

# Tom's of maine case study

Education



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How should management accommodate a variety of conflicting spiritual perspectives in the workplace? An employer is required by law to reasonably accommodate a religious request unless the request presents undue hardship on the business. The trick is to make sure that the organization allows for each religious request on an equal basis. A good example of working to avoid the tensions and conflicts that might arise by mixing religion and work is the Ford Interfaith Network (FIN) which operates within Ford Motor Company.

The Interfaith Network has a representative from each religion on the network's executive committee. Questions about another member's faith is asked and answered through formal channels developed by the Interfaith Network. The questions might be answered by a committee representative or by a guest religious scholar. Another company, Wells Fargo, one of the top 50 companies to make the Diversity list of 2005 has strict guidelines on the creation of employee-resource groups. Religious groups do not meet the criteria. According to the assistant vice president of corporate communications there are just too many religious groups to accommodate them all.

However, Wells Fargo does permit informal religious gatherings on site. Os Hillman, an evangelical Christian, who advised companies such as Coca Cola and Toyota regarding faith-at-work issues, believes that companies " should promote fairness for each group and leave it at that." Companies recognize that " faith and religion are an important part of an employee's identity" and that religious diversity has a future in corporate America. Now companies

must find a way to provide accommodations to conflicting spiritual perspectives in a way that is equal to everyone.

These accommodations will make better employees and a better place to work. There are many companies who support and promote faith at work: American Express, AOL, American Airlines, Continental Airlines, Texas Instruments and Ford Motor Company. Each of these organizations has developed a system which successfully accommodates a variety of conflicting spiritual perspectives in the workplace.

Tom Chappell created a spiritual framework for Tom's of Maine, a family-owned business. Can such a framework be created for a publicly traded company? What differences might there be in its effects? The spiritual framework for Tom's of Maine can definitely be created for publically traded companies. Spiritual, religious, ethical and moral issues are now being given great weight and consideration in the business world. Society seems to want to focus more on family values and what is truly important in life.

Diversity, equality, medical and business ethics, human rights, fair trade, and environmental issues are elemental considerations today. Promoting these values can make organizations more productive, and leaders who adhere to these standards are more sensitive to ethical issues. What is needed is more than ever is ethical leadership. Proof of the absence of good ethical leaders can be seen in the events of Enron, Bank of America, and Madoff's ponzi scheme, to name a few.

Tom and Kate Chappell believe it is crucial not to compromise your beliefs in order to turn a profit. The Chappell's expressed strong personal values of respect for both people and nature. Through conflicts between the companies' new talent and the Chappell's, Tom enrolled at Harvard Divinity School where he immersed himself in writings of great moral and religious philosophers. Having new knowledge and a deeper understanding of the direction he wanted his company to go in he "devoted much time to formulating the company's mission and beliefs and to molding a corporate culture that embodies these tenets." (p. 177)

What risks might an organizational encounter when encouraging the expression of spiritual values in the workplace? What are its advantages? Tom's of Maine might have risks involving the lack of understanding between employees and the company's vision. However to avoid the Chappell's believe that "there is a difference between requiring a workforce to embrace one's religious beliefs and empowering all employees through a spiritual framework." (p. 179) One advantage would be the Chappell's setting the example.

They are committed to donating 10% of the company's pre-tax profits to nonprofit organizations. By giving back to their community (county, state, nation and world) they are a shining example of what they would like their employees to do. They also encourage their employees to do this by providing a "generous benefit package, including four weeks of parental leave for both mothers and fathers, as well as offers flexible work schedules, job sharing, and work-at-home programs. Child-care and elder-care referral

service is provided, and child care is partially reimbursed for employees earning less than \$32, 500 annually.” (p. 178)