



Religion in the Workplace: Inclusion, Freedom, and Morale

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Religion in the Workplace: Inclusion, Freedom, and Morale

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Diversity in the workplace is a huge priority for today's corporations. It is no secret that by fostering a diverse workplace, the business will have a variety of perspectives, creativity, and a greater global impact. Organizations with diverse and inclusive cultures are six times more likely to be innovative, six times more likely to anticipate change and respond effectively, and two times more likely to meet or exceed financial targets.¹ Companies are so determined to ensure they hire a diverse group of people, that they have even required diversity training programs. These diversity programs focus on race, age, gender, and sexual orientation.

But, what about religion?

The Religious Freedom and Business Foundation (RFBF) saw the crucial need for freedom of religion in the workplace. The RFBF is an organization that's passionate about integrating religion in the workplace. Its purpose is to collaborate with corporations and help business leaders see the value of a work environment where employees can be open about their religious beliefs. The RFBF helps businesses by administering religion-focused corporate training and consulting to understand how the business is run and how they can best implement religious freedom in their workplaces. They also publicize examples of companies making their workplace more faith-friendly to inspire others and show the positive results of integrating religion in the workplace. Increased religious acceptance in the workplace starts with understanding what freedom of religion looks like and how it can be implemented, which effects then lead to an increase in morale and economic benefits.

What does freedom of religion look like?

The ideal workplace includes having employees feel comfortable and welcome to discuss their religious beliefs: the result being that of intentional effort from company leadership and employees working in unity. Freedom of religion provides a safe space where individuals can be open about who they are. In an interview with the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation's president Brian Grim, he expressed, "This is about helping people of faith connect with one another for the purpose of making [a] company more successful." When employees feel connected to one another and are seen as who they truly are, this will lead to an increase in innovation, creativity, and support all because of increased openness.

Why is learning someone's religious background so important? By understanding what an employee believes, an employer can know the employee's personal needs and values. And

¹ "Faith & Business Build A Better World." RFBF, 2020.
<https://religiousfreedomandbusiness.org/>

through honoring an employee's personal values, both parties can develop mutual respect in the company, increasing that employee's intrinsic motivation to bring value to the company. For example, understanding that a person of the Jewish faith needs kosher options in the cafeteria, or a person of the Islamic faith needs a place to pray during the day, makes those employees feel respected. By understanding the needs of employees, leaders can better understand how to help their employees feel seen and respected at work.

Freedom of religion in the workplace also includes feeling comfortable talking about one's religious obligation. Senior Student Engagement Fellow at RFBF Christine Clark, Ph.D. shared a story of an employer noticing that one of his employees seemed fatigued and not his usual self. When the employer approached the employee and asked if anything was wrong, the employee explained that he was fasting. Out of respectful curiosity, the employer inquired why he was fasting. The employee was caught off guard, but then explained that he was Muslim and celebrating Ramadan. He explained that during Ramadan, people of the Islamic faith fast between sunrise and sunset. The employer was intrigued and asked his employee to please explain more about Ramadan. He also asked how he could support his employee during this special month. This is a great example of how religious inclusion in the workplace is so important. It also shows that when people are open about their faith, companies can work to support their employees and foster a supportive and inclusive culture.

What is someone's "whole self?"

When employees feel like they are their most authentic selves at work, they will be more creative, outgoing, and more willing to share thoughts and ideas. Christine Clark explained that "if you feel at home, if you feel like you can bring your whole self and soul to work, you're not looking for anywhere else. It's really interesting to see how company communication changes because of respecting one another. I respect you with your life, your experience, your faith, and all this, and you respect me the same way." As Christine highlighted, when people feel respected and comfortable bringing their whole self to work, this will increase employee retention and increase morale. Faith is a big part of people's life. It is humanly innate for people to want their coworkers, who they spend so much time with, to know and accept their "whole self." Often a person of faith's religion is a crucial part of who they are. It can be the core of their identity.²

In an interview with the Religious Freedom and Business Foundation's Treasurer Paul Lambert, he expressed, "Your work is a big part of your life; for a person of faith, their faith is a big part of their life." When the workplace shifts from simply a professional obligation to a welcoming community with a shared purpose, productivity will flourish.

² "Faith & Business Build A Better World."

What are the economic benefits?

It is clear that religious freedom in the workplace helps boost morale, but what about the business itself? Why should the leaders of Fortune 500 companies care if their company has religious freedom? Brian Grim found in his study on religious freedom that it helps to create peace and stability in a business. This is important to companies because “where stability exists, there is more opportunity to invest and conduct normal and predictable business operations, especially in emerging and new markets”.³ As mentioned above by Clark, when workers feel more respected and comfortable about their religion in the workplace, they will be more inclined to stay loyal to the company. When a company does not have a high employee turnover rate, the company will look more appealing to investors—in return, helping the business grow. Religious freedom in the workplace also helps avoid unnecessary legal fees. In 2013, Abercrombie & Fitch went to court over religious discrimination due to the firing of an employee wearing a scarf in violation of the company’s dress code.⁴ This discrimination lawsuit cost the company a substantial amount in legal fees, not to mention creating a negative public image.

Religion does not only help individual companies, but the economy as a whole. According to a 2016 study by Dr. Brian Grim, religious groups contribute \$1.2 trillion every year to the United States economy⁵. Religious groups and active religious participation stimulate the economy and provide economic opportunities for more people.

How have companies have implemented this?

In order to maintain economic and social relevance in the upcoming decades, many companies are recognizing the crucial importance of investing in themselves and their employees. This growth mindset coupled with research shows that people—thus in part, employees—who have religious affiliations are projected to increase by over 2 billion by the year 2050.⁶ Companies with future-oriented mindsets realize that investing in building a company culture and reputation of religious tolerance and acceptance will be critical as they are presented with a future of increasing religious affiliation.

³ “RFBF, 2020.

⁴ Grim, Brian J, Greg Clark, and Robert Edward Snyder. “Is Religious Freedom Good for Business: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 10, no. 4. (2014). <https://www.religjournal.com/pdf/ijrr10004.pdf>.

⁵ Grim, Brian J, Greg Clark, and Robert Edward Snyder. “Is Religious Freedom Good for Business: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis,”

⁶ RFBF.

Salesforce is the top customer relationship management platform, and an excellent example of how a company can implement religion in the workplace. Salesforce has a team, called “Faithforce,” that is an interfaith resource group who celebrates, supports, and fosters an understanding of global faiths and spiritual diversity through inclusive and educational events. They champion faith diversity, inclusion, interfaith and intersectional collaboration, and allyship across the company.⁷ Salesforce is a great example of how large companies can support freedom of religion in the workplace while fostering a positive and inclusive environment.

What does religious freedom look like in your workplace?

Religious freedom in business helps everyone. The Religious Freedom and Business Foundation’s Vice President Greg Clark urges people to “find a way to work together in a common cause of trying to advance religious freedom, whether we're Catholics or spiritualist or evangelicals or LDS or Hindu or Muslim, we need to work together in a common cause to advance religious freedom. So, we have the right to worship separately according to the dictates of our own conscience, but we work together for the common cause.” Big changes happen at the individual level as employees and management personally work to understand and implement religious freedom in the workplace. As individual attitudes and awareness increase, religious inclusive movements will gain momentum across businesses. This begins with understanding the importance of religion in the workplace and evaluating if potential employers offer an inclusive culture for people of faith, and as management consider what steps can be taken to curate a more accepting company culture.

With religious affiliation growing, it is crucial that businesses evaluate their company culture and evaluate if they are offering inclusivity to people of faith. The RFBF is a pioneer of informing companies on what religious freedom looks like, helping employees bring their “whole self” to work, and causing companies to see a more inclusive culture and increased economic stability.

⁷ “Equality at Salesforce - Equality Groups.” Salesforce.com. Salesforce, 2021.
<https://www.salesforce.com/company/equality/equality-groups/#eq-sf-earth?d=cta-body-promo-19>.

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