



Minding the Gap - October 2016

A Faith and Work Publication

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

"The Practice of Scapegoating"

Have you ever wondered how or when the term "scapegoat" originated? - and you well might know. Leviticus 16:21ff tells us: "Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness...". So, the goat ends up bearing responsibility for everyone's shortcomings, mistakes, faults, etc. (may better say, **Sin**), and everyone goes home feeling better. At least feeling so for another year until the next Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement).

Fast-forward to today and what we're really speaking about is the practice of taking our faults, problems, mistakes, etc., and, in some manner, blaming someone else for them. One psychological term for this is "projection" where we project our issues on to someone else. In "family systems" when relationship problems develop, there is often an individual within the family who becomes the "victim" or identified "bearer" of the problems that really belong to the whole family. For example, in the movie *Caine Mutiny*, Captain Queeg (Humphrey Bogart) becomes the **scapegoat** for many of the crew's problems and even acts out in a manner, which exacerbates their frustrations. After the accused is acquitted in a court martial trial, we see the defense lawyer making a very distinct point in showing how members of the crew were actually casting (scapegoating) their frustrations and fears on to Captain Queeg to a point where he becomes extremely paranoid in his leadership causing great pain for the whole crew.

Richard Rohr very succinctly identifies this, in a crowning manner, as happening to Jesus. Rohr states: "Jesus came to radically undo this illusory **scapegoat mechanism**, which is found in every culture in some form." He does this in a very clear and defining manner when, "*He became the scapegoat to reveal the universal lie of scapegoating.*" Then Rohr adds: "The scapegoat mechanism largely operates in the unconscious; people do not know what they are doing. **Scapegoaters** do not know they are scapegoating." Jesus even says: "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus Christ erases the 'need' for **scapegoating** once and forever through his crucifixion - God himself taking on our anger, frustration, violence ("sin of the world") in a "forever act" to end any need to scapegoat.

As human beings in the work place, we are bound to make mistakes or do wrong. This happens because we simply don't know; because we weren't diligent enough; because we didn't believe it to be important; because we were angry; or for whatever reason. However, **scapegoating** is no longer necessary because the crucifixion event changes everything: the ultimate judgment - **we have forgiveness from God**; and likewise, the crucifixion erases the embarrassment of day-to-day wrong-doing because we can 'afford' to assign blame to ourselves - "Sorry, I screwed up!" This folks, is a TRUE REALITY for people of faith. Just imagine - yes, really do think about it.....how that would change the relational dynamics of the office and even the organization. We become dispensers of **grace**; dispensers of **apology**; dispensers of **authenticity**; and dispensers of **love**!

Blessings in your world of work,

- Jim Grubs

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