



Minding the Gap - July 2016

A Faith and Work Publication

Welcome to Minding the Gap, a monthly thought about faith in the workplace!

"Character Over Skills"

In a recent conversation with a long-time friend of mine who has just retired as a professor of theology at Whitworth University, I asked him, "What is the most important element of your faith you need to bring into the 'world-of-work'?" After a few moments of reflection he responded that for him his **character** would be the element he'd choose - much more important than the **skills** he'd learned or developed. He went on to say..."If I fail in **character**, then truly I've failed in my work." He highlighted, reinforced and put an exclamation mark on a principle, which my heart and experience know to be true. One can possess all the knowledge, education and skills imaginable, but if you are not of the character which Scripture and the Holy Spirit ask you to be, then what a terrible loss.

What is character and how does one get 'there'? I believe character is best defined throughout Scripture as exemplified in Galatians 5:22-23 - "...the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is no law against such things." As far as how to get there, the following is a quote I first heard from Mike Naughton at one of our earlier Faith and Work Gatherings which says it well in giving us a 'pathway':

*"Watch your thoughts - they become words.
Watch your words - they become actions.
Watch your actions - they become habits.*

*Watch your habit - they become character.
Watch your character - it becomes your destiny."*

Let me move to the realm of faith and work in relating a story, which I feel illustrates what my friend from Whitworth was identifying. At my work with Reell Corporation, we were quite intentional in addressing issues of conflict between coworkers. Via training and policy 'mechanisms' we, as a group of leaders, developed a strong understanding of how to address and resolve conflict. However, beyond the understanding and developed skills for resolving conflict was the person's heart or spirit in addressing the issue. Do I want just to get even? Am I doing this for my benefit or the other person's benefit? Here I am reminded of the hymn, which we recently sang at worship: "when within my place, I must and ought to speak, then to my words give **grace** (*character*), lest I offend the weak", and how vital a spirit of grace and humility is in all our work. So the story, briefly, is that one of my coworkers, Steve, from time-to-time needed to "have a *difficult conversation*" with another coworker, and was faithful to do so. The aspect of this process which showed **character over skill** was that Steve would always be certain to follow-up this conversation within 24 hours by checking in with the person so s/he would know that maintaining their relationship was as, or even more, important than the issue - definitely *character over skill*.

I conclude with a quote from Paul's letter to Timothy: "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness." (2 Timothy 2:24-25a). Blessings in your work!

- Jim Grubs

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