

# Motivation in Business

**Spring Conference at Ridley Hall Cambridge  
30 March -1 April 2012**

*Report prepared by Sally Orwin*

Against the background of the global financial crisis, this conference looked at a wide variety of motivating factors in business from a Christian perspective. The conclusion was one of hope rather than despair.



## Introduction

**F**aith in Business hosted another successful conference this year in the congenial surroundings of Ridley Hall in Cambridge. 33 people from diverse areas of business and academic life gathered to discuss and challenge one another on the issue of motivation in business. Combined with opportunities for more informal conversations among delegates over coffee, lunch and dinner, the conference concluded with worship in the chapel together on Palm Sunday when David Murray preached on biblical wisdom expressed in love.

What motivates us at work? Richard Higginson, Director of *Faith in Business*, asked the following questions: 'Is it the size of our pay packet and – depending on the sector we work in – the lure of a bonus for outstanding performance? Is it intellectual stimulus, joy in teamwork, or that mysterious entity we call job satisfaction? Is it the belief that we can make a positive difference to the quality of people's lives through our work? What, if anything, gets us out of our bed on Monday morning with a spring in our step and a glint in our eye?

Closely linked to the question of motivation is the issue of ambition. What are our ambitions in business? Do we want to get to the top, and what methods are we prepared to use to do so? Are we simply ambitious for ourselves, or are we ambitious for our organisation? Do personal and corporate ambitions mesh together, or are they in tension?

Christian faith impinges on motivation and ambition, but how exactly? Does it encourage Christians to be mild and self-denying, to be followers rather than leaders? Or does it incite a passion to use our gifts and talents to the full? If we seek 'the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God' (Colossians 3:1), what bearing does this have on our earthly ambitions? What are appropriate Christian ambitions in the business world?

The conference looked at these issues and related questions in depth. Its aim was to clarify delegates' motivation and sharpen ambition in positive directions, drawing on the accumulated wisdom of personal experience and addressing the concerns and questions



▶▶ of younger participants who have recently embarked on their business career. It was helpful to have a cross-cultural dimension, exploring attitudes to motivation and ambition in Scandinavian and Chinese cultures as well as the UK.

### Adventuring with God

Arriving in Cambridge on Friday evening, Bev Shepherd had the unenviable task of opening the conference to delegates arriving tired after a week of hard work. A management consultant, Bev has been a Workplace Speaker for the London Institute for Contemporary Christianity for many years and has recently set up the *PrayerWorks* initiative to encourage prayer in our everyday places of work.

Bev is an experienced and winsome conference speaker. After a brief introduction looking at classic motivational theories from the past 40 years, she moved on to motivation in the context of biblical resilience and the deeply-held belief that the Christian life is one of meaning.

Highlighting a number of characters from the Bible, she talked about call, command and commission. The process of learning resilience develops out of the trials God ordains for his people. Using the biblical ‘weapons’ of faith and prayer, the Christian is prepared and equipped through times of trial to look for the next open door of opportunity and go through it confident in God’s commission. Rooting the motivation of the Christian firmly in the context of God’s ongoing desire to equip his people for works of service, Bev spoke of being built for battle. It is in this context that she has developed *PrayerWorks* as a means of equipping and encouraging the people of God to pray strategically across the whole of life beyond the walls of our church buildings.

### Big Business

The thrust of Jim Wright’s presentation was: how can we influence our organisations as followers of Christ? His desire was to

stimulate conference delegates to think through how we might challenge one another in our working lives where the world, the flesh and the devil may tempt us to keep quiet about the good news.

Jim presented what he perceived to be some of the key problematic issues with big business today including greed, globalisation, deregulation, debt, privatisation and cost cutting. He spoke about the ‘limiting’ and ‘disempowering’ misconception among Christians that the best one can do is maintain one’s integrity in a corrupt world without attempting to influence and change the secular paradigms in which we live and work. He asked the common question: ‘Why are we so fearful and anxious?’ when we know, drawing on Colossians 3:17, that Jesus is our ‘ultimate boss’ and we are commanded to work for the welfare of society and its institutions.



**Jesus is our ‘ultimate boss’**

*Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, Col 3:17*  
 (Mosaic of Jesus Christ, Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, 1261)

In this context, we can recognise and draw strength from the biblical principle that we are called to be obedient rather than to win.

### Tomorrow Today

Dr Graeme Codrington founded *TomorrowToday* to ‘work hard to help our clients understand the future world of work’. ([tomorrowtoday.uk.com/](http://tomorrowtoday.uk.com/)) The company specialises in identifying the forces that are shaping the world today, and shows its clients how they can gain tomorrow’s competitive ▶▶

▶▶ advantage today, particularly in the areas of strategy and the future, leadership, talent and teams, customer experience and marketing and organisational agility.

In his conference presentation, Graeme focused particularly on cultural trends across the generations. What does this mean for how we approach discipleship, evangelism and the Christian life generally in both its gathered and scattered forms? How can those from the Silent Generation begin to understand the approach of Generation X and Y?

Given that behaviour stems from attitudes, he spoke about influencing the future behaviour of Christians gathered in the church and scattered in the world through a better understanding of generational trends. He spoke about the cyclical nature of the different paradigms, particular aspects of which pop up two or three generations down the line. Using family as a powerful metaphor for church, he encouraged cross-generational engagement and interaction. It was the kind of talk which inspired some 'aha' moments – 'now I understand that person/group in my church or business!'

### Motivation in China

As Director of *Faith in Business*, Richard Higginson travels widely to learn and assess how the Christian faith impacts on and motivates business people in different cultures around the world. Speaking about his recent experiences on trips to China, he explained how the Chinese view Christianity as a key factor in the domination of European culture and economic power in the modern era. This provided the basis for a series of lectures to Chinese businesspeople on Christianity, Culture and Capitalism which he delivered in Guangzhou just before Christmas last year.

Richard rooted motivation in business in China into an historical context. He showed how up to around 1500 A.D. the inventiveness and curiosity of the Chinese meant that in many ways they were well advanced culturally and economically. This was reversed slowly over the succeeding centuries, as

acknowledged by Deng Xiaoping, who said that 'No country that wishes to become developed today can pursue closed-door policies... Counting from the middle of the Ming Dynasty to the Opium Wars, through 300 years of isolation, China was made poor, and became backward and mired in darkness and ignorance.' It is now making up for lost time at a rate of knots.

More recently, however, the growth of Christianity in China has seen a proliferation of what are called 'Boss Christians'. The ethical framework it provides has helped the Chinese in the struggle to cope with the transition from communism to capitalism. Christians have begun to acquire a reputation for being hard-working, honest and trustworthy.

Richard cited the example of TS Wong and his company Jetta which employs 40,000 people (see Natalie Chan's article 'Making Toys in China', *FiBQ* 13:2, pp.23-25). Through the watchwords of 'integrity, excellence and synergy' Mr Wong has raised standards of health and safety not only in Jetta but in the toy industry as a whole in China.

Challenges remain for Chinese Christians, and generally the Chinese church suffers from inadequate teaching, which fails to make disciples rather than converts. However, Richard concluded his presentation with the exciting opportunity that now exists for Christianity to have a positive influence on China at a crucial stage in world history. ▶▶



Conference delegates  
Andy Atkins (holding *FiBQ*) with Mo Trudel

▶▶ **Success and Significance**

Now in his 60s, Harald Holt presented the conference with his research findings on what it means for a Christian in business or the world of work to find both success and significance. His main thrust was the question: what does it look like for an individual to walk through the span of life looking to deploy our gifts in varied opportunities to serve God?

To help the conference delegates understand their own personal route through life, he presented a ‘cycle of motivation from faith’. Beginning with the grace of God and understanding ourselves through the Word of God we can look to gain an understanding of our spiritual and practical gifts at different stages in life. Through this we can mentor and coach one another in grace to seek alternative application of these gifts in what he called ‘parallel careers’.

Harald himself has had a varied career serving as a telecoms expert, rector of Noroff College in Norway and now working to expand and ripple out his ideas on the ‘second half’ of life through the Scandinavian website ‘Business – More than Money’ ([www.tropaaajobben.org/](http://www.tropaaajobben.org/)). Taking the Saturday evening slot, his thesis prompted some heartfelt personal discussions among the conference delegates.

**ToughStuff**

Andrew Tanswell set up his company *ToughStuff* with Dutch business partner, Adriaan Mol, to provide affordable solar-



Conference delegates - Ridley student Kina Robertshaw (from Zambia) with Harald Holt

powered alternatives for those living off-grid, replacing expensive, unhealthy and environmentally damaging products. Availability of these products has transformed the lives of the very poor, solar lamps for example substituting for dangerous kerosene lamps, enabling children to do homework in the evenings.

Andrew opened his presentation by talking about the significance of a name. He referred to the well-known vision-setting technique of writing one’s own obituary, ‘What do you want people to say about you at your funeral?’ but replaced this with the concept of writing one’s name in heaven. Nehemiah, for example, might be known as ‘Repairer of Broken Walls’.

He also used an example of an experience with his daughter to present the idea of the Christian life as being like a child walking along a log. Elodie (whose name means ‘chosen by God’) wanted to walk along the log without help but needed the occasional steadying hand from her Dad. What is the metaphorical equivalent of the log you are walking along in this Christian life? asked Andrew. What name will you have when you’ve used up your gifts in the world now for the glory of God in eternity?

Andrew spoke honestly about the need for accountability as a Christian entrepreneur running an enterprise with a triple bottom line in a world where safety and security in the here and now can be a powerful force, drawing one away from the adventure of seeking to provide not just financial reward but also environmental and social benefits.

The conference also generated many opportunities for more informal and personal interaction. There was much encouragement and support regarding the spiritual aspects of being a person of faith, particularly amid the challenging consequences of the recent global financial and political crisis. There are no quick fixes or easy solutions for this. I believe many delegates were encouraged to learn from others in different but equally challenging circumstances, how to move forward with godly motivation as we work together in the world now, to God’s eternal glory. ■