



CONVERSATION: CHUCK BENGOCHEA

A passion for compassion

Born in Cuba, raised in the U.S., and now the CEO of The Original HoneyBaked Ham Company of Georgia, Chuck Bengochea thanks God for His blessings and is excited to give back through compassion ministries such as Convoy of Hope. Assistant Editor Jennifer McClure spoke with Bengochea about his life, advice for fellow Christians in business and the value of compassion ministry to the Church.

tpe: Give us a brief overview of your life story.

BENGOCHEA: I am so grateful for what God has done for my family and me. I came from Cuba when I was 3 years old. My dad left our family when we came over, but my mom was amazing. God has had His hand on my life from the beginning. My wife and I got married at 18 years old, and we're going on 33 years of marriage. For whatever His reasons and His purpose, God has given me a boldness about my witness. He's given me a desire to share His truth, and He's given me a position of leadership to do that.

tpe: What led up to your getting into business with HoneyBaked Hams?

BENGOCHEA: The reason I came to HoneyBaked was totally unexpected. Before coming to HoneyBaked, I was the controller for the Fountain Business Division, now called Food Services, of Coca-Cola. Things were going good, but they wanted me to move to Spain to be the CFO of the bottling group there. I wanted to, but I didn't feel I could serve God and do what they asked me to do, because I also wanted to invest in my family. My two little girls were at a young enough age, but my boys were 13 and 15 at the time.

That was the summer of 1995. In January 1996, the Chief Operating Officer of HoneyBaked started recruiting me. I wasn't looking to leave Coca-Cola, but my wife and I started praying about it and listening to the Lord, and it became obvious to me that I needed to go to HoneyBaked.

tpe: How does being a Christian translate to the workplace?

BENGOCHEA: Scripture clearly says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men" (Colossians 3:23, NIV). I've made that an anchor verse. In other words, it's no more sacred to be serving in Haiti than it is

for me to come to what I do — as long as the condition of the heart is the same. Whatever we're doing, we're doing it for the Lord.

The requirement of us in business is intimacy with the Savior. Our full-on 24/7 pursuit should be to draw closer to our Father. And if we do that, then a wall drops. In other words, I don't come to work and look at it as if there's this wall or door I'm going to go through, and when I go through that door I have to act a different way. There should be nothing prohibiting me from sharing the gospel proclaiming the name Jesus Christ.

If you have the right heartbeat, you realize when you come to work that whatever it is you do you work as unto the Lord. You start by investing in your folks and making sure that at some point — having served them well, having loved them well — that you get the privilege of ensuring they know the reason for that is Jesus Christ.

tpe: What are some other principles Christian business-people should live by?

BENGOCHEA: For too many Christian business people, God is in a box. They leave God at home and change their behavior in the office as they pursue a profit or a bonus. We serve a liv-



At an April Convoy of Hope Outreach near Atlanta, Chuck and his wife, Laurie Bengochea, volunteer in the prayer tent.

ing God who's not in a box, who is King and on His throne every day regardless of where we are.

Christians in business should honor and serve God every day in how they treat their vendors, employees and customers — all of that is under God's authority. God is over your job, not just your church.

tpe: How does your faith influence how you do business?

BENGOCHEA: I strive to always be aware that I'm a witness for God. One of the things I publicly say in my company all of the time is I'm not interested in my legacy being how many hams I sold. But I want my legacy to be how many people I impact. That's what I'm more interested in. How many

people did I love with God's love.

At the end of the day, no matter how bad my flesh wants to screw things up, I try not to lose sight that I serve God and represent Him. That's a joyful privilege, but it's also a sobering one.

tpe: How has being involved with Convoy of Hope changed you?

BENGOCHEA: My natural bent is toward serving and giving, but probably the most visible way it's changed me is it's made me want to do even more. There's something about people being sold out, like the folks at Convoy. That's changed me.

tpe: Would you recommend other executives to get involved?

BENGOCHEA: Absolutely — with both compassion and Convoy as well. I would recommend anybody I know to get involved with Convoy. It's an honor to partner with them.

tpe: How is compassion ministry valuable to the church?

BENGOCHEA: There's never an opportunity or dialogue I ever have where I'm not looking for the privilege and the opportunity of sharing the truth of Jesus Christ. My heartbeat is, I always want you to know it's about the

Cross and the Resurrection. But I want to love you. Even if you reject the gospel, I still want to love you.

It's clear who Jesus spent His time with — the prostitutes, tax collectors and the sinners. If we aren't willing to do that, then we aren't living out His gospel. And if we're not living out His gospel, then we become irrelevant. It's a hurting world out there. I think we're all too comfortable — in our lifestyles, in what we do, in our comfortable homes. But we have to be jarred out of that. We have to get outside of that and go serve and make ourselves relevant.

If you love people well, then you get the privilege and the opportunity to let the Holy Spirit work in their lives. **tpe**

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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