



Marketplace Moments

Bibliophoria

Rising Above a Toxic Workplace

Gary Chapman, Paul White & Harold Myra.

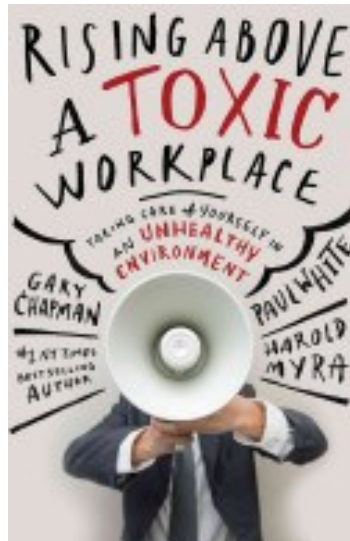
Those of us who have a number of years in the workplace would probably have been wounded one way or another by horrible bosses from hell or backstabbing colleagues.

"In our wired, globalized world, disruptive events impact markets, technology, stability—and people, as we continually see in the news. This upheaval batters workers morale in everything from manufacturing to retail to IT, from schools to local government to hospitals and banks. Employees struggle with economic uncertainties, downsizing, and demands to do more with less. They—we- feel overworked, underpaid, insecure and underappreciated."

In Singapore, many faces the above with the changing structure of our economy from manufacturing to more diversified finance and service sectors. Globalization has brought greater competition to good jobs, while lower income group struggle with low cost labor and rising cost of living.

In this living book filled with anecdotes and stories of real people, through the counselling work of Chapman and experiences of the other two co-authors. The stories are not only confined to the for profit world but a whole chapter on "Hidden poisons in nonprofits and churches". What honesty!

Each chapter also closes with a



segment on survival strategies for the 'oppressed' and a segment of leadership lessons for the 'oppressors'.

Like rabbits living by the freeway, the authors used this illustration to show that though kept safe from being run over by vehicles speeding past them, being exposed noise and fumes to the constant passing by cars and trucks proofed detrimental to the rabbits and their offspring.

How can believers keep a healthy spirituality and walk with God in a toxic workplace and at the same time be aware of what is gnawing away at our emotional well being, that would eventually hit hard at our physical, spiritual, mental and even our family life? One of the chapters speaks of the 'Descent to the Dark Side'.

The shortfall here perhaps is the much focus on survival and less so on rising above. Many of the cases ends with the leaving the workplace rather than transforming the work-

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Of the Heart and Mind

Culture of Images

One advantage of having a teenage daughter is the ability to get fairly updated second hand information of what is 'in' and what's not. Korean pop culture has swept Asia and even Western nations alike in recent years with their beautiful and handsome artists, glittering fashion, fancy dance moves and splendid stage lighting and décor.

According to Euny Hong, author of 'The birth of Korea Cool', "The Korean popular wave of culture is known as "Hallyu". President Obama referred to it during a March 2012 visit to South Korea, in the context of discussing the nation's technical and pop culture innovations."

Curious one day, I asked my daughter what is so capturing about Korean pop songs, that get them buying loads of CDs, chasing after Korean stars, crying over them etc. After all, none of what they are singing makes any sense since most of them do not even have rudimentary understanding of the language, save perhaps the phrase, "sarang hey" (translated "I love you") littered all over.

My daughter paused for a moment and insightfully said (paraphrased), "it is not the content, but the image; all the other things in the package matters more than the meaning of the songs. It is the melody, the beat and rhythm, the looks and dance moves, and cool factor."

This trend is not particularly new, starting in the late 80s with MTV. Even as far back in 1967, a book entitled "The Medium is the Message" by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore writes, "The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and reevaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to "the others." And they're changing dramatically.

Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication. The alphabet, for instance, is a technology that is absorbed by the very young child in a completely unconscious manner, by osmosis so to speak. Words and the meaning of words predispose the child to think and act automatically in certain ways. The alphabet and print technology fostered and encouraged a fragmenting process, a process of specialism and of detachment. Electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement. It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media."



Jesus engagement with His culture took the form of His life with the disciples for 3 year of his public ministry as well as the many parables that we now have in writing of the four Gospels. However, some churches are still stuck in the era of the enlightenment without fully comprehending that the form and the medium no longer have relevance to a new generation. No matter how rich and solid is the content, they fall of deaf ears and blind eyes. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we see the glitz show of progressive churches with rock concert like worship services and preachers that have attained 'idol' and pop-star status without a full and holistic gospel message that undergirds all they do.

In a culture of images, how can faithful teachers of the Word of God, communicate biblically in a culture of images, without dumbing down the message, worse yet, compromise the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How do parents disciple their children and navigate through this myriad of popular cultures without ourselves first being grounded in the word of God? How can believers become the medium that demonstrate the Gospel in the workplace?

Open Eyes in a Darkened Room

The Rewrite

Once upon a time, Keith Michaels (Hugh Grant - *About a Boy*, *Love Actually*) was an Award-winning Hollywood screenwriter, but divorce and a string of unsuccessful films have left him with nothing but bad debts and blank pages. So when his agent arranges a job as guest screenwriting professor at a remote university in upstate New York, a desperate Keith can't say no. Initially hoping to give minimal effort to actual teaching so he can focus on his next script, Keith unexpectedly finds himself becoming invested in his students lives, including Holly (Marisa Tomei, *The Wrestler*), a single mom looking to start her own new chapter. (*Rotten Tomatoes*)

Keith wasn't very interested in teaching to begin with and believe that greatness could not be taught. He takes the view that one either have it or doesn't. While Holly is the optimist that believes things can get better and she is back to school to learn. On a certain level, some may be able to discuss on this whole topic if talent is born innately or taught. As Keith guided a few of his students, one was able to sell his script to Hollywood, while others seem to have to work more at it. Perhaps we walk away, and less upbeat than the movie attempts to portray that we can all learn to be great with a great teacher.

My recent conversation with a friend and professor who is an expert in curriculum and instructional methods, spoke much on the



disposition of teaching and learning. That a teacher must have an attitude to care enough to teach and students must have a desire to learn. Empirically, these attitudes have significant bearing on the outcomes of learning and doing.

At times, our talents are discovered in our attempts to survive through various life situation, much like Keith in the story.

Another angle comes from a very real and significant phenomenon of second or even third careers, particularly those in their 40s and 50s. This group have young families and too young to retire. A recent report I read says that ageism in Singapore is a fairly serious problem and many in the above age category takes about 1 to 1.5 years to find a new job. There seems also to be a structural employment problem where jobs available may not match the training and experience of many PMETs (Professionals, Managers, Executives and Technicians).

Perhaps many like Keith will reminisce their past glories, the quick rise to management or the C-suite. Yet in the lull of a continually faltering economy, there lies around Singapore a sea of foreign talents who are willing to work harder for less. This is exacerbated by the high cost of living in Singapore and the legitimate (but sometimes unrealistic) desire by parents to provide a good education and other opportunities for their children.

At the end of the day, runaway inflation and high cost of living need to be addressed at the macro level and stimulating good jobs for Singaporeans is a priority. This is not only the role of government but also by businesses and entrepreneurs. On a personal level, particularly for believers, we need to search for our calling more seriously and to moderate our expectations and lifestyles.

As much as we aspire, for a better next 50 years for Singapore, the ebb and flow of global geopolitics may not be favorable. We all need to be prepared.

**Marketplace
Christian Network**

Teban Garden Post Office
PO Box 669
Singapore 916003



Phone: +65 6872 4732
Email:
info@marketplacechristian.net
Web-site:
▶ www.marketplacechristian.net

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at the Workplace**

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