

## How Shall a Christian Professional then Live?

\*Excerpts from discussions of leadership panel



### THE PANEL



**Mark Ammerman**

Ammerman is Managing Director of ScotiaBank's Houston-based energy banking operation, Head of U.S. Energy, and co-chair of the global banking committee of Scotia Capital. During his 25-year career with the bank, he

has built the energy practice through acquisitions and more recently its expansion into Latin America and Europe.



**Donna Draudt**

Draudt is Regional President of Woodforest National Bank, overseeing Houston area lending operations and the Treasury management sales team. She has over 32 years of commercial banking experience and specializes in lending to "non-profit organizations."



**Brad Hays (Moderator)**

Hays is an experienced Executive Coach and the Houston area chair of Convene, a national leadership training operation for Christian CEOs and business owners. He has over 35 years of experience with Honeywell and Pennzoil as well as CEO of two technology start-ups.



**Linda Headley**

Headley is a shareholder and former managing shareholder in the Houston office of Littler Mendelson, the nation's largest specialized labor and employment law firm. A frequent speaker on employment law issues, she has been named a Best Lawyer in America by *Employment Law Management* from 2001-2012.



**Bill Mearse**

Mearse is Managing Director of Accenture's Houston office and COO of the firm's Resources

Sector, a \$5+ billion business involving the oil and gas, chemical, utilities, metal, mining and paper industries. He is responsible for the growth and profitability of the Resources global business and participates on several Accenture management committees.



**Gary Thomas**

Thomas is an internationally acclaimed speaker and author of over a dozen books, including *Sacred Marriage: What*

*if God Designed Marriage to Make Us Holy More Than to Make Us Happy?*, *Pure Pleasure, Sacred Pathways*, and the Gold Medallion award winner *Authentic Faith*. He serves on the teaching team of Second Baptist Church, Houston, and is an adjunct faculty member at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon. His books and ministry focus on spiritual formation: how we can integrate Scripture, church history, and time-tested Christian classics into our modern experience of faith.

\*To offer business professionals a first person reflection on the issue of work life balance by Christian business leaders, the Center for Christianity in Business at Houston Baptist University convened a panel discussion on Work Life Balance on September 30, 2011. Here are the highlights.

*Hays: Let's begin by having the topic framed. How should we understand the whole issue of work-life balance?*

*Thomas:* I want to give my life to a place that cares if I am gone, where I am not replaced with just another number but where it matters if I go. When I look at the Bible, I see it as being so honest about the human condition. I used to think Genesis 5 was one of the most boring chapters in the Bible but now I believe it may be one of the more profound. It has a huge start – the world was being created. God was sprinkling mountains, creating time, forming the first man and woman. Then there was the drama of Adam and Eve being naked and unashamed, the great temptation, the Fall and the banishment, and then a homicide!

But then you come to Chapter 5. It is nothing but a long list of genealogies: Seth lived to be 105, had his first kid, then lived another 807 years and died at 912; then Enosh and Kenan came, etc. It is just a long, dull list. Yet I think this is a shockingly honest picture of the human condition. We have kids. We live a certain amount of time. We die and get out of the way.

We don't know anything about these biblical characters. All we know is they lived, had kids, these were the kids' names, and they died. When I realize that I couldn't name my great-great grandfather or great-great grandmother, just a few generations removed, I realize how silly to think that my great-great grandchildren could name me. In one sense, I have to embrace my historical insignificance so as to live a life of eternal significance and relational purpose because my kids do know who I am. So then if the Bible presents that reality, and history presents that reality, how does it affect our view of work today?

I believe we find our significance not in trying to become significant in our day and age but by becoming significant to the family that we have been called to live with and to raise, and as far as our service to the Lord. If we look at our work as an offering to God - providing jobs, offering services, feeding families, beginning with our own - it becomes an eternally significant work. When we get lost in trying to have a false historical significance that would be swallowed up more quickly than we can believe, I think in many ways we would have a wasted life because of that. So for me, work-life balance is really found in trying to see work as one of the primary forms of worship and offering it up in that regard.

*Hays: Let's look at that significance from the first blending of life and workplace. As part of God's original design for man, what should our proper response be to work? How did the Fall affect the attitude toward work?*

*Headley:* I have dealt a lot with work-life balance issues from a secular vantage point, but until now, I have not really approached it from a Christian perspective. As I ponder this question, it is helpful to ask, what kind of work did God give Adam to do before the Fall? It seems pretty clear and simple: God gave Adam a job! He was to be the CEO of the Garden of Eden, which he is supposed to tend and keep.

So work did not come after the Fall. Work is a God-given thing. Work is not a bad thing. It is all about how it fits with the perspective and priority under Christian principles, and how it is done so that we make a difference, being a light in the darkness and not just more of the darkness in this world. Our work is part of God's plan. We shouldn't shy away from

work or be lazy about doing it, yet we must do it to God's glory. This is a principle that has stayed with me all my life.

After the Fall, the curses towards Adam (and of course towards women as well since they are in the workplace as much as men today, but even if they just labor in the home) – the toiling among thorns and thistles and laboring by the sweat of the brow – are sobering in that there is no let-up until we return to the ground. It is not like we get to check out at some point, taking a sabbatical or retiring and everything is going to be roses. God says we are to work all of our lives. There is no stopping! Is it any different than Adam tending the garden? Well, there weren't any weeds, no poison ivy, in a garden where there was no sin!

As an employment lawyer, I think about how thorns and thistles and the sweat of the brow would translate into what I do. You know, we advise clients all day long and you hear about all these employment problems. The problems of the employees are like the poison ivy. The sin in the workplace that bubbles up into problems and materializes into lawsuits - those are the thorns and thistles. Interaction in the workplace with a difficult boss or a troubling subordinate employee – those are the poison ivy. There is the toiling and the sweat of the brow. There is no smooth sailing. They all give us our challenges and opportunities to do all we can to God's glory.

*Hays: What are the different motivations that drive us to work so much, creating problems with life balance?*

*Mearse:* Motive is very important. I started working when I was a teenager. I went to work for my dad's company. He was an executive in a small chain of department stores in West Texas. I like to

say I started at the top, literally on the roof, cleaning air conditioning towers. One thing I remember was that before I started working, my dad sat down with me and said, look, there are some things you need to understand as you go to work, mainly because of who you are and who I am. He continued to say that, number one, everybody is going to know who you are – you are the boss's kid and, number two, they are going to watch everything you do – to see if you do earn your keep or are you pulling your weight because your dad is the boss. There is one more thing, he said: everything you do is going to reflect on me.

I have now lived in Houston for almost 32 years and I have worked as long for Accenture, which was Arthur Andersen when it first started. I grew up in Abilene, Texas and attended Baylor, so my life was not a very wild life, [not a] fast paced life by any means. I came to Houston in 1980, went to work for Arthur Andersen, and attended Second Baptist Church – all huge places to me but of course, nothing compared to what they are today.

Those first years were wild for me – not from an earthly standpoint, but just that I had never experienced change on that kind of scale. I struggled and kept running into people at work who said they worked hard in order to make a lot of money or to get ahead of the game. I was a Christian. I attended church, and I knew God was involved in work and all that. So unlike those people, I sensed that the self-worth, the power, the money, etc., could not be the reason why I was working. Then three years later, I was studying the book of Colossians and got into Chapter 3, where it says work as if you are working for the Lord. Boom! The light came on. It reminded me of the conversation I had ten years earlier with

my dad. I discovered I was working for my father again – it just wasn't my earthly father but my heavenly father – and yes, all eyes were on me.

After that my whole perspective changed. I came to Houston, eager to move on within a few years, not sure for what purpose I was in Houston and on the payroll of Arthur Andersen. With the new perspective I said, okay, God, I accept why I am here – I am here to do whatever You want me to do. Then things started happening.

My dad was diagnosed with cancer and ended up spending a lot of time here in Houston going through treatment. If I had not been here, I don't know what would have happened to my parents. Not much later I met my wife, got married, and was about to settle down when Arthur Andersen decided to send me to Anchorage, Alaska. Even before I questioned why I was sent there, I was teaching a fast growing Bible study class in an otherwise struggling local church. I came back to Houston and made partner when Andersen asked me to go to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for a few years. Now that's about where work-life balance drew the line for me. After much prayer, I left for KL and soon was teaching a big Bible class in an international church with people from all over the world.

What I have found from these experiences is that we work to serve God. Our work is not just a vocation but an opportunity to serve – to serve Him not just at the workplace but, as my Alaska and Malaysia experiences testify, in ministries that God would open up for us outside of the workplace. God wants us to be where we are to change lives and influence lives. Andersen and now Accenture were, and are still, secular places, but I would tell you that I have seen Christian influence coming into our organization,

particularly here in Houston. It has not been through overt evangelism...but rather through lifestyle witnessing and relationships. At the end of the day, what we have in this world is God and all those who have been saved, and that to me underscores what work is all about. Surprisingly, when I discovered I was to work to serve God and obey Him, I got the promotions, the salary increases, the self-worth, and all the other stuff people told me they were striving for, as by-products.

*Hays: When the imbalance specifically affects the family, how often do you take family priorities and preferences into your decisions about work, considering the priorities of both your family and your subordinates?*

*Ammerman:* About five to six years ago, I had my first conversation with our then-new country head. He phoned, complaining about the cost of flying into Houston from New York, and said he was going over the expenses [of my last Latin American trip]. I said [the explanation for the trip] was actually quite simple. I flew down on Super Bowl Sunday so that I could be there for a scheduled speech at a conference on Monday morning and to make some client visits during the week. In the meantime, the CEO called and said he was going to be there the week before and asked me to go down and accompany him on visits to oil and gas companies in that country. So I was there the week before and the week after, and it just so happened there was an 8-year old girl who had a birthday on Saturday morning, so I went home between the two trips. I waited for the response. There was silence for a moment and he changed the topic.



That fellow I had this conversation with is now my CEO. That was the first opportunity I had in a very direct way to share with him my work culture. It is a very distinct culture about how I deal with my family – I am always home for important events, period. I set the stage with the people with whom I work. I will tell them to just take care of the business at home and we will take care of the business at work, whatever it takes. Now you can do this in such a way that will make people feel guilty as they walk out the door and regret they ever asked. The key is to make sure they won't regret asking and your motive is genuine.

When we first moved to Houston years ago, my dad worked as the ABC Evening News anchor. During weekdays I didn't get to see him much because he would be at work when I got home from school and I would be asleep when he returned. I made a commitment when I started my professional career to do differently than that...My employees know I don't want to see any email stamps on Sundays because I don't want them to be at work on Sundays. Yet our group is one of the largest and most profitable in the entire global bank. As we know from the story of Chick-fil-A, it is just amazing how God prospers these things even when people are in their sleep. The Psalmist says, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to retire late, to eat the bread of painful labors; for He gives to His beloved even in his sleep" (Psalm 127:3). It is so true.

*Hays: Does work-life balance create happier and more productive employees? Can workplace programs and policies be effective in promoting and encouraging life balance?*

*Draudt:* Most definitely. More companies are starting to recognize that balance in people's lives, more flex hours or four-day workweeks, would make better employees. I read recently that those companies that are going this direction are getting the very best employees.

When I first started working back in the 70s, women's role was much different than today. I worked on and off throughout my early marriage when I needed to stay home to raise my children. I was out nearly 10 years before I came to Houston and decided to take my career seriously. I got back into banking and started working for a very large financial institution. They were very good to me, but as I went up the career ladder, there came a lot of demands.

The firm was very bottom line driven. I have three children and they are the most important things to me in this world, so balancing work and my children's needs, being there at the ball games, recital, etc., was of utmost priority for me. Incorporating demanding work into my family life became more and more difficult and dealing with it required increased suppression of my feelings.

Then seven and a half years ago I got a phone call from my former boss, a fine Christian man whom I enjoyed working with before. He asked me to consider coming to work with him. Instinctively I said no; I had over 19 years with my employer, satisfied clients, and a wonderful peer group. I had everything, so I thought. It was my life, my safety net. I was actually ranked in the top 10 percent in the nation at my firm. Yet he persisted and said, "I really want you to think about it and this is what I want you to think about: balance in your life because I know you don't have it."

Leaving something that is comfortable to you is very hard. When my advis-

ers and trusted friends were no help, I turned to God in prayer and asked Him to please send me a sign and knock me over the head with it. Soon afterwards, I attended a funeral of a Christian friend, a young mother with boys in high school. As I sat there and watched those boys and their father, it occurred to me that she had all the dreams that I had - to see the kids grow up, graduate from high school, go to college, meet that special someone, get married, be there for that first grandbaby, and so on and so forth - but then how quickly she was taken away from them! I could not have asked for a clearer sign. I made up my mind that day to make a change in my life. It was all about balance in my life, something [my former employer] could not give enough. I took a leap of faith and went to my new employer. That was 7 years ago and I have never looked back.

Not only have I found balance in the life of my family – myself, husband, children, grandchildren – but my career has not faltered. Instead it has grown, with nearly 90 percent of my clients ending up following me. Even more satisfying is that I have developed a passion to work with churches and non-profits, which make up a good part of my portfolio. I feel like I am doing God's work while doing my job. That big bonus that I might have gotten from my former employer? I get a bigger one in more than monetary terms and now realize I can be successful without goals and lots of pressure. I think working for the right employer, taking that leap of faith, believing in God and that He's got a plan and a direction for you, opens all kinds of doors.

*Hays: What can we do to manage or overcome the tendency or compulsion to work too much so we can live a balanced*

*life? What are the biggest obstacles and constraints to creating a balanced life and what are the greatest facilitators?*

*Thomas:* God often asks us to do the right thing and lets us pay a price for it. God in His sovereignty certainly has the right to do that. So if we want to effect work-life balance, sometimes we have to pay a price for that – a missed promotion, an income cut, a relocation to a different community or employer, etc. When the ideals of our family do not line up with the ideals of the employer, our allegiance is to the principles and teachings of Scripture. The result may be earthly prices we pay, the crosses we pick up daily in our journey of obedience.

I had the opportunity of being asked by one of the best-known churches in the country to join their staff. I told the pastor that I just told my children we wouldn't move again. From a vocational standpoint, the offer was irresistible, yet I had to say no to that amazing opportunity because of my promise to the family. It was just one of those (take-up-your-) cross moments. Little did I know, of course, that an even bigger church here in Houston would make me the same offer only a few years later. In hindsight, the decision was a good one. So for those of you who haven't had understanding bosses, I still think you are making the right choice by not gauging your work life on the basis of earthly influences, finance or promotions, etc.

Turning to the second part of the question, I am reminded of a family vacation we had in Hawaii. As we hiked up to the top of a mountain, the guide pointed to the plant next to us and said it is the most dangerous plant in the island. It had killed more people than any other plant. Everybody took a step back when we heard that, assuming the plant was

poisonous. It turns out the plant is a fern that only grows on a very steep incline. It masks the fact that people close to the plant are actually standing on the edge of a precipice. People with a false sense of security would step on the fern and fall inevitably to their death.

Let me suggest that there are three spiritual ferns when we look at work-life balance. As a pastor, I would advise that if you experience one of these it should cause some concern. If you experience two, you might as well be on the precipice. If you experience all three, I would suggest that you call a counselor or a pastor before you head back to the office just for self-preservation.

First, I find that people who are out of balance tend to get very lonely. They lose that relational identity. From a spiritual perspective, Satan dines on lonely people and spits them out. Loneliness denigrates our ability to resist temptation. It is not a sin to be lonely and it could happen to anybody, but to allow ourselves to stay that way is unwise. When we become lonely, we become very vulnerable, and most of us don't manage loneliness very well. So if you are consistently lonely, it is a sign of being out of balance and it should be taken seriously. Second is tiredness. When we are tired we succumb to emotions like anger, treat others improperly, give less to our relationships, and become more vulnerable to temptation. So a consistently tired body is something to be concerned about. Last but not least is a lack of joy. The mark of a Christian is to have great joy with what God has done for us. If everything appears like drudgery to us, then what kind of gospel are we proclaiming? How can we be bearers of good news when we live with a sour face? The effectiveness of our testimonies is compromised.



What I pointed out is nothing but simple life management issues. Like spiritual ferns, they are not necessarily poisonous but they set us up for poisonous acts, attitudes and desires. As such we need to guard against them. After all, life balance is not just about ourselves but our families, too. If we go, our family goes with it. The church will be affected and so will be our fellow believers and their witness in the business community.

*Hays: What has been the result for people who have been able to effect life balance? What is the richest blessing you ever received as a direct result of life balance? What is the greatest price you ever paid?*

*Headley: All the research I have done on Christianity and work-life balance confirms that the Bible does not address the issue, at least not directly. Where the rubber meets the road is this: God puts us in this world to work and does not tell us when to stop. Is that a bad thing? It can be if we end up stepping on spiritual ferns and fall over the cliff, as Gary pointed out.*

In passages that talk about working, God gives us perspectives through nuggets such as, masters, be kind to your servant, or servants, give your master his due, or fathers, don't provoke your children to anger, or wives, submit to your husband, etc. These are principles that we can integrate and come up with a recipe for a balanced life.

In our firm there are 840 lawyers in 50 offices all over the map and I have been involved in a lot of leadership roles. One of these roles I currently hold is

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co-chair of women's leadership initiatives with a subgroup called work/life balance. I do think companies can have a faith-based workplace without being a Christian workplace, and ours, for example, is an inclusive tent with adopted policies on work-life balance that actually work.

A personal priority for me in the leadership role of my company is to help young women who came into the law practice to avoid falling by the wayside because of work-life balance issues. These young women went through law school and excelled. They might not be married when they started with the firm. The pressure was high, the time-off was little. They got married, and they had children. I have watched it happen too many times when these young women had no choice but to leave the profession under the circumstances. In the early days of my practice of law, there were no alternative ways, such as some kind of a flex schedule, to accommodate the needs of these young mothers. But it does [accommodate them] today. It is something I have felt very keen about as I managed the office.

So what is the richest blessing? A dear friend who had left the firm earlier this year sent me [a] personal note [expressing deep gratitude for my support of her and her family]. What other blessings do I need when such words and feelings weigh far more than the money I have made or the honor or prestige I ever received?

I believe in my earlier years I did pay a price monetarily and in terms of career advancement. Law firms gauge you on productivity, which is that all-important billable-hour. Every law firm I have been with, there is a threshold minimum. My view was that what I owed my master was that minimum. I didn't owe one hour



more. If I got a performance bonus because of billable hours, then I felt I had taken it away from my family. So I tried to hit it and never tried to exceed it. My employer can always expect me to do a really good job meeting the minimum, but I was not going to take away from my children any more than I already did by being here.

*Hays: What has to happen in order for work to become a daily act of worship? Is it even possible? What poses the greatest threat to victorious living day by day, year after year?*

*Draudt:* I believe it is important to surround yourself with people who have like values and morals. All my customers are special to me but there are some who are more relatable. I tend to associate myself with Christian leaders in the community. They are someone you can pick up the phone and call, share your thoughts, bounce ideas off and get good feedback. To have an active act of worship, you need to share things that are important to you with people who are like you, harboring strong Christian values.

*Ammerman:* At church, we have visitation nights when we go visit newcomers to tell them about the church and get to know them. I woke up one day and realized that is what I do as a banker, too. We visit clients, cold call prospects, tell them about our business, and get to know them. In I Timothy 4:12, Paul tells us to show ourselves an example of those who believe. Just last week, I was in Europe visiting clients, [and I had prayed] to find a way to bridge gaps and build a relationship so that I could be an example where not many are followers of Christ.

The way we conduct ourselves tells people we are Christ-followers, and

people often know us (and what we stand for) even before they have a chance to meet us in person. I have strong relationships with fellow believers who represent some of the very best clients I have in this town. There are a lot of bigger banks than ours around the world. How we get these clients into our portfolio often has a lot to do with the glue that holds our relationships, and more often than not, it is the witness and the faith they find in me. Trust is built on our witness and God rewards that.

*Mearse:* I have found several truths about work-life balance. First, work-life balance differs from person to person. I used to work with a fellow who had very different work habits than I did, and only much later did I realize we had different life balances. We have to manage our expectations and should avoid comparing ours against others'.

Second, work-life balance changes over time. Had you told me after joining the firm that I had to relocate to Anchorage or Kuala Lumpur, I would have quit on the spot. Yet the assignments, when they came, turned out to be blessings.

Third, there will be times when there won't be any balance. I always say at college recruiting events that we sometimes work under a term paper syndrome. You've got to work a little harder and later to get the paper done on the night before it is due. In the business world, that may not be the night before, but two or three months before. So there will be times when your life is out of balance.

The last truth I want to mention is that you have to manage your own expectations as well as those of whom you are working for. But also let them know what true balance means to you. I remember there was a time when I was working

seven days a week while shuttling back and forth between Florida and Houston. It was about the time I was up for review for partner, when I told my boss that if I had to be working seven days a week consistently I wouldn't be here very long. I had other commitments than just work. We need to know and set our boundaries and make them known to those we work with.

*Thomas:* An out-of-balance work life is sort of like smoking. You can get away with an occasional cigar or a few cigarettes, but eventually, if you get heavily into it, you get hurt. You can cope with an out-of-balance marriage for a while, but if you stop working on your marriage, you will end up spending a lot of time working on your divorce. The same goes for your children. If you don't spend

the time raising them, eventually you may spend a lot of time dealing with cops, courts, and substance abuse counselors. I am not saying it will happen, but it is definitely more likely you would have to deal with the fallout.

It is the same health-wise. If we keep sacrificing our physical health by not eating, exercising, or sleeping, our body can handle that for a while. Yet our life can be brought to a sudden stop when we come down with any number of ailments resulting from a life that has long been out of balance. So just because the consequences are not immediate does not mean we should be blind to the effects of imbalance. As Christians, how we finish is just as important as how we start. If we don't finish well, we sort of undercut our whole life of work as a witness for Christ.

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