



Tell Me About a Time . . . by Earl Creps

As I sat tapping on my computer keyboard in a Midwestern Starbucks, an unexpected event unfolded nearby. A manager sporting a green apron sat down at a table with a young man who turned out to be a prospective employee. The purpose of their meeting was a job interview—Starbucks style.

The conversation seemed quite practiced on the manager's end. She worked hard to help the interviewee feel comfortable while being questioned. Our tables were close enough to make the entire conversation public domain. As they talked, I had an impulse to type up the progress of the meeting and eventually produced something of a rough transcript, plus some impressions.

If you apply for a job at Starbucks (maybe while church planting), your interview will revolve around questions like these:

1. Why do you want to work at Starbucks?
2. Tell me about a time you have worked in a situation that required a dress code.
3. Tell me about a time you had to deal with someone who wasn't getting his or her job done.
4. Describe a time when you failed to meet a customer expectation.
5. Tell me about a difficult decision you had to make at work when you didn't know the right course of action.
6. Tell me about a time when you had to make a difficult ethical decision.
7. In your most recent job, describe your relationships with your co-workers.

The manager wrapped up the exchange by informing the applicant that the average employee takes four months to reach proficiency on the store's learning curve. A huge international conglomerate was asking only seven questions. But six of these items dealt with actual conduct rather than opinions or intentions.

After the initial question about motivation, every other one began with something like: "Tell me about a time . . ." In other words, Starbucks believes a person's behavior is best predicted by patterns that can be identified in the past.

While I may *believe* that I work well under stress, or I may *value* doing so, my actual conduct is the only real indicator of what type of person I become when the heat is on.

The Starbucks method immediately reminded me of all the bad job interviews I have conducted. These mostly focused on the person's "values" or "gifts" or "attitudes," but paid very little attention to how they

actually lived. While I assumed that resume items reported the individual's conduct, they really only offered me information about previous jobs.

How the applicant lives day to day only comes out when I say words like, "tell me about a time . . ." I intend to use this approach in all future interviewing. Of course, the respondent may misrepresent himself or herself, but so do resumes and references.

The Starbucks method brought to mind the words of James: That we are to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only. If I really live the values I profess, then I will be able to answer questions like those that begin with "Tell me about a time when . . ." My conduct is the only trustworthy indicator of what I truly value. It is the difference between Christianity as talk and as walk.

All of us value evangelism, but when was my last spiritual conversation with a person in need of faith in Christ? All of us value unity, but when was the last time I resisted the urge to say something negative about a peer? All of us value our families, but when was the last time I took a day off just to be with them (and turned off my cell phone)?

My Starbucks experience made me wonder if, in our first moment at the Judgment Seat of Christ, we might hear the words, "Tell me about a time . . ."

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