

AFFIRMING THE DIGNITY OF WORK**By Rick Boxx**

The global pandemic affected virtually every one of us, and even though the dire warnings have ended, its impact was still being felt many months after health officials declared the health crisis had ended. Among them has been its impact on the employment market.

At the peak of the pandemic, businesses like restaurants and retail stores were forced to shut down. For businesses that continued to operate, workers often performed their jobs at home by computer. Before COVID-19, most businesses had no difficulty in filling job openings whenever needed. However, after the pandemic ended, many employers struggled to find workers to fill their available jobs.

“Help Wanted” signs seemed everywhere. At some restaurants, customers were greeted by signs like: “Please be patient. We are short-staffed. Be grateful for those who are willing to work.” Several years later, this problem persists. There are multiple reasons for this employment gap, but we will not address those now. One thing is certain: We have found ourselves in a strange time when in some areas there are more jobs available than people willing to fill them. When people have a financial safety net because of government subsidies, they have less motivation for going back to work. Proverbs 16:26 in the Bible’s Old Testament wisely observes, “A worker’s appetite works for him, for his hunger urges him on.”

As this new mindset toward work continues, we might need to devise new ways for motivating people to work. One way is to reaffirm an old truth – that finding dignity in work is important. If we are in the role of being employers, supervisors, or leaders, we must strive make certain our employees are perceiving and appreciating this dignity. Here are a few biblical principles to consider:

Work has been God’s idea from the beginning. In the Bible’s creation account, after the triune God created humankind “in our image, in our likeness” (Genesis 1:26), His first instructions were for people to go to work. “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and every living thing.... I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food” (Genesis 1:28-29).

Disobedience made work difficult. Everything was going well until Adam and Eve defied God command by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The results of their wrongful actions, which the Bible calls “sin,” was God’s declaration, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food” (Genesis 3:17-19).

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Work may be hard, but it can be very rewarding. In finding dignity in our work, we must answer some important questions. These include, 'Why are we working?' and 'Who are we ultimately serving?' These questions are answered in the Scriptures in several places, including Colossians 3:17,23-24. It says, 'And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.... 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.'

In our work, we serve our customers, our employers, and ultimately, God. They all deserve our best.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you noticed, following the pandemic, a continuing shortage of workers in some types of work, such as restaurants and retail establishments, even in some vital professions? What are some of the causes of this post-pandemic phenomenon, in your opinion?
2. What comes to mind when you read the phrase, "dignity in work"? Do you agree with the view that work does carry inherent dignity, at least when it is done well and for the right reasons? Why or why not?
3. The first chapter of Genesis teaches that God conceived the idea of work, first reflected in His own work to create the earth and then the entire universe, and then giving responsibilities for working to men and women. How does – or should – thinking about that influence our own approach to work?
4. In what ways can we impart and encourage the concept of work having dignity to our employees, colleagues, customers, and others we encounter in the marketplace?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more, consider the following passages: Proverbs 12:11, 14:23, 18:9, 22:29, 24:30-34; Ecclesiastes 9:7-10; 1 Corinthians 3:9

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