



## The Ten Commandments of Working in a Hostile Environment: An Interview with T. D. Jakes

2.27.05 by Nancy Lovell

### Article:



T. D. Jakes, pastor and businessman, has a long list of accomplishments, growing ever longer. In the past year alone, while leading The Potter's House Church, one of the nation's largest, he co-produced and appeared in *Woman, Thou Art Loosed*, a mainstream film about childhood sexual abuse and redemption. He broke ground on an impressive housing development in South Dallas and founded a preparatory school there. He released the best-selling book *HeMotions*. He visited with the presidents of Uganda and Kenya, and personally oversaw digging wells for remote nomadic tribes in Kenya. He received the NAACP's 2004 Presidential Award; and in February this year, *Time* magazine listed him as one of the country's 25 Most Influential Evangelicals. This month, Penguin Group released *The Ten Commandments for Working in a Hostile Environment*, in which Bishop Jakes speaks practically as both pastor and businessman.

### • Bishop Jakes, why write about the workplace?

I see many people today hired into situations contrary to everything else they know—church, family, everything. Their parents tended to work in simpler environments, but people today deal daily with corporate deadlines, quotas, high-stakes meetings, budgetary constraints, threatened cutbacks, internal rivalries, harassment suits, and discrimination issues. Add demanding customers, frivolous lawsuits, and patrons who spend more energy complaining than building relationships. It all may put profits in the penthouse, but employee morale lands in the round metal file.

### • You say “Your Power is Your Purpose.” But dreams and burning bushes are rare. How can the rest of us know our life purpose?

The best barometer of what we ought to be doing with our hands or heads is locked up in our hearts—in our passions. Most of us thrive in the job or career that opens the door to our creative zeal or deep fascination, when we can enjoy our employ and see our salary as a benefit rather than the objective. To begin to discover your purpose, take a deep look into your childhood. Evaluate your reactions when exposed to this vocation or that. This kind of introspection takes time; many people don't know *what* they want to do and have allowed themselves to long be driven by the wrong things.

### • How should a Christian define being a witness to Christ on the job?

The greatest witness on the job is to be personally pleasant and undeniably productive. Unfortunately, we grow up feeling obligated to share our faith rather than to allow people to observe it by our professional integrity. Christians should not use the workplace for vocal and blatant evangelism—as happens so much in the name of God, from politics to picketing. (If God were so inclined, I believe He could sue most Christians for false representation.) The real witness to Christ is love, peace, contentment, etc. These inaudible attributes—coupled with excellent work ethics and fulfilled promises to staff members, employees, or consumers—speak volumes.

### • Many Christians grow up thinking that low-risk/no-risk life is a virtue—and wake up one day haunted by the parable of the man who buried his one talent. You say good stewardship requires risk-taking.

The Proverbs 31 woman and the parable of the talents show that God is still asking us to be fruitful and productive. But like investing seeds into the ground, which exposes the farmer to potential loss in everything from bad weather to weeds—or investing in a corporation—fruitfulness involves calculated risk. This parable presents a clear demand from God for a return, and the greatest return often exposes us to the greatest risk. In the parable, the man who played it safe didn't get this principle, and he was rebuked. I would add that professionals everywhere should not worry that success is unspiritual. God doesn't see success and spirituality as mutually exclusive.

### • As a leader in both Christian and mainstream fields, what firsthand advice do you have about leaders' workday pressures?

Leaders must separate what they do from who they are, lest they forget that life does not amount to a balance sheet in the computer. I advocate balancing work stress with serene outlets, healthy diets, and exercise. While leadership involves confrontation, the Bible says be angry and sin not, and volatility should not be a "by any means necessary" approach. We escalate our approach, when necessary, without personal hostility that eats up our emotional lining. (It is *not* that serious.) To whom much is given, much is required. Get the job done, but remember it is just a job. I believe that it is possible to be passionate without becoming neurotic just because the buck stops with you.

• **What does Jesus' life show about survival in a hostile work environment?**

The scriptures describe Jesus as a root springing out of dry ground: He was self-contained, independent of His environment. Who faced more hostility than Christ? He faced media maladies, tax issues, temptations, betrayal of His friends and His accountant. He was victimized by His associates and denied by those closest to him. Yet he maintained His focus. He managed to complete His assignment, pay His tax bill, identify His antagonist, move beyond His critics, survive the press issues, and rise above His circumstances without bitterness and depression. He is the premier example of my book's primary message.

• **How can a person know if he's in the wrong job or just the wrong frame of mind?**

A frame of mind will pass. All of us have periods when our sense of fulfillment seems to evaporate. But we must remember that moods do not determine misplacement. A person who is misplaced feels unable to function in his role . . . he avoids his main task and works feverishly at another to compensate. Doing his assigned job depresses and frustrates him, because his heart holds passion for something else. If you are working a job that you continually dread going to, it is time to do some soul-searching. I am convinced that there is seldom any such thing as a bad employee, just a misplaced one.

• **Finally, many people think longingly that *real* Christian work is in churches and Christian organizations. Any comment?**

Recently, my 24 year-old son became terribly ill. The physician who nursed him through the heart attack didn't claim to be in ministry—but to my wife and me, and even to my son, his use of his gift was a ministry. The hospital was not a church, and the physician quoted no scriptures, but his skill ministered to us all. Whether you are a physician or a beautician, if you, as a Christian, do your work well, it is a ministry and a calling. I have met many political figures who serve the community as a Christian in government. Like the kings of old, they felt called to serve their generation. My advice to each of you is to find that thing you feel like you were created to do—in the pulpit or the factory, it is a ministry if you do it well. Pray over it, serve with tenacity, and watch Jesus anoint you to do what you do. He was a carpenter's son who called physicians, tax collectors, and fishermen to serve Him. He must love people who work, or He wouldn't have called them. Thank God there are so many vitally important people who find a calling beyond the walls of the sanctuary. Because they do what they do, we can do what we do, and the world is better because there are different administrations, callings, and ministries . . . all committed to serving their generation in ways different but profound.

**The Ten Commandments of Working in a Hostile Environment**

1. **Know that you are anointed for the job or position you now hold.** God uses ordinary circumstances as a training ground to perfect our character.
2. **Don't expect to be appreciated.** God values humility and servanthood, not pride and entitlement.
3. **Embrace opportunities for change.** May we reach the stage of maturity when we are no longer surprised by change.
4. **Do the job well while remembering the vision.** The secret to performing your duties well where you are is to maintain a vision of where you're headed.
5. **Don't let the environment get inside you.** To counter bad attitudes, behavior, and gossip, maintain a regular diet of prayer and Bible study.
6. **Increase your capacity to work with difficult personalities.** Too often we only try to fit in and connect with others similar to us.
7. **Where you are is not where you are going.** Be peaceful while progressive. . . .
8. **Achieve optimal results with minimal confusion.** We spend too much time trying to compensate for our weaknesses rather than capitalizing on our strengths.
9. **Do not pledge allegiance to cliques and groups.** The enemy tempts us with the security of the group and the approval of others.
10. **Keep your song near you.** Spend time in God's presence. Study His Word, offer up prayer, and look deep inside yourself to call up your song—praise and worship Him.