

Transcript: “Faith in the Workplace,” *Faith in the Workplace* segment, The Today Show, NBC-TV, 19 March 2004)

CAMPBELL BROWN, co-host: You may have noticed a growing trend. People aren’t just expressing their faith in houses of worship anymore. Now the workplace is getting religion, too. NBC’s Ron Allen reports.

GROUP: (Singing) How sweet the sound.

RON ALLEN, reporting: On the third Thursday of each month, this board room of a New York law firm becomes a ministry. Bibles replace all legal briefs.

JOE RUTTA (Christian Legal Society): If you would just do a miracle, oh, God.

ALLEN: They’re members of the Christian Legal Society who, like Joe Rutta, see no separation between work and faith.

RUTTA: I try and live my life in – as a – with Christian principles throughout the day. And I think that trying to cut that off in the middle of – of – of a workday and not be natural in who you are would be a bit odd.

UNIDENTIFIED MAN: Is it an accurate portrayal?

ALLEN: Tonight’s topic, the movie “The Passion” and how it can help open a dialogue with co-workers about faith. At a time when religion is prominent in pop culture, it’s perhaps no surprise that more people are attending prayer sessions and Bible study groups in the office and incorporating those principles on the job.

RUTTA: If you can discuss every other thing under the sun at work, why not – why exclude God?

ALLEN: Some religious scholars are calling what’s happening ‘the faith at work movement.’ More than a thousand loosely networked organizations, with hundreds more forming each year, seeking ways to bring spiritual beliefs into factories, offices and workplaces across the nation. But why now? Yale professor David Miller thinks the recent scandals have caused many in corporate America to seek more ethical ways of doing business. Longer, demanding hours also have many employees asking themselves hard questions.

DAVID MILLER (Yale Center for Faith & Culture): What do I do with my life? What’s it mean to be a CEO? How can I please God through my work? Can this be a vocation or a calling? Well, the Christian faith and many others say, ‘Yes, it can be.’

ALLEN: And with so many Americans now deeply committed to their faith, more offices may soon become faith-friendly workplaces. For TODAY, Ron Allen, NBC News, New York.

BROWN: Laura Nash is an expert in workplace ministry who teaches courses on management and corporate ethics at the Harvard Business School. Laura, good morning.

LAURA NASH (Harvard Business School): Good morning.

BROWN: So traditionally, there have been two subjects that are off limits at work, politics and religion.

NASH: That's right.

BROWN: But what changed? Was it really the corporate scandals?

NASH: I think so. I think the disgust at the ethical behavior going on, the sense that we're losing our values, the never-enough culture. How do we begin to have some sense of limits? But you're right. This is a new movement. Religion is important to people. Money is important to people. But we had a kind of detente about them in the workplace.

BROWN: Explain the various groups. Because there is a lot of diversity. You do have choices.

NASH: That's right. I think it's important to understand this is not one movement representing one denomination. A lot of it is grass roots, individuals. Interestingly, it's been organized more by business people than religious professionals. And so to characterize it as a kind of 'Let's take over the world,' which some people fear, is – is really not accurate.

BROWN: Well, there are a couple of things that actually I thought, you know, might be sort of the downside of this. One being, there is a lot of diversity in religion. You know, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists at work. If you have one group that's going off to form a religious group within the workplace, doesn't that sort of divide employees?

NASH: It can.

BROWN: Or you're – you're identified based on your religion.

NASH: You can be iden – I think that's what you saw in the – in the – in the video that some of the people, that's what they want. It's part of their bringing themselves to work. And more of your work is taking over more of life. Why shouldn't your life be expressed in – in work? Having said that, there's two cultures going on. We have a culture of diversity in the workplace that we value religious freedom. In America, it's about freedom when you express your religion, don't step on the feet of somebody else. I think those are strong traditions in our society.

BROWN: But there can also be a line where you cross where there is an evangelical sort of approach to it where you're trying to convert people at work.

NASH: They're walking a tightrope here. How on do you express your religion but not force it on someone else. How do you not abuse your power? And I think there has to be a very clear line here about not creating a clubby membership. Lot of these groups stay offsite, out of the workplace for that reason. They're voluntary. They're up front. Others are more cagey about it. And – and that does create a lot of suspicion.

BROWN: How are businesses reacting? And what can it mean for the company involved or the business as opposed to the individual?

NASH: It's hard to – it's – it's – there's a diverse business culture as well. So there are many reactions. But I think it's now permissible to say, 'This is who I am. This is what I believe.' I'm hearing it more in the workplace. I'm hearing it more about ethics in the workplace. I think businesses are also very concerned that they don't signal you can use your belief in God instead of rational management procedures. And religion tends to push for never-enough solutions of its own. So what everyone is searching for is a framework for success that goes beyond money and goes to these lasting values. It's not just people with one sectarian belief.

BROWN: But if you're needing to bring this into your job and your work life, does it also mean that you're not getting what you need from your church or your mosque or your synagogue? That in your place of worship, they're not doing enough for you?

NASH: I did a – a – a large study of this problem. Why weren't the churches providing these services themselves, and I think mainstream churches have had an anxiety about capitalism and money that has kept them out of the workplace. And that's part of the reason. And so business people of faith approached – they often approach someone from a church or a – or a synagogue to help them run a service. But they started the movement themselves, primarily.

BROWN: Overall, do you think this is a good thing?

NASH: I think as long as it's not used to beat up people and form clubs it's good. I think this search for lasting success is important. I think we need to learn "just enough" in our vocabulary. That's one of our problems. But I don't – and I think it has to be inclusive of people who don't wear it on their sleeve. And it's why my latest book, "Just Enough" is on a secular version of this. It's very important. It's very exciting what's going on.

BROWN: Interesting. Laura Nash. Thanks. And we'll be right back.