with sin and it's consequences. In addition the person is now holding themselves accountable to all staff and volunteers and the wider community we serve.

### **Is there more than one way?**

Some leaders may have taken a different path, certainly we could have acted well within the law and employee rights with an instant dismissal with no financial recompense. We could have

reported the matter to the police and possibly there may have been some ramifications for the individual from that. In a secular context it is much harder to offer a second chance because most if not all workers are not sympathetic to the Christian ideal and it could be miss understood. I remember a Managing Director of a well know firm who is a believer asking for my counsel when he discovered that a senior sales manager had been found using his work laptop to view pornography when travelling. What to do, offer a second chance or dismiss as this was provided for in his contract? The issues here were challenging because any action taken by the MD could have been easily misunderstood by non Christian colleague, his Group CEO and other staff. Without a Christian moral foundation with the teaching of forgiveness and redemption, any second chance could have been interpreted as turning a blind eye on the situation.

As we discussed and prayed about what would be the right thing to do it became clear that there was no option, painful though it was to my friend, but dismissal.

### **Acting by the Book**

In Christian organisations and the church we can and perhaps should act differently depending on the circumstances and the sin involved. Our only manual is the word of God and we have to seek wisdom to understand how to work out some of it's principles both in the church and in an organisational context. It's difficult to be hard and fast about what the right course of action might be in different situations and circumstances and these are the dilemmas that face Christian leaders in a fallen world where we as Christian can also fall into sin. I am reminded of King David and the depth of sin that he fell into when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then sought to cover it up by having her husband killed. The story reminds us of the forgiveness of God that is possible when the sin is confronted and repented of. No doubt David lived with the consequences of this sin for the rest of his life, one of which was the pain of his son dying.

If we are running a Christian organisation then we have the blessing of the freedom to act in accordance with what we believe God teaches us rather than solely in the more restrictive light of the law of the land. Had the person not been a believer then I have no doubt that he would have been dismissed because without Christ there is no hope of redemption and restoration from sinful behaviour. The glorious hope that we have as believers is that if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

### **Giving it time**

Will the course of action we took be successful? Will our brother and member of staff be restored to a close walk with the Lord again and contribute fully in his role? Only time will tell as we monitor his progress and seek to provide the mentoring and supervision that has been lacking. We draw some encouragement from learning that this person cannot stop asking "why do we should love him so much and have given him a second chance". Hopefully as we, as an organization, try to model in some small way the love that God shows to us, he will be truly repentant throwing himself on the unconditional love that God shows to sinners.

There are of course lessons to be learnt as leaders and questions to be asked. Did we expect too much with out closer supervision, could we have done more to nurture this individual. A key lesson that one of our leaders is learning is the need to adopt a more hands on leadership style with those who are less experienced and mature even if they are very knowledgeable.

All of us who face the challenges of dealing with sin in our organisations and who seek to restore rather than simply dismiss can be encouraged by what James writes:

"My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." James 5:19-20

