

# Leadership through Service

by S. Kristine Farmer, MS, RP, PHR and Kim Nimon, PhD



Interstate Batteries retail store in Hillsboro, Oregon. Photo Credit: M.O. Stevens

In the summer issue of *Annals of Psychotherapy & Integrative Health*<sup>®</sup>, we reported on an interview with the Corporate Chaplain of Interstate Batteries, Henry Rogers. In this issue, we follow with an interview with Chris Willis, the Vice President of Human Resources and General Counsel. Chris provides unique insights in employing a corporate chaplain in a privately held company. Interstate Batteries' inclusion of a corporate chaplain is consistent with its business model that incorporates servant leadership. As indicated in Nimon & Farmer, 2012, Interstate's mission and philosophy statements (see below) are consistent with servant leadership factors, including *listening, empathy, healing, stewardship, and commitment of growth of people*.

## Interstate's Mission:

To glorify God as we supply our customers worldwide with top quality, value-priced batteries, related electrical power-source products and services, and distribution services. Further, our mission is to provide our partners and associates with opportunities which are profitable, rewarding, and growth-oriented.

## Interstate's Philosophy:

Our business philosophy is to treat others as we want to be treated: treating all our business associates with respect, fairness, and integrity; caring for and listening to them; professionally serving them; always being a model of working hard and striving hard for excellence.

**Kristine:** As the Vice President of Human Resources and Counsel for a corporation that embraces Christianity in the workplace, do you and your staff face any challenges in human resources management that may be unique compared to corporations that do not have a corporate philosophy and mission that embraces God? Are there any concerns related to religious discrimination issues?

**Chris:** I do not believe we have any unique challenges in human resources management. We have the normal day-to-day challenges of dealing with people. We believe in treating our team members in a consistent manner, so that if in any event we ever did become involved in litigation, we are able to stand behind what we say we do. With that said, we really have not had any issues with it being used against us.

We are, of course, mindful of our mission and philosophy statements that boldly embrace God. We do a good job of explaining our mission and philosophy statements and how our corporate chaplain department helps us to fulfill those statements. We recognize that not every team member believes in God. Our corporate chaplain, Henry Rogers, conducts an orientation of new team members in which he ensures that new team members understand what our corporate chaplaincy is, what the benefits are, and how it supports our mission and philosophy statements. We make it very clear at orientation that any team member participation in those corporate chaplain activities is strictly voluntary.



**Kristine:** I would think working for a corporation that has a corporate culture of honoring God in the workplace and encouraging spiritual growth among its team members, that you and your staff would probably focus your responsibilities in the areas of team member training and engagement and less in the area of employee discipline issues. Do you find that to be true? Have you seen an increase in productivity, job commitment, and morale? Has there been a reduction in absenteeism by Interstate's team members?

**Chris:** Yes, but like most corporations, we still do have discipline and performance issues. Primarily, I find that people are people and they make mistakes, get distracted, and have issues. As far as productivity, job commitment, and morale, we find team members score very high in overall employee satisfaction. Team members are very satisfied with their work environment, are committed to their work, and engaged in their jobs. By engagement, I mean team members are willing to go the extra mile to do whatever is needed. Our tag line is, "Outrageously Dependable." Team members are generally happy to be here and are more engaged in what they are doing, which does lead to increased productivity.

**Kristine:** Does the role your staff plays in team member development intersect with the role of Interstate's Corporate Chaplain's staff when it comes to performance improvement issues? If so, can you explain that involvement and describe some successes you've seen?

**Chris:** The Corporate Chaplain Department is not really involved in performance improvement or disciplinary issues. If there is substance abuse or other significant issue, we will refer them to the Chaplain's Department. We have seen the Corporate Chaplain meet with individuals and have had successful results arise from difficult situations.

**Kristine:** What advice do you have for business stakeholders who are considering employing a workplace chaplain or integrating their faith into their company's mission statement?

**Chris:** I suggest that any company considering employing a corporate chaplain should love people, and make that their foundation. If you do create a corporate chaplain program, then make it available as an optional resource and then love the people every day in every type of situation. From an integrity perspective, you have to do what you say you are going to do.

**Kim:** How many companies do you know that are doing corporate chaplaincy the way Interstate Batters is doing it?

**Chris:** Chick-fil-A, Hobby Lobby, and Service Master.

**Kim:** Any other thoughts or final things to share?

**"Our tag line is, "Outrageously Dependable." Team members are generally happy to be here and are more engaged in what they are doing, which does lead to increased productivity."**

**Chris:** In order to be successful in adopting God into your mission and/or philosophy, it comes down to leaders living by Biblical principles. By living according to Biblical principles, people will generally gravitate to you, especially in a difficult environment. Before you can get people to follow a Godly mission statement, you must live it first.

We extend our sincere appreciation to Chris, Henry, and the Interstate Batteries team for giving us an opportunity to learn more about their organization's corporate chaplaincy program. It was our privilege to meet and learn from them. As always, I am interested in your thoughts and opinions on corporate chaplains and the role they play in the workplace. I would appreciate hearing about your experiences with corporate chaplains. Feel free to contact me via email at kim.nimon@gmail.com. I look forward to your input.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



**S. KRISTINE FARMER**, MS, RP, PHR, is a Litigation Paralegal for Fish & Richardson PC working in the areas of labor and employment law. Kristine holds a BBA in labor/management, a MS in Applied Technology and Performance Improvement, and is pursuing a PhD where her research will focus on professional development within the legal profession. Kristine is a past president of the National Federation of Paralegal Association, Inc. (NFPA), the Paralegal Division of the State Bar of Texas, and the Dallas Area Paralegal Association (DAPA), which named her its Paralegal of the Year in 2002. In 2005, Kristine was named *Legal Assistant Today* magazine's Paralegal of the Year and in 2009, Kristine was honored with the Honorable William R. Robie National Leadership Award by NFPA.



**KIM NIMON**, PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of North Texas, where the main tenet of her research agenda focuses on improving human performance through the practice of workplace spirituality. She became aware of corporate chaplaincy programs during her doctoral studies and began researching how they fit within the larger context of workplace spirituality. Her research on workplace chaplains has been published by the *Journal of Management, Spirituality, & Religion* and the *International Society for Performance Improvement*.