



---

# ENHANCING LIVES FOREVER

One Company's  
Journey Into Faith



## F O R E W O R D

My brother Brant and I launched our mortgage business in 2003. We struggled through the first year, but then in year two the business started to take off. We've been on a high growth curve ever since, going from 3 employees back then to over 2000 today.

Veterans United (VU) has been blessed greatly in that time. We've won numerous awards like: one of the nation's fastest-growing private companies (Inc.), the 30<sup>th</sup> best place to work nationally (Fortune), one of the best workplaces for giving back (Fortune), and many, many others. I don't say this to boast, but in order to say this totally crazy statement (but one I truly believe): all of these awesome awards pale in comparison to the excitement we've experienced and the lives we've seen impacted by launching a faith platform. To me, it is the greatest thing VU has ever done.

This came about in 2007, a really great season for VU. We were having a lot of fun, had an amazing team, we really cared about each other, and business was good. But still something seemed to be missing.

It was at this time, too, that I underwent my personal faith transformation. I was 32 years-old, and it happened pretty easily: a coworker invited me to church. Over the next few months of going to church and reading a Bible, I realized a deep need for Jesus. I accepted the gospel—Jesus' life and death and resurrection for me—and I put my trust and hope in Him. An unrivaled peace and joy washed over me, filling the long-empty crevices of my soul. From that moment on, I slowly started investing in my marriage and becoming a better husband, growing as a father, and being a better friend.

Within a year or so, I began looking at the people in my life that I really cared about, and realizing that the vast majority of them worked at VU. I found myself wanting them to experience that peace and joy that I had discovered. I knew their own path to such might be a bit different than my own, but I began desperately wanting more for them than just the superficial successes and strivings of life.

At that time, I was in a small group with 3 other guys from work, and we decided it would be great to start a bigger group with our coworkers. There, we could read the

Bible or other books on faith, ask big questions, offer accountability, and really dig in together to the deeper things in life.

For us, it was about opening up a conversation. Faith had become a pretty big taboo in the workplace in modern times, but we were committing to meet that challenge and at least open up a door—people could choose whether or not they wanted to walk through it and check it out for themselves.

We launched our book group to the whole company, and on the first Wednesday morning meeting, 8 people showed up. The next semester, the group doubled. So we chased the success, and added quarterly “faith forums” where we would rotate who would give his or her testimony to any coworkers who would show up. And the groups and forums kept growing.

At this point, we felt God was leading us to hire someone to guide all of the movement in the area of faith; all the pieces were in position to really become something, but we needed someone to synthesize things and add vision to it all. In this way, that door could be even more approachable to even more of our coworkers.

We weren't sure what exactly we needed, but we knew relationships were important. It had to be someone who could cry with our employees, but equally important was the ability to laugh with them. We wanted a person who could meet people where they were—whether inside or outside of faith—and wasn't pushing an agenda. We wanted someone who could counsel and have the best interest in mind for employees regardless of the individual employee's spiritual position.

After a three-year search, we found that person in Matt. He was far from your stereotypical “church guy” and I am constantly amazed at his speaking, writing, wisdom, humor and biblical understanding. He not only has those gifts, but he also has the ability to bring them to his audience. Above all else, regardless of whom he is talking with or what they are talking about, they know he cares about them. His non-intimidating, caring personality is a perfect fit for this kind of role. While this process may take a different shape for you, if you do end up hiring, hiring well couldn't be more important. Waiting three years was hard for us, but it was worth it to get the right fit.

Matt quickly jumped in and began his full-time job dedicated to living the gospel out with his coworkers. That can mean a lot of different things, but at the forefront is the willingness to attempt to love people well.

I hear stories all the time of my coworkers coming to know Jesus—or know Him more. My best guess would be that a couple hundred souls are further on their faith journey in the time since we started getting intentional about making faith an optional employee resource at work. We have a culture now in which it is not awkward to talk about one's faith—or lack of faith. We don't always agree, but we are committing to respecting one another and caring for one another all the same.

This guide is a snapshot of God's work here at VU over the first few years of our faith programming. In it, Matt will share some lessons he learned in helping to build a faith platform in a secular company. Your situation and circumstances might be much different than ours, but perhaps there are some ideas and mistakes here that you can learn from in making faith a reality in your work life. I'm not sure what restraints you have, what obstacles lay before you, but I do know that you are reading these words, and that there very well may be a reason for that. Perhaps that reason may even have eternity at its crux.

-Brock Bukowsky, co-owner of Veterans United Home Loans



# I. A CARING CULTURE

On the British two pound coin is an inscription taken from a letter from Isaac Newton that reads: “Standing on the shoulders of giants.” I’d like to start at the beginning, but that would be to invite failure. Seldom does anything successful begin at the beginning, for much went on before it existed—a foundation for success or for disappointment. I was fortunate that a culture of success had been developed long before I arrived, and it is on that which I now stand, learning and growing with each new day.

In the early 2000s, two brothers studying towards exciting careers as math teachers—if such a thing can exist—started a business. From that business evolved another business, and it was this second company, an exploration of the mortgage industry, that really captured the brothers’ imagination. That creative imagination was put on display through their choice of name: Mortgage Research Center; truly the work of the mathematical mind, chockfull of wonder and whimsy.

Aside from the name, however, things were successful. Like, pretty much everything. I mean, that isn’t to say it was easy, but what had started as a project was turning into an actual business, and one that may even have some promise.

So these two young men, with the future bright before them, took a look around at their present tense. Here they were in Columbia, MO, the town that they learned to love through college. And here was this business they began—made up of peers from those same college days. And each day they were hiring more and more of their friends, and then friends of their friends. They took an early loan officer and made him CEO. The business was about as “homegrown” as you could get.

And with that “home feel” came another organic operating principle: treating people well. This should always be the case, but how much easier is it when the people you are to be treating well are childhood friends, college roommates, and family members?

A company culture was born. Later came values befitting this culture and even a fulltime position charged with seeing that growth would never rob Veterans United—oh yeah, they wisely got a new name too—of its commitment to enhancing lives.

This is what I walked into in the summer of 2013, after turning down a chaplaincy at this company a few times because “it would never work.” It worked because a high-trust culture of respect was already established.

- How would employees define your company culture?
- Is caring a clearly seen part of the equation?
- Does your workplace have a holistic approach to individuals or is the actual job at the center of things?
- Why is care an important soil in which to plant seeds of faith?

## II. BE SMART, NOT SCARED

When Erik, a recruiter from Veterans United (VU) and family friend of mine from childhood, called about a chaplain position, it was an easy “no.” At that time, I was working at a church several hours away and jumping aboard a corporate setting felt a bit like selling out. And beyond that, I truly believed that this would not work for several reasons.

The first of those reasons was related to the age and demographic of the workforce. With an average age of around thirty, Veterans United was young. Studies indicate that many things matter to a young work force—autonomy, creativity, perks—but none seem to be as important as a single attribute: Authenticity. Increasingly today, people want to follow authentic leaders toward their own individual authenticity. Character still counts, but a key component of character is not so much the ability to do all the right things, but a willingness to admit when one hasn’t. We live in the age of self-expression, and the gods of the age are vulnerability, transparency, and genuineness. Add this to the political correctness of modern America, and you have a quandary when it comes to religion—especially religion in the workplace. More and more, religion is a taboo topic. Don’t ask someone how much money he makes, who he votes for, or, later in developing, bring up any sort of faith aspect—such conversation is now deeply private.

So at a mortgage company—an industry already known for stern regulatory standards—how on earth could a chaplaincy be created that was anything other than watered down? And, with the culture’s insatiable appetite for authenticity, how could

I, a devout Christian, occupy a position that would call me to abandon convictions or get sued, fired, or both? It was a catch-22, and I wanted no part of it.

You see, I was viewing VU through the prism of the broader Western culture—one that elevates tolerance above all else but can be terribly intolerant toward certain beliefs or means of living.

However, that was not what I witnessed upon my first recruitment visit to VU. It was like getting hit with a NERF dart in the head . . . no wait, that was actually a NERF dart hitting me in the head. The shooter didn't care if I was a VU employee yet or not. I was here, so I was going to be part of impromptu NERF wars and I was going to go down one of the company slides—reluctantly I did this too. And just as there wasn't a litmus test on if I was qualified to have a NERF gun shot at me, I wasn't vetted on my beliefs to fit in. I could have had a Bible under my arm as easily as a Richard Dawkins manifesto. Each may have told something about who I was, but neither excluded me from the community at-large nor replaced the story entirely.

This was different than I expected. Of course, the nature of hiring a "chaplain" is already going to be a far cry different than the traditional interview, at which things like religious thought play no part. But I guess I came in expecting a more traditional business interview because that, I thought, is all "business people" knew. And then my first interview question came my way. Sitting in a neighboring coffee shop with one of the biggest of VU wigs, there I was with a paradoxically balding man who had professionally done it all: he had launched, built, and sold business, held government positions, and was now in leadership at this young mortgage company. I figured he would ask me all the liability questions. All the ones that would protect the business side of things. I figured he would badger me on my PC acumen, my ability to play the chameleon, and gauge my overall capacity to contribute to the bottom line—all things, might I add, I was interested in, but more in the way that one is interested in a blister he has developed; it certainly was no passion.

Instead, he opened up with this: "Who is Christ for you?"

Taken aback, I answered. And then I answered many other gospel-centered questions. Some "liability" questions followed, but they were never based on fear or the bottom line; they were based on respecting others. The other interviews were confusingly

much the same. The small hiring team, made up in the most part of a few executives, saw no problem with building a Christian platform in the institution. In fact, to them it made sense! Since the company is Midwestern, and the prevailing religious demographic was Christian, it was sensible to have the chaplain be a Christian one. It was the type of cold, obvious logic that is far less fun to hurl around than haphazard offense at every occasion. But it made sense. Further, the position would be to help employees develop faith, explore faith, and engage faith. I could assist in that process, or just connect folks to helpful resources. So for those going along a path I knew a bit about, I'd be their guy. If they began to desire a different path than that which I could offer expertise on, well, it made sense—for them and me—to pass them off to someone who would be of more help. Again, it all suddenly seemed quite obvious.

It was understood from the beginning that the position would be a non-coercive friend of the employees, who sought their best regardless of their beliefs. And no matter what engagement was going on—a purely secular company event or one with faith connotations—we would live (and die) by a simple maxim: “Be smart, not scared.” It is that adage that has served us well here. Of course, there is risk in this sort of thing—these days there is risk in just about anything. But, regardless of what sort of business model you have, risk can be mitigated by wisdom and attention to detail. Over and over again, we come back to it: Be smart, not scared.

- Who are your employees? How can you best meet them where they are?
- What obstacles might need to be overcome in your workplace when creating opportunities for employees to engage (with a person, an idea, or program)?
- What things, for you, are worth a little smart risk?

### III. JUDGING A BOOK BY ITS TITLE

The smart, not scared decision to take the job came from the whispered voice of my wife. She leaned over on my second recruitment visit, the one I had brought her along on in order that she could point out all the holes in this boat, and said, “We sort of have to do this.”

Neither of us wanted to move. We were pretty content where we were, but there was something so compelling about seeing a parking lot full of cars. Each of these cars

represented a life. And each of these lives was a someone who I would be getting paid, essentially, to be kind to! I could be there with them in times of trouble or celebrate great victories with them. I could let them vent to me or cry with me or laugh with me, and I could do all this while growing in and being true to my worldview. In short, forty hours a week would be for finding ways to be light and seek the flourishing of all those around me.

If, of course, they would let me.

And this was a big consideration. When I was in the church setting, I could give a sermon one week, and someone could get offended by something I said, leave the church, and never come back, me none the wiser. I'd never get to meet the offended party, dig deeper into the way my words had miscarried, or have any chance at developing a relationship with him or her. So being with people all week who couldn't up and leave at the first contrarian thought had terrific appeal. But this was not them entering my space, but me barging into theirs. Even if they couldn't actually bar my path into the company, I think we all know deep down that the strongest of barriers are the invisible ones.

Before moving, I asked a non-faith friend of mine the following question: "Hey, what would you do if they hired a chaplain at your workplace?"

Jeff, without hesitation, answered: "I'd stay the hell away from that guy."

Jeff was twenty-eight. He was from a small town and was a sports nut. In short, he was representative of a very sizeable percentage of the company for which I had just committed to be a chaplain.

"Um, well, Jeff, what about if your company hired me? And I'd just work there and you could come talk to me about life, sort of whenever you needed to?"

"That'd be awesome!"

Jeff had taught us much that day.

He was into authenticity—just like most are nowadays. So the thought of having a trusted person with whom to be vulnerable held great appeal for him. But also clear in Jeff's initial response is the adherence to stereotypes, especially when it comes to

religion. Use the words “priest” or “church” or “righteous” and all sorts of images come forth for people, especially those who have either been raised in secular, skeptical cultures or harmed by religious ones.

I hadn’t even moved to Columbia yet to begin my new job, and already Jeff’s comments awoke in me a valid fear. Due to the charged words around a charged title, I would, by many, be written off as whatever their worst religious impression or experience put in mind. I would start at a net-negative, and any attempt of management to change the negative narrative in the minds of employees would only be more validation for their deepening mistrust.

And then it came back around to me, the catchphrase from emails and the recruitment visit: “Be smart, not scared.” I hadn’t even started the job yet, but I sent an email to the owner and the recruiter explaining that we had a problem. I rehashed my conversation with Jeff and the subsequent fear it brought on of creating institutional disdain before ever even starting the job. I then offered up some different titles we could go with instead. I felt they’d see this as anxious and finicky. Instead, they emailed back the title they liked best and instantly substituted it for “chaplain.” This nimbleness, a hallmark for our company, has been central to this role from even before the beginning, and this agility has been vital. From that day forward I became the Director of Faith & Community. I had always dreamed of being the St. Louis Cardinals shortstop or the President of the United States. I would now settle for this one-of-a-kind job with a conjured title. Today, I’m thankful the Cardinals never called and that my hair and mind never quite got presidential enough.

- What haven’t you thought of?
- What are some small areas where you need to get smarter?
- Which things have you missed that might be worth going back and fixing/changing?
- Can your vision adapt to God’s leading?

## IV. KNOW WHAT IS VALUED

So I had a title. Next was the creation of a job description. We came up with one that seemed to make sense and gave a decent on-paper account of what this role would

entail. Of course, none of us really knew. Some of the executives had visited Hobby Lobby to get a feel for how their chaplaincy program worked. They had read about Ford and other organizations that also had some sort of faith/religion facet to their employee services. But any of these, replicated precisely, would fail here. And so it will be for your organization, should you duplicate this model. In public speaking, experts and laymen alike emphasize the importance of audience. One has to know her audience to give a truly effective speech. So it is when serving people—be it in realms of religion or elsewhere. Meeting people where they are is crucial.

One way we went about doing that is through the emphasis on the “community” piece of the job title. VU is an autonomous web-based company. People are very individualistic, yet our process calls for teamwork to get a loan from start to finish. Therefore, our culture hinges upon a statement from our values: “We achieve more collectively than we ever could individually.” This simple line embodies our organization, and, as such, teamwork and community are not mere trifles—without them, we fail.

So community is important here. It is how we have set up a multi-million dollar charitable foundation, towards which 93% of employees donate; it is how we close more VA purchase loans than any other organization; it is how we have the most intense dodgeball tournaments of any company anywhere; it is why we land on national lists for camaraderie and why we are considered one of the nation’s “Great Places to Work.” And since it exists at the broad level, it works its way down to the micro level: healthy community or unhealthy community is there for each and every employee to choose between.

This is where the title and job description could help serve me and this new platform. Not everyone in our company is into faith. Fewer still are interested in Christianity. Yet everyone, regardless of belief or unbelief, has to sign off on community. It is expressed so often in our values and in our workflow that anyone not onboard with healthy community would feel a bit like Hannibal Lecter when he’s all masked and straight-jacketed. Yes, it can get campy at times, and we use familial terms more often than the Brady Bunch. One year, an owner declared it “The Year of the Hug” at VU. HR loved that.

With this community emphasis though, comes opportunity. If I could find a way to plug into “community” and seek its betterment, then I could do life with more people, win more people over to trust me, and maybe even lead a few beyond just community and self, and on into the realms of faith. But we, at all points, would leave that decision up to them. In community, there would be no such decision, and good community is always a win for the organization and its people; it is highly valued by everyone in our organization.

By altering the title and including something “valuable” across the board (and something that I had a proclivity toward), we found a way to validate my position beyond just the proponents of faith. I would take part in new hire orientations, I’d meet with folks who were having conflict at work, I’d help plan events, like the aforementioned, bloodthirsty dodgeball tournament, a Valentine’s Day couples luncheon, a Thanksgiving “Feast Forum” for expressing gratitude, and more of the like.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul is a missionary by night, but by day he contributes to society, earns money, and gains validity in the culture by setting up tents. I am no apostle, so how much more do I need to establish a good “reason” for being around, especially for those, like my friend Jeff, who are operating with some negative faith perceptions?

And of course, none of this is a ruse. I do care deeply about community, about friendships, about conflict resolution, about flourishing in every realm and dimension. So it is easy to learn in this space, to help others in this space, and to use this space to gain the institutional clout necessary to have some influence with my life through my job.

- What defines your community?
- What are your community’s deeply held and obvious lived-out values?
- How can you develop programming that exists within a pre-existing healthy value-set?

# V. WANT AN ONION RING? AND OTHER IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Like waves upon the shore, it seems the same questions have barraged me since starting this new endeavor.

What do you do with people of other faiths?

What about atheists?

How do you have group meetings on faith?

Can you say the name (gulp) Jesus?

What if someone gets offended?

What if someone doesn't believe the same things as you?

They are the same questions I had when beginning this job. And since my livelihood depended upon thoughtful answers to them, I spent a lot of time thinking on them. On drives I'd stare at the landscape imagining the vengeful practitioner of another faith, seething with rage at the Bible on my desk. (If you see that guy, you may want to tell him he's probably practicing his faith wrong!) I pondered vehement picketers standing outside my office demanding I renounce my belief in a Creator. I pictured the whole thing spinning out of control, and the words of one of the company's leaders besieged my shaky mind: "If we end up getting sued, well yeah, that might happen. These days that can happen for almost anything at almost any time. If you want to bring down the whole company, let us know first." He said this in a tongue-and-cheek manner, but it was a good reminder that, yes, there is risk everywhere, but it can't keep one from doing things that one determines are worth the risk.

The truth is many of us have these questions, but honestly, that doesn't make them good questions, just volatile ones. Let me explain.

I like the Cardinals. And yet I work with some clowns who have the audacity to like the Cubs. Okay, I shouldn't have just called them clowns, especially given the analogy. But here's the thing: I didn't really mean it. In the end, I'm all right with them liking the

Cubs if they feel they must. They wear their Cubs hats around me too, and I don't remove them and spit in them or anything either. No, in fact, when I hear they like the Cubs, it usually sparks conversation, and not hatred. Do I think they are wrong for liking the Cubs? Honestly, yeah, probably a little. But that doesn't mean I treat them bad, or devalue them, or hate on them (outside of formerly apropos World Series jokes).

Convoluted example in order to make this point: in most other circumstances we know exactly how to treat people who differ from us. It is only our external environment that has somehow turned faith and politics into two very charged arenas. But honestly, they don't have to be.

And do I think practitioners of other religions are mistaken? Yeah, I do actually. Not in some prideful, bigoted way. Just in a way that I've considered worldviews and think mine is more or less "correct." And you know what? They think their worldview is correct too (which means mine isn't!). No one knowingly follows second-best truths. That would be like my wife offering me steak or pizza for dinner, and despite desiring the pizza in every ounce of me, opting instead for the steak for no reason whatsoever. The simple fact is that we all follow what we think is best, and in the realm of truth, what we think is true. Sure, some people can say that all truths are equally valid, but that claim cannot stand as long as there are those who say that all truths aren't equally valid—those two opinions cannot coexist philosophically. If person A says "all beliefs about foods are equally valid" and person B says "pizza is the best food," person A would have to disagree with person B's worldview at some level—there would be something, in person A's view, "wrong" about it. And that's okay! We all make these decisions. Every day we make them about all sorts of things. Most of the time we are just too busy to think about our thinking long enough to realize it.

So what is the point? The point is, I feel absolute freedom to sit with the atheist and discuss why he is wrong about his view of the world and give him the freedom to refute my theistic leanings. Why act like either of us is doing anything else? And why convince ourselves or others that we cannot do this in a loving, winsome, respectful way? Of course we can. And we prove it every day with the "simpler" issues of life.

One of my favorite meals at work came early on. A coworker and I were eating at a barbecue place. We sat down with our lunches, and he broke the momentary silence by saying, "I don't believe in God."

It was an interesting lead-in. And it was one of those moments when I think I actually had the perfect response (a rarity, just ask my wife!). Here is my poetic reply:

"Want an onion ring?"

Turns out he may not have liked my views on God, but he liked my onion rings just fine. In that lunch, we talked work, sports, relationships, and, yes, theology. Do I think he is wrong in his unbelief? Yes, I do. And he thinks I am wrong in my belief. And now, with that out there in the open, we get to go about finding other things we are both wrong and right about. It is relationships without expectations and without strings, without political correctness and loaded questions and cagey answers. In short, it is authentic. And it works! I'd be inauthentic if I said I didn't hope some of my belief would rub off on him. But whether it does or doesn't, I'd offer him my last onion ring all the same.

We live in a litigious day and age; I doubt many would argue that, especially boards of directors and business owners. But there are constitutionally guaranteed freedoms out there, regardless of your specific situation. Sure, a privately held company may be able to express certain of these freedoms more directly, but even a rigid public structure cannot strip an individual of his or her right to respect and honor his or her fellow person. And since wholesome faith expression is the overflow of love from one individual to another, there are myriad ways that faith can be presented in even the most stringent of workplaces through simple acts of kindness.

- How can you create a culture that is encouraged to respectfully disagree?
- How can transparency impact relationship?
- What could your workplace look like if political correctness and fear were replaced with open, honest communication maintained through vigilant love?
- What actions are smart, faith-conducive possibilities for your office?

## VI. WE DON'T SUE OUR FRIENDS

We mentioned lawsuits above, and since we are a litigious society, why not come back to that? It is so grabby. Fun, right?

I recall one person who wasn't thrilled about the company hiring a "faith person." That is the way it was put to me then, which is a funny way to put it because it is a whole new layer beneath passive aggressive. It is passively passive aggressive. I mean, "faith person" isn't really mean. Better options could have included any of the following: faith dork, Jesus freak (or just "freak"), charlatan, snake charmer, scam artist, crackpot, joker, total loser, ingrate . . . I mean, there is not a shortage of colorful ways to demean me, just ask the kids I went to junior high with.

I went to meet with this person, and you know what I did? I treated her to a pleasant breakfast. She was a wonderful conversationalist. We, like my onion ring friend, shared our views on faith (she is a semi-practicing Muslim), on life, on love, on breakfast burritos. It was great. At the end of the meal I baptized her in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

No, just kidding. At the end of the meal, I shook her hand as a friend. I cared about her, about her vision for her future, about her realizing some of her hopes and dreams, and I certainly never wanted to do anything to cause her pain. I also hoped she wouldn't ever want to sue the company because of me.

And she didn't. I'm not sure if it is because I didn't do anything "sue-worthy," but more than anything I think it is for two other reasons. First, and probably most importantly, I showed her I cared for her. Whether we agreed on everything or not, we could go down the road quite a ways together as humans. And for us, as we soon realized, that had to be enough. We were alike enough to get along and care about one another, and different enough to know that there would always be points at which we would go our separate ways. And, when you think about it, this is true for everyone on earth. My wife and I go the same way in so many areas, but we have different views on bathroom etiquette, household cleanliness, and exercise (she is for it; I'm against it). She and I go down the road quite a ways, but there are still things we compromise on and some things we will never see eye to eye on. Every human relationship is like this: We are all individuals learning to better cohabitate on this earth.

The second reason I think she didn't try to blow this whole thing up is because I told her about the vending machine.

At our workplaces we have free vending machines. Early in the company, our owners liked to eat snacks at work, and they decided that maybe employees would too, so they provided free vending machines full of junk food. They did the same thing with massages, with some fun company outings/events, with healthy snacks, and other perks. And then, when one of our owners had a prominent faith experience, which originated and developed through the friendships of a few coworkers, he thought it might be a good idea to provide other coworkers with the same opportunity. And that is the operative word here: opportunity. It is open for you, just as the vending machines are, but no one stands there and makes someone binge eat Snickers bars. It is totally volitional. You take a Snickers if you want one. If you don't, you don't.

I told this new friend at breakfast that I wasn't going to try to make her a Christian. I wasn't going to twist her arm. I wasn't going to awkwardly force my beliefs into each and every conversation. With her or with any VU employees. It was funny to see the angst vanish from her face. This took all the bite out of the relationship. We could talk faith, sure, but only as a conversation from a place of deep meaning and genuineness, not as a slimy sales pitch.

Time and time again this has made all the difference. I've been able to counsel, to learn with, even to pray with people who believe starkly differently than I do. Sometimes I ask people I have meetings with if I can pray with them, and it has always been this great conversation, this coming together of sorts:

"Look, I know you don't believe this. And that is fine. But I really do, so I'd love to pray with you because it will make me feel better about all this, and who knows? If I'm right about any of this God stuff, it sure couldn't hurt anything."

They emphatically agree to this. (I've had one "no" from one of my favorite people at the end of a very emotional meeting discussing her painful decision to leave the company. I then told her, "Okay, but know I'm going to pray for you as soon you leave because I care about you and that is the best way I know how to care, okay?" To that she smiled through her tears her warm assent, we hugged, she left, and I prayed for her.) And if someone ever said back to me, "Okay, you can pray for me, but then I'm

going to chant to my god on your behalf, okay?" I'd nod in respectful agreement, and pray silently to my God along with them.

- How can you give options to people, yet let them decide for themselves?
- Are you comfortable with holding on loosely toward others even to things you think of as essential for you?
- Do you trust your beliefs and yourself enough to extend trust to others—even those different from you?

## VII. WISE ONE-ON-ONES

The second day of my new job had me in front of nearly 400 employees introducing one of the owners, who would be sharing his own life story and faith story with employees. I wasn't sure what to do with my seven-minute window because I was there to connect with a bunch of strangers and to explain to them my new role—one I didn't have a grasp on myself.

I didn't really want to give this talk. It seemed strange to stand there with a microphone, acting like I had a clue as to what was going on or that I would be any help whatsoever to these people. If I had been around long enough to feel comfortable ruffling feathers, I certainly would have told my boss I was opting out of making this mini-speech, and I would have had valid reasons for doing so.

But honestly, nothing was better than those moments. I got to disarm some doubts about the position, and show that I had most of the same qualities of the existing workforce. I wore a VU t-shirt—the common dress of the employee—visually showing I was not some external force, but an internal person: I was, from that day, one of them.

The large audience experiences have all been very important for gaining influence in this community. I've had the chance to speak at larger venues called Faith Forums, to give a brief address at our annual holiday parties, to join in several of our culture videos. But, while the large group opportunities have been significant, the other, smaller opportunities have been just as vital. Our Chief People Officer, a company culture sage named Amanda Andrade, spoke to me about the importance of different interactions in my first few months: one-to-one, one-to-small, one-to-large.

Early on, I would use any downtime I had developing these one-to-one opportunities. Much of this was done via email. I had a rule that when I heard an employee's name three separate times, I had to email that employee. What hearing the employee's name multiple times told me was that the employee was a gatekeeper. Or, to put simply, that he or she was popular. An example of this was the name Aaron Crites. His name came up a handful of times in my first few weeks, so in some of my downtime—most of my time was “downtime” while trying to get things going—I sent him an email that read something along these lines:

*Aaron,*

*Hey, my name is Matt and I'm new to the company. I'd love to get together sometime and get to know you more, so let me know what would work best for you. I could do a lunch or just about anything. Let me know if you'd be up for this, and even if you don't, know that I'm for you. –Matt*

The recipient would get back to me, and more times than not some sort of meeting was set. (I had a company credit card and permission to take people to lunch or to coffee, and it is amazing how free food/drink opens up one's calendar. I'm not sure what resources you might be able to commit to something like this, but thinking things like this through will be very beneficial.)

In those meetings, I had all kinds of goals. Because of my faith and my role at the company, sure, getting to open up about faith was always in my mind, but it was not some do-or-die goal. Actually, my main goal was simply to show this person that I was for him or her. Knowing that they were a gatekeeper, meant that to win their affinity and to gain their trust, wasn't just gaining one advocate, but that it would cause a ripple effect of approval. And this was never some sort of chess game; it worked this way because I was truly for this person. And in order truly to make anything beyond a small dent of impact, I was going to have use my hours as wisely as possible—especially at the start—and that meant thinking beyond addition toward multiplication.

Take Aaron again. He was well-known and well-liked in the company. He, at that time, was not a faith person—far from it really (at least it appeared so). If I tried to win him to my mental position in regards to religion, the odds are I fail nine out of ten times.

But even if those odds are adjusted, let's say to fifty-fifty, I'm flipping a coin on a relationship with Aaron—heads, we become close and unified, tails he thinks I'm a weirdo with only one thing to offer him, a thing he decidedly doesn't want. And, added to the latter scenario, any time my own name gets brought up, he, if noble, stays silent, or, more likely, rolls his eyes and offers, "Yeah, that dude is pretty weird." So not only have I lost Aaron, I've lost all the people who trust him—which, based on the frequency of his name coming up, is many.

These meetings gave me the opportunity to sit down with a hundred coworkers and impact the impression of a thousand of them by proxy. If you win the gatekeepers, you have a better shot at winning the rest (or at least starting at neutral with them). So I was not trying to evangelize my coworkers—thank goodness! I was simply trying to build relationships. Plus, I knew that if Aaron and I became friends, he would get to see my faith, just like I would get to see his worldview—that is how, you know, genuine friendships work.

This worked. It was easy and effective. I didn't have metrics for this, but what I had was meeting invites. I was getting emails out of the blue from coworkers whom I hadn't met, asking if they could sit down with me. One person told me about a spouse's infidelity, another wanted to talk through if he should move to Colorado or not, a third had hit rock bottom and wanted to see if faith had any answers. And that was on day three! All of those people had heard about me from people I had either met with or emailed. I didn't have to do all the work of connecting because the gatekeepers would do that for me—it is natural for these woo-filled folks. Things started getting really busy in the one-on-one realm just in time for one-to-small to kick off.

- Do you have hidden agendas with people?
- Have you identified the gatekeepers in your community? How are you building relational traction with them?
- What strategy do you have to cultivate relationships and grow new connections?

## VII. GETTING TOGETHER BY GETTING TOGETHER

We had always had a company built upon friendships. This was the original foundation of the company, and it had grown outward. Friends and family continually were hired on, and relationships abounded in the workplace. So it was not odd to see employees forming groups to pursue common interests.

What we wanted to do is use our affable atmosphere to get employees together not just to try new beers or do fantasy football drafts, as important as those things are, of course. Our desire was to see people have a safe, comfortable environment to consider life's deeper questions. Again, there would be no coercion to be in these groups or to conform to any opinions, but just an open opportunity to ask deep questions in a non-judgmental zone.

We did this through small groups, and continue to do so today. We launch somewhere between fifty and seventy employee-led small groups every semester. There are also organic groups that just sort of pop up, but the “official” groups are rolled out to employees and take on all sorts of issues. Some of the groups are secular in nature, and delve into business and self-help topics. Some are hobby-based. But we also have numerous books that explore faith and internal development. I look at these group offerings like I look at those climbing walls at gyms. The thing that separates the beginner walls from the expert ones is how far apart the handholds are. With our groups, I try to have some seeker studies/books and pair these with adept leaders for the seeker—the type of leader who is comfortable asking questions without feeling the need to constantly provide all the answers. We have books that have a faith component but are more topical—like books on being a good mom or a better husband. We offer books that are biographical in nature, and we tend to have something historical. We’ll have some fiction offerings like “The Death of Ivan Ilyich” and “The Chronicles of Narnia.” (There is nothing like reading a children’s book series with a bunch of mortgage-industry adults!) And then, of course, we’ll have some deeper theological offerings, including some groups who sit with Bibles in hand and dig into Scripture. And each semester I try to teach a classroom-style course that explores the Basics of Christianity in a relevant way. For the experienced wall-climber, we have some expert walls, but we don’t want to throw the novice up on that wall and

frustrate him toward having feelings of inadequacy and eventually giving up on climbing altogether.

These groups aim to offer something for everyone, even for the skeptic or the atheist, who are welcome to attend these groups, learn from them, and share their own insights. In fact, some of my favorite groups have been the ones that have included those in the anti-faith position. Like one we had my first semester with “Amy” in it.

Amy signed up for a group that was reading a book called, “Who Made God?” The book explored a bunch of really sticky questions surrounding the Christian faith and whether or not it is a reasonable, logical worldview. Most of the dozen or so people signed up to learn more about their own Christian faith, and be better able to give a reason for the hope they had.

Not Amy. She signed up as an atheist who was bent on finding holes in Christianity that she could then use to challenge her pious grandparents, who were, apparently, prone to pushing their own views on their “wayward” granddaughter. By nature inquisitive, she would attend each session and rattle off question after question to the group. The group leader, an IT guy named Rick, would patiently answer her most scathing questions, and willingly offer the appropriate I-don’t-knows when waters were too deep.

In this before-work group, held in a company conference room, a strange, subtle thing began to happen: Amy’s tone softened. The questions still came—an utter onslaught of them—but they were asked less like an interrogator and more like a person hooked on a weekly television show who has missed a recent episode. I happened to be in this group, and met Amy for lunch at a Mexican restaurant adjacent our workplace. There we got to open up about what faith could be, what it couldn’t be, and what it downright wasn’t. Amy kept attending the group, began going to a local church, and did a worldview about-face.

Now, for every Amy story we have, we have a story like that of my friend “JoAnn.” JoAnn, who is proudly “non-faith,” attended a faith group, got busy, and quit coming. There was no ah-ha! moment for her. Her life stayed basically the same. However, she and I are still growing a friendship, have mutual respect, and continue to meet together periodically to share our lives. Recently, she was attending a St. Louis Blues

hockey game, and I got to give her a sweatshirt to borrow so she could look the part. We've become friends.

Occasionally, I get asked about groups for practitioners for other faiths. My answer tends to be, "Sure!" I had a guy want to lead a group through one of his favorite books, "Siddhartha." This short book really packs a punch, and while it is fairly universalistic in its message, it relies heavily on Buddhist traditions. We allow employees to start (mostly) whatever groups they want (and I say "mostly" because I could envision a scenario where groups of inflammatory nature would be disallowed from operating in the work sphere . . . so yeah, probably no "Mein Kempf" any time soon). We also have had, for the last three years, a summer world religion feature, in which a speaker gives a month's worth of weekly talks on varying religions and their different beliefs, practices, and regalia. From this, we launch a world religion small group that will read some sort of educational religious book. Having this world religion emphasis serves employees well, while also giving us freedom to continue on the Christianity side of things. Increasing accommodation has helped us mitigate risk, and this isn't some sort of farce. Employees have voiced, via culture surveys, that they had desired and now appreciate these learning opportunities.

Small groups are great because employees feel safe to open up, but there is enough structure in place to stay purposeful. Of course, I hope for many Amy-type scenarios to occur, but that is not the expectation for these groups. The expectations again fall in line with our VU values that "respect for everyone is a standard." The goal of these groups is that coworkers can get together, challenge one another, ask big questions, explore existence and purpose, and leave unjudged and unaffected vocationally. And when this can happen time and time again, the Amy scenarios will naturally occur over time.

- What circumstances/environments already exist in your company that you might leverage toward life-enriching dialogues?
- Could a small group option work at your workplace? How would you go about implementing it? What type of resource and what topic might be valuable to colleagues?
- How can you create structures that mitigate risk and create the most freedom for opportunity?

## VIII. BE WHEREVER THERE IS

Other scenarios happen too. When you are intentional about one-to-one relationships, you are active with several small groups, and you are occasionally seen wielding a microphone and spinning a yarn in front of larger audiences, other opportunities wash onto your shores.

Some of these opportunities are of your own doing. One summer I had a “Racket Ball Tournament for Bad Racket Ball Players.” This allowed me to get a lot of guys together—all considered themselves to be poor racket ballers or were good racket ballers and wanted an easy win—to play a simple game with one another, get to know each other, and build community. Few things pave the way for gospel engagement more than relationship, so environments to build relationships have to be developed. And with that, relationships are—believe it or not—best had with other humans. That’s right, crazy I know. So with the “extras” that I engage in, I want to be sure that it shows I’m human, I’m willing to laugh, to jump in, to be a person that another person could feasibly enjoy being around.

One of my favorite recent opportunities of this ilk was our “Night at the OK Corral.” On this fated evening, our culture manager and I invited about 30 people to join us for a meal at a less than reputable buffet in town that happened to have the word “Corral” in its title. Attendees were asked to join us for dinner after work with just two strings attached: cowboy attire and strong Western accents were required. It was a disaster in the most perfect way, and it allowed others to see that I’m a total idiot (especially when wearing a child-sized cowboy hat).

The simple fact is that people have ideas on what faith is and what a “faith leader” looks like. For the people I do life with, I would rather have them picture me as a goofball in too-small jeans, laughing with them at a bad buffet, than immaculately dressed and tucked away somewhere with some big leather-bound books, chanting away alone.

These engagements often pave the way for other unexpected endeavors. Because people grow in their trust of you, they then begin entrusting you. Friday is an example.

Recently, I got a text at about 3 PM on a Friday from one of our employees. She was reaching out because her mother, who has an ugly cancer diagnosis, had taken a turn for the worse. The doctors were giving the employee's mother days or even hours to live. So what could I do in this situation? Well, obviously not a whole lot, but what I could do as an ordained person was officiate a wedding. I've done the pre-marital counseling and weddings of a handful of my coworkers—great opportunities to discuss two things I hold in highest regard: gospel and marriage—and now this employee was requesting that her own marriage, still six months away, happen that night so her mom could be there to witness it, to see her only daughter in white. Their immediate family gathered in her mother's backyard, and we had a makeshift wedding, complete with vows, cake, and a beautiful, poignant sunset. Hanging out with the family that evening in their collective emotional tenderness was difficult, but to be able to do some small service for them in their time of need was of the highest honor.

And while this circumstance was unique perhaps, it certainly is not uncommon to be called upon when employees are navigating loss. I've held a coworker after delivering to him the news that his father had passed away; I've visited the home of a widow who had lost her husband, a beloved VU coworker. We send cards and bereavement boxes out when employees lose a family member, and we traverse the hard road of grief together.

Happier times come this way too. A friend and I got to help coordinate the fundraising and car-buying for another coworker whose family was in need of a vehicle. The look on her face when her dream car—a Toyota RAV4—was delivered to her was amazing! I've attended sports events with coworkers with extra tickets, played cards with some amazing guys from our branch office team, celebrated promotions and family additions with coworkers, and have gotten to be part of several moving parties for employees.

Whether difficult or joyful, situations will arise, and arise often, once trust is developed. And this has to be one of the greatest aspects of this sort of a faith platform: you have to be there for people—whatever that ends up meaning.

- How can you creatively find ways to engage employees?

- In what ways can you develop a healthy vulnerability and build a more vibrant vision of faith in your coworkers?
- In your unique context, how can you “be there” for people?

## IX. AUTHORITY AND HUMILITY

Another facet of this whole endeavor that produced positive outcome hinged on power and the use of it. One of our owners was passionate about this position. Since he was passionate, and since his brother (the other owner) loved him and trusted him, his brother supported the position. Since the other executives loved and trusted these owners, they supported the position. Since the owners and executives supported the position and the managers loved and trusted the owners and execs, they supported the position. You get where we are going with this.

In my first meeting with my direct boss, an executive at the company, he looked me round in the eye and shared, “Matt, what you are going to be doing here is the most important thing.” It seemed like he meant it too. Though, I still didn’t really believe him.

And what he said was important and so was my disbelief in that statement.

First, it was clear from the onset that belief in what you are attempting has to be true for a faith platform to work in a secular environment. Those with institutional power have to really believe in and support it. That does not mean they have to be people of faith either. Many supporters and stakeholders in what I do are not. They support it because it helps people. Maybe not all the people—including themselves—but it is worth it because it helps some.

Secondly, and just as important, the people on the ground doing the actual work in the faith area can’t ever believe too strongly in this endorsement. Feeling valued is a good thing, and that needs to happen. The chaplain position needs to be treated like a professional and a part of the team, sure. But one step beyond feeling valued is feeling entitled. Feeling important can easily grow into feeling more important. That comes from pride, and not only does it foster mistruth, it corrodes the trust of others. I

have a daily choice in my own job: to be self-important or be important to others. I cannot be both.

And the ways of becoming self-important—or even giving the impression of such—is easy. You take extras. You put yourself in elite company. You gossip. You take shortcuts to clout instead of developing reputation through steady care for others.

Some ways in which my employers showed that this initiative was important to them was to set me up like every other employee. I went to the same orientation, take part in the same events, have similar training and expectations and review-processes as other employees in congruent fields. They also invest financially in this program; they treat it like other employee-care based programming. If I need a resource that will be valuable to a coworker's spiritual growth/emotional health, the company helps pay for it. They encourage me to take coworkers to lunch or coffee on the company's dime. These may seem like small, obvious decisions, but this is money that doesn't go at all toward affecting the bottom line. Yes, a well-adjusted employee may work harder and better, but he could also "find himself" and decide to quit and pursue his passion for the outdoors or join the ministry (yep, these have happened). The investment is not looking for a financial return or expectation. The investment, though, is still seen as priceless, and truly it is an invaluable link from my position to the trusted leadership of our organization. And none of this works without that link.

For me then, it is important not to take any of the above (and the other ways the leaders invest in the program and me) and abuse those things. An example of this is the time the owner of my company gave me a dream-come-true experience. I got to go to a Cards-Cubs playoff game in Wrigley. The owner was going with a few of his friends, and they had one ticket left. Somehow I was in the right place at the right time and got to go. We took a private flight and ate a terrific (free!) dinner. It was an amazing night. And aside from my wife and family, I told no one. Of course, I'm writing about it here, but purely for the sake of example. You see, it is key that I am linked to the owner, but the second I become seen as his pet or his best friend or his traveling companion, I lose my position with my coworkers—even if only a perception is created. And what is that position? Hopefully, as low as possible.

Since I have a different job than everyone else here, I am a threat to no one. No one is really gunning for my job and I'm striving for no one else's. We structured my job so

I'm sort of with Human Resources in some things, but totally separate on paper—when it comes to hiring and firing decisions, and promotions and such. Again, this was to sever me from any sort of threatening or promising aspect for people. It is important at all times that my position is seen as unique—that way people realize they can use me and that the standards for measure are a bit different—but never as special. One way I take this goal on is to work as hard as I can, and to be at work as much or more than my coworkers. If everyone is busy in our organization, it hinders this platform if I am twiddling my thumbs or seen as just hanging out. And to me the organization is completely flat, and everyone has equal footing. This allows for transparency, adds protection for the company, and allows a freedom for all employees when they interact with me, especially when it comes to the tough stuff. Which it often does.

- If a chaplaincy is created in your workplace, how can it be invested in and given value? How can some measure of “institutional clout” be granted it?
- What expectations might allow a faith position to be viewed as a valid coworker within the organization?
- How can an individual maintain deep ties with leadership, and yet maintain a humble, approachable social status?

## X. PEOPLE AND THEIR ISSUES

I remember the nerves walking into my first one-on-one meeting. A manager had reached out and asked if I could come over to his office; he had something he needed to discuss. I had no idea where this conversation would go, but I figured, based on what I know about people, that it would stay pretty close to the vest. I mean, we were strangers after all.

Now, I know people much, much better.

In that setting “Carl” totally opened up. He told me, with specific detail, of his eroding marriage, of his fear regarding that, and about his doubt going forward. I sat there nodding, wondering what had made this guy such an outlier—a person willing to just open right up without even knowing my last name . . . heck, he may not have known my first name! (Some people did call me “Mark” for the first month I was here.)

A fear of mine coming in was that there would not be enough to do because people wouldn't use me. Why would they? Everyone has someone, and those someones are far closer to them than I would ever be. But after hundreds of meetings about affairs, about drugs, about pain and suffering, about fear and doubt and risk, I've realized that "Carl" that day was not the outlier. The fact that I was on the peripheral of most of these lives didn't encumber transparency, it increased it exponentially.

I came to liken it to a person stranded on an island and writing a message in the bottle. Consider that a moment. If you were sitting there writing a nearly hopeless letter that would be tossed out to sea, what would you write? Specifically, it is hard to know, but I'm willing to bet one thing—you wouldn't lie. The reason people lie, deceive, cover up, or project is all about these horizontal relationships they have with other people. So if I am telling a situation to a group of my friends, I'm more likely to spin it in a way that I am in the right, or I am the hero, or omit certain details altogether to protect their image of me. But not so with the message in the bottle that may end up with anyone or no one. No, in that message I'm free to fill that bottle with a message, and fill that message with veracity.

Now that isn't to say that people don't twist things a bit with me, nor is it to imply that they somehow see their lives with pristine accuracy with me. But I do feel that because I am disconnected to the org chart and often disconnected to their peer group, their spouse, and their personal life, they are freer to be transparent with me—there are no repercussions in it. They won't lose a job, a spouse, a friend, an opportunity. And if I can get them to see that I will not divulge their info or judge them on it, it allows for a really unique safe space for them, and in that space, I do think they can see their lives and decisions more lucidly.

This is desired. And that is why this week alone, I've been hit up about a lingering drug addiction, about a bout of crippling anxiety, about a departmental conflict, about a desire for something more, and others. And it is just Thursday morning as I type. We still have few days to go! And isn't that the stuff of life . . . while there are still days to go, there are still endless possibilities of the joys and sorrows those days may contain.

So what is the point? I guess it is this: People are people. And people need people. We give them perks at work—and that is great—but at the end of the day most people long after purpose. They want transcendence and significance, and allowing

them a place to seek these things out will create a more joyful, self-aware workforce, it will enhance lives, and, based on your beliefs, it could take part in saving souls.

## XI. TIME AND TIME AGAIN

I don't know your situation. Maybe you are a church or parachurch leader with a heart for workplace ministry. Perhaps you are a business leader yourself, looking for ways to enhance the lives of your employees. But regardless of your position, I would offer these two things:

- 1) Infusing a dynamic, optional faith component into your workplace can affect lives positively.
- 2) It is possible.

The spread of Christianity throughout Rome was due in large part to plagues. As illness ravaged cities, people fled, seeking more healthful harbors and leaving the dead and dying in their wake. But the Christians stayed. At peril to their own lives, they nursed the dying, they honored the dead, they cared for their fellow human. And they did so without imposing dogma upon the sick. Yes, they prayed as they dressed sores and attempted to assuage fever, but the only real thing they forced upon their patients was love.

Ours is a plagued world. Sure, there is beauty manifest in our communities and our relationships. But there is decay as well. It grows in the human heart in the shape of loneliness, of isolation, of fear. And the antidote for it is faith, hope, and love.

A chaplaincy program or personal faith element in your day-to-day work cannot cure all the hurts of the world, nor will it swoop in with simple, sudden success. No, it will be a messy addition, and one that will certainly cost money, time, and effort.

But what if it gives hope to the hopeless? What if it helps save a marriage? What if it guides one through the pathways of grief? What if it brings joy to the despairing, and replaces shame with freedom?

Against my own doubts, I've seen this firsthand. I've seen a young man have someone to confide in who was certainly on a path toward suicide. And now I see that same guy, not without problems, but seeking solutions, finding coping skills, and flourishing in work and family. I've seen a guy about to throw his job and marriage away for the sake of drugs, now boasting about his two weeks of sobriety and attending meetings with pride. I've met with a transgendered person grieving abandonment by his conservative family, and I've gotten to walk through questions with him about acceptance, decisions, grace, and identity. I got to see a young woman choose God over alcohol, and as a side-effect of this life-change, compete in her first triathlon after getting into a more healthful life-pattern. I got to see a man who was cheated on by his wife of a couple decades, start fresh, plug into church, and move from anger to forgiveness and choose love. I've gotten to stand up on the altar with marrying coworkers, and watch a groom tear up at the approach of his bride, a single mother who had finally truly found herself. I've gotten to see so much in just a few short years. And there are so many more stories being written even today.

When our executives visited Hobby Lobby, one quote seemed to make an impact on them. As they discussed potential lawsuits, the political climate, and the stacked up risks, this quote rang out amid the chaos: "What is the price of a soul?"

With this mindset, these leaders trusted the process and moved forward. They extended this trust to me. I trusted our employees to give it a shot, and they have. After a year, we extended that trust again and brought on a female chaplain—called the Faith and Wellness Coordinator, a woman who connects with people on the spiritual and physical levels. We've trained up employees to go out and read the gospel with their coworkers, and we trust that they will steward the message of hope with patience, love, and grace. We keep pushing calmly into the next thing, trusting that God will continue to direct our steps and make our paths straight.

We keep trusting that when the intent is good—enhancing lives—the outcome really cannot fail. Tomorrow they may ask me to leave—the whole thing is just too much risk. I would leave thrilled with the opportunity I've had and the things we've seen happen. Through this, my own faith has been tested, tried, and galvanized because I've seen God show up in lives time and time again.

I hope you find the same.



If you would like to discuss faith in your workplace in more detail, please reach out to Matt Gordon ([matt.gordon@vu.com](mailto:matt.gordon@vu.com)) or Brock Bukowsky ([brock@vu.com](mailto:brock@vu.com)).