

America, A Proselytizing Society *by Eric B. Dent*

Americans have a history of sharing and being generous. If we find something good in life, we want to tell others about it so that they can share in the goodness. For a few weeks I kept track of all the ways that I was proselytized by people I encountered. I was told, often passionately and emphatically, that I should

- Send my kids to a particular school(s)
- Become a fan of a certain sports team(s) (I was really harangued about this)
- Buy a specific type of car
- Do Pilates, the South Beach diet, and the Atkins diet (do I really look that fat?)
- Read a particular book(s)
- Shop at a certain online site(s)
- Take shag dancing lessons
- Invest in a particular stock
- Go see a certain movie
- Eat in a new restaurant
- Have laser surgery on my eyes

It would take about two more pages to list everything I was proselytized about in just a few weeks. The point is that we are constantly bombarded with advice and recruiting by our family, friends, business colleagues, and others. This proselytizing is simply part and parcel of American discourse. We accept it and we've learned how to deal with these unsolicited recommendations. Sometimes the advice of an overbearing mother or friend who lost 100 pounds on the South Beach diet strains our patience. Still, we make adjustments accordingly, perhaps, tuning out mom or eating donuts in front of the friend.

There is one dimension of life, though, in which some people believe proselytizing should not be allowed, especially at work - religion (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). Some even say that it is offensive for one person to mention the goodness she has found in her faith to another person. Offensive is a term that should be reserved for the haranguing we receive when moving from one hotbed of ACC basketball to another! Are we really so thin-skinned, fragile, and impressionable in one realm of life that we can't hear about someone's religious beliefs but we can hear about their political, sports, shopping, restaurant, and child-rearing ones? I'm not afraid. Tell more your religious beliefs. But, please, don't tell me how much weight you've lost and what diet I should be on.

References

Mitroff, I. I., & Denton, E. A. (1999). *A spiritual audit of corporate America: A hard look at spirituality, religion, and values in the workplace*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.