

Good morning brothers and sisters and welcome to the Sunday Sermon of our Church of Change. We are gathered here today to talk about what matters most. Some of you participated in our confessional booth this weekend to talk about your values. Our booth wouldn't be confessional if we didn't explore situations in which those values don't always persevere. We would like to take this time to thank all the participants for their open and heartfelt confessions.

There was a common thread to the values which are most important in our booth during the Australasian Change Days. We heard kindness a lot. Curiosity. Compassion and empathy. Openness and faith. But two values that were omnipresent in our talks relating to work, were honesty and being real. And if we have learned anything in working with values these last fifteen years, it is that people value the things that they need most.

Almost every confession came down to one thing: the challenge for the modern day change agent is to stay true to themselves, while the workplace tries to force them into an unnatural, systemic role. A role of power distancing, of withholding feedback, of being political and of saying yes to something while your internal compass says no. To stay human in a cold system of efficiency and ROI.

As one of our participants put it: it feels like i'm getting paid to fuck with people. Some of us compensate for this technocratic behavior by overcharging banks, mining companies and IT firms to create the conditions for doing good elsewhere at a minimum rate.

There were lots of examples of dehumanizing work in our booth this weekend: enduring things that go against your values as a practitioner. Holding yourself back. Dialing down playfulness, curiosity, creativity and kindness. The very skills that could energize and 'future proof' a company censured as part of a status quo.

Time and again we got the same message: change practitioners can be paid well. And be happy. But not at the same time. They value things that their clients seem not to. They aim to bring values like curiosity and integrity to a workplace that seems to only care about efficiency, profit and power. It seems to us that companies like the feeling of a change agent on the payroll, but not the real change that could come with it.

The one thing change agents can't seem to effectively address, is the culture in which companies can grow to be more human. Why is that? What risk is there to speak up against this culture of callousness?

And what's holding us back? The chains holding us back are familiar ones: mortgages to be paid, family to be provided for, careers to advance. Who are we without our C suite clients? It's hard not to confuse a 200 dollar hourly wage with a reward for being you.

So are we doomed to a lifetime of dehumanizing work? Is the fear of the professional abyss enough to stifle any thoughts of speaking up or taking a stand? Do we cast ourselves into the agonizing pits of management to become Chief executors of fire? Operational officers of Brimstone? It seems that we are willing to sell souls for an hourly wage on a corporate highway to hell.

Thus concludes the dark part of our sermon. Now we head towards the light.

People value the things that they need most. But in order to value something you must first be able to recognize it. And that means that it mirrors something in yourself. And one of the things that seems to inspire the change community is a shared idealism for a better world. A world in which organizations quit looking at their humans as resources, but look to organizations as being resources to humans. We are a tribe that can remind organizations that it is great people that make great companies. Curious people. Kind people. Empathetic people. People that fail, and learn, and in doing so become better people.

Listening to the humans in our booth leaves us no doubt that the change professional community is uniquely equipped to bring about the change that matters most: convincing companies to put people and their values first. Aligning the values that make us human with the values that drive our marketplace. It can be done. And we can do it.

But what does it take? What will make an agent of change have faith in their ideals? To seize the moment and tell a management team that there are humans behind spreadsheets? To call bullshit when core values become the domain of advertising? Or to tell a CEO that if they are not prepared to pay for honesty that they better not pay us at all?

In one of our favorite movies is The Matrix. In it, a wise man fighting against the machines to save humanity says that there will be difficult times ahead. Morpheus, as he is called says: If we are to prepare for it, we must first shed our fear of it. It is a lesson that is as old as humanity itself. The Stoics - islander philosophers of old - taught us that any fear will take us hostage as soon as we let it materialize in our minds. Fear of losing a house. Of not being able to provide. Of losing a job or ending a career. These stoics said that we must not fight our fears. It's this emotions like fear - and kindness and empathy - that make us human. Only by leaning into it and letting it pass through us can we make way for hope and acceptance. Once we embrace fear it loses its grip on us.

We agents of change have a lot to bring to the workplace. I believe it is we that can teach organizations to become human again. But in order to do so we must embrace fear, bring who we are to work and be courageous. It is when we take a leap of faith and accept vulnerability when we create the conditions for real connection. If there's one takeaway from the Australasian Change days for us it's that real connection takes courage. Wouldn't it be cool to leave ACDC number one with a renewed commitment to courage in our work?

Maybe the language that we can use can serve as a reminder to take that leap of faith in times of need. Did you know that the word 'courage' comes from the French word for heart? It literally means to 'have heart'. And heart is what the australasian change days community has in abundance...

And we would like to end this sermon by saying: doing well means nothing if it's not anchored in doing good. And doing good is the business of being aware of your values. And having a little courage from time to time. Please think back to ACDC and realize you're not alone when the time comes to be courageous. Because if we have learned anything in the booth this weekend is that the search for meaning in our work is one that we can share in our community. And it's when we take the time and the leap of faith to open up to each other that we experience the most real thing of all:

We are not alone. We are connected.

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#### Note to the reader

Thank you so much for your attention! We loved being present at ACDC with our confessional booth. One of our participants said: speaking to you made me aware of things that I wasn't aware of before. And that only took 10 minutes. We would love it if we could use our confessional booths to remind companies of their values and their humanity. Because we believe human companies are better companies.

If you can help us in this quest, we would love to hear from you.  
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