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Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

Does Your Work Matter?

The Role of Your Business in Society

Most of us have to work for a living. We own businesses, manage businesses, or are employees who work primarily to provide for the basic needs; food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and education.

For some, income also provides for entertainment and the possibility of retirement security from the wise investment of discretionary funds.

The work we do enables us to exist in our monetary society. But is that all there is to it? For many, the sad answer is, “yes.”

You see, in the developed world, work is viewed as a means to self-fulfillment. The “world” looks at the man who lives in the big house on the hill and drives an expensive car, and says, “he must be smarter than me, he must be more successful, he must be more fulfilled.”

Along with this “wealth equals success” theory is a similar one that says, “you’ve got to do whatever it takes to get the job done.” Achievement of the objective becomes the driving force. Nothing but the expedient matters. Even things like principles and integrity take a back seat to the employee driven to succeed no matter what it takes.

According to Peter Drucker, in his book, *Management, Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, “There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer.”

Drucker's point is that many respond to the question of “what is the purpose of business?” with, “to make a profit.” While making a profit is critical to the continuity of business, profit is not the purpose of business. Profit is the result of, and the reward for, having “created customers.” From Drucker's viewpoint, the purpose of business is to provide a product or service that fills a consumer need.



If one considers only the here and now Drucker is right. If one considers eternity, Drucker's concept is short sighted.

You see, regardless of the goods we produce or the service we provide, all are temporal. *“What does a man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come, and generations go, but the earth remains forever”* (Ecclesiastes 1:3-4).

The license plate frame that reads, “The one with the most toys wins,” is wrong. No matter how many toys you accumulate because of earthly success, you still must face the cold, hard reality that life is short.

Individual Purpose Versus Business Purpose

In a one-man business, it is easy to see that the purpose of the man's business is a direct result of the purpose of his labor. But what about a large company, one in which the individual has little impact on the purpose of the business as a whole?

I submit to you that the large company is made up of individuals. The collective purpose of the individuals should define the purpose of the company. If you don't think the purpose of the individual defines the purpose of the company, consider this:

- What would happen to a manufacturing/sales company if most of the employees came to work without concern for building and selling more widgets?
- What would happen to a service company whose employees decided to stop servicing customers?

In both cases, the companies would soon be out of business.

God's Plan for Work

Like Daniel into the lion's den comes the Christian manager. We can survive if we understand, believe, and accept God's plan for work.

His plan for our work is no different than His plan for the rest of our lives. Work gives us an opportunity to worship, witness, minister, and to grow spiritually.

Worship. *“Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship you should offer”* (Romans 12:1). Many people draw a line between their worship on Sunday and the work they do Monday through Friday. Perhaps you know someone like this; a heavenly saint on Sunday, and Scrooge on Monday. Endeavor to make your work a worship to God all week long!



Witness. In his farewell address to the Ephesians elders Paul said, *“I consider life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task that the Lord Jesus has given me - the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace”* (Acts 20:24).

Some of you may be rebelling at the thought of witnessing at work. You may have a picture in your mind of a “bible thumper” who scares more employees than he comforts.

That’s the wrong picture! The picture should be of an employee who works energetically, enthusiastically, without grumbling or complaining. An employee who works “as though they were working for the Lord.”

See the difference? It's the example we set that provides a witness. Matthew 5:16 provides a concise description to the type of witness we should have in our work: *“Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and praise your Father in heaven.”*

Actions speak louder than words. More they what we say, our example should be the “light that shines before men.”

Minister. Isaiah writes, *“The Lord God has given me his words of wisdom so that I may know what I should say to all these weary ones”* (Isaiah 50:4). There is no end to suffering and pain. In your workplace, you have the opportunity to minister to the “weary ones.”

Grow Spiritually. Do not think for a minute that God only wants to teach you spiritual things for an hour on Sunday morning! Our lives are an evolving process from spiritual milk to solid food. All of the problems, trials, and stress in your business life are there to help you mature spiritually. Proverbs 18:15 says, *“The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out.”* In every trial, in every great success, look for the opportunity to grow spiritually.

Enjoy Your Work

For those of you that struggle through every day with a deep frown on your face, realize that this is not God's plan. He wants you to enjoy your work. Solomon spelled it out in Ecclesiastes 5:18-19:

“Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.”



God's plan for our work is further illustrated in Paul's letter to the Colossians 3:23-24, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."*

Clearly, we are to enjoy our work. God empowers us to receive this reward; our work is a gift from God! Furthermore, we are instructed to work as though we were working for the Lord. Would you change anything in the way you work if Jesus had the corner office in your building?

The Examples of Solomon And David

Consider for a moment Solomon. His reputation was so great as a wise man that *"Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom"* (I Kings 4:34).

When the Queen of Sheba visited Solomon, she said, *"The report I heard in my own country about your achievements and your wisdom is true...Indeed, not even half of the greatness of your wisdom was told me..."* (II Chronicles 9:5-6).

Solomon's reputation, his witness, was so compelling that word of him spread throughout the world. His light certainly shined before men.

But, you say, Solomon was a king! I'm just a (fill in the blank)! Then consider Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

They were carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar. Despite tremendous pressure to conform, they maintained their integrity. Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (also known by their Babylonian names as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar's gold statue. They were thrown into the fiery furnace and miraculously saved. What a witness of their faith!

Whether pauper or king, it doesn't matter. You have the same opportunity to make the purpose of your work shine before men.

Sphere of Influence

In a large company, an individual may not be able to push his or her work ethic up the chain of command. But, that individual certainly does have the ability to influence those below him, perhaps some peers, and maybe even some supervisors. More than likely the corporate employee can also influence customers or suppliers.

Net, every single employee influences every single person they come in contact with in the business world. Either positive or negative, there is influence wherever there is contact.



The same is true for a small company. Contact equals influence. While the sphere of influence may be smaller, the direct impact may be greater. For example, if you are one of ten employees in a small company it doesn't matter whether you are the president, the secretary, or the janitor, every employee has a big potential impact on every other employee.

Joseph was the youngest, and least, among the sons of Jacob, but he became the second in command of all Egypt. His sphere of influence included not only his own family but all of Egypt. The chances are good that your sphere of influence is larger than you think.

Getting Started

Remember God's plan for work; worship, ministry, witnessing, and spiritual growth. But also remember that while you are a “good guy” there is any number of “bad guys” in the business world in which you compete.

We need to be prepared. We have all seen the results of company politics promoting the incompetent over the competent, people who negotiate shady deals with customers while taking advantage of others, and sadly, we have seen the result of leaders who have made poor moral choices.

“Good Guys”

Keeping the following four points will help strengthen your work:

Everyone has value to God. *“If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine and go look for the one that wandered off?”* (Matthew 18:12). It does not take courage to befriend another Christian. It takes courage to befriend the enemy. Be courageous.

Work with enthusiasm. *“Do all things without grumbling or arguing”* (Philippians 2:14). Enthusiasm is easy to spot, and it is contagious.

Maintain your integrity at all times. *“The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out”* (Proverbs 10:9). Be reliable, dependable, and consistent.

Don't stop growing. *“Do yourself a favor and learn all you can; then remember what you learn, and you will prosper”* (Proverbs 19:8).

The greatest testimony that you can have is when your detractors have to admit that you have integrity, that you are an enthusiastic worker, and that you are the most skilled worker. When this happens, you will know that your light shines before men!



One Final Thought

So, what do you do? How do you make the purpose of your work or your business count for God? Paul gives us no less than fifteen guidelines in Romans 12:9-21:

- Hate what is evil, cling to what is good.
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.
- Honor one another above yourselves.
- Keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.
- Be joyful in hope.
- Be patient in affliction.
- Be faithful in prayer.
- Share with those in need.
- Be hospitable.
- Love your enemies.
- Identify with the joys and sorrows of others.
- Live in harmony with others.
- Do not be proud or conceited.
- Do not repay evil for evil.
- Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

You can make a difference. Perhaps as you consider your plans and goals for the year you will place at the top of the list, “Make my work a light unto the world.”