



Then, Now and Forever

What Has Shifted and What Remains Timeless in the Workplace

By Al Lopus

Al Lopus, president and co-founder of Best Christian Workplaces Institute (BCWI), conducts surveys and studies trends in Christian organizations. We asked him to reflect on changes in the workplace he has observed in the last 30 years.

1974. That's the year I joined the workforce fresh out of college. My work environment was standard for the 70s. I sat at a metal desk in a chair with squeaking rollers. My desk butted up against a coworker's and we shared a telephone. I remember needing a calculator for my work. I didn't want to use the big clunky adding machine, so I bought my own state-of-the-art, battery driven, handheld calculator. Quite pricey, but it was cutting edge technology. It was my PC (personal calculator). With pen and paper, I composed memos that were sent to a stenographic pool to be typed. No personal computer. No e-mail. No Skype. No Blackberries. No frequent flyer programs. *No Amazon.com!*



As I look back over the last three decades, a few things really strike me about shifts in the workplace.

Shift #1: Automation and technology have revolutionized how we work and communicate in the secular and Christian workplace.

My desk today provides testimony to this. I still have a landline phone (thankfully, I'm not sharing it with anyone else). My PC sits on top of my desk and, hooked up to the Internet, makes an infinite amount of data available to me in seconds. My cell phone lies next to my "regular" phone.

It's absolutely amazing the ways we can get a message out these days: e-mail, streaming video, etc. Do you

remember when there were only three channels on television and we all watched the same thing? We now have hundreds of options. Technological advances have changed our culture and workplace in a major way.

This rapidly changing technology is impacting the way we communicate. Clearly, the expectations for employees to "be in the loop" and to be involved in decision making are revolutionizing the workplace.

Shift #2: We're experiencing a much higher level of employee involvement. In fact, this is the most drastic change I've noticed impacting Christian organizations.

Most managers have little control over the next tech-

How Our Work Has Changed From 1970 Until Now

The New American Workplace, by James O'Toole and Edward E. Lawler III, chronicles shifts in our work from the 70s until now. It's a fascinating look at the reshaping of the workplace. The data comes from a cross-section of the entire U.S. workforce. In the chart below, note the rise of employee involvement over the past decades.

Percent of workers responding: "strongly agree"	1977 %	2002 %
I have the freedom to decide what I do on my job	18.1	24.1
My job requires that I keep learning new things	45.4	62.3
It is basically my responsibility to decide how my job gets done	32.3	54.6
I have a lot of say about what happens on my job	20.8	31.9
I decide when I take breaks	22.6	53.1
My job requires that I be creative	20.4	45.2
The work I do is meaningful to me	26.9	66.0
My job lets me use my skills and abilities	27.8	68.5

Source: *The New American Workplace* by O'Toole and Lawler

nological advancement. But, managers do have a hand in employee participation and satisfaction.

More than 30 years ago, employees were shaped by their work. When I started in the workforce, the prevailing attitude was: "This is your job. We don't expect you to receive personal satisfaction." Today, having a job isn't enough. Employees want their jobs to be shaped around them and to derive satisfaction from their work.

Christian organizations have come to realize that the gifts and talents people bring to their jobs are more important than in the past. They recognize that engaging their employees makes a huge difference in the accomplishment of the overall mission. Of course, that's where they've always had a competitive advantage. Even more than GE, which promises: "we bring good things to life," Christian organizations have an eternal purpose.

So, how do managers keep employees engaged and happy with their workplace?

According to our research at BCWI, an organization's commitment to learning is most critical.

Because of the increasing speed of technological change, organizations that wish to be successful must be committed to ongoing education for their employees. The world is becoming smaller and we need to know a lot more—faster. CMA helps organizations achieve this goal by providing excellent learning opportunities. The annual conference has remarkable content. *Christian Management Report* magazine and regional chapter meetings are also great sources for ongoing learning, networking and professional development.

Another issue that highly correlates with employee satisfaction in the Christian workplace is how well the organization is managed.

That's the criterion Christian workers use more than others to determine whether they really like working for an organization. I believe the reason people who work in Christian ministries sacrifice willingly is because of the purpose of the organization. But if they're seeing poor management or poor practices, keeping them from being effective in what God has called to them to do, it frustrates them. In today's Christian workplace, building competence in managers is key to ministry success.

Actually, *Christian organizations have a competitive advantage* relative to secular organizations. In the former, there's a sense of community secular organizations don't have. In our BCW survey, we ask the question: "What makes your workplace a great workplace?"

The theme that comes back is: "We have great people, I love working in a Christian environment." We're seeing over and over again that the number one comment is: "I love the people I work with. We're a family." Christian organizations that have focused and developed in this area have done well.

Employee satisfaction is worth it, because it correlates with ministry growth over time in Christian ministries. We at BCWI conduct employee satisfaction surveys and ask a battery of more than 50 questions on this topic. Then we look at growth of the organization over time. The findings are telling. Organizations with higher employee satisfaction tend to be growing more rapidly than those with lower marks for employee satisfaction.

Shift #3: Employees don't join an organization for life.

In the 60s and 70s, people joined a ministry expecting to be lifelong employees. That's changed to a degree; peo-

ple aren't looking to work in a particular ministry for a full career. Mission-sending organizations are also dealing with turnover issues. It's easier today to change jobs or change mission agencies. It's easier to find out about other options and opportunities. This is another reason Christian organizations are realizing the importance of employee satisfaction, engagement and loyalty.

Shift #4: There's been an increase in workplace diversity.

In the early 70s, Peter Drucker was still talking about leaders as men, and the business world and Christian ministries were totally male-oriented. Back then, you'd see few, if any, women on a leadership team. Clearly, that's changed. Today, one out of five leaders in Christian organizations is a woman. I've also seen an increase in racial integration just in the last five years.

The issue of working with diverse people is one Christian organizations know and understand well because of their international missionary work. I find that Christian organizations believe diversity brings broader, more positive and more appropriate perspectives. But

it also requires more training and understanding.

In some large ministries, there's work going on around the clock in several different cultures and languages. For

The BCWI-CMA Connection

Al Lopus had been involved with "Best Companies to Work For" in Washington for five years. Helen Lee, a freelance writer from *Christianity Today*, wanted to develop the *Best Christian Places to Work*. She called John Pearson, then CMA president, who connected her with Al. Helen and Al met with *Christianity Today* officials, who agreed to make an investment that first year to get BCWI off the ground. To learn more about BCW Institute, visit bcwinstitute.com.

instance, in a 24-hour period, someone may work on a publication or project in the U.S., email it to Thailand for review, and then someone else in the United Kingdom adds the finishing touches. Thirty years ago, that same communique would have taken at least two weeks to make its rounds.

So what is timeless? What endures for decades? Even centuries?

A culture of character is timeless.

There are Christian organizations which have developed a culture of character in their leadership and entire organization. Character is an enduring quality for today and tomorrow. Employees in Christian workplaces are looking for leaders who behave with fairness and integrity, who demonstrate the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and are transparent with their organization. These are leaders who have compassion for people and have created a high level of trust.

These things haven't changed. The need for a culture of character and individual character development have become more important than ever. These stand the test of time.

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