



Minding the Gap - May 2015

A Faith and Work Publication

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

"Reframing Accountability"

In the 15th chapter of John's gospel and beyond, Jesus is spending significant time teaching his disciples about the nature of the Kingdom of God. Here he focuses on the metaphor of the vine and its branches. Incarnation's pastor Jeanne Hartfield, used this text as the basis for her message on a recent Sunday. I was struck by her focus on the idea of pruning. There is clearly the initial teaching about us (the branches) needing to be connected to Jesus (the vine) to grow. Yes, the importance of the on-going relationship (abiding) with Christ for us to do well in life. But, then He continues speaking about the process of pruning and its importance.

Jeanne's insightful reflections led me to the point that when I apply God's 'pruning' to life, He's pruning out the *thoughts, behaviors* and *attitudes* not helpful to a satisfying or 'fruitful' life. The truly positive impact from our Creator is that this pruning comes to me **not** as a threat but as a challenge. I'm not sure, however, if this is the case for most of our 'corrections' in life.

Quickly, Jeanne's reflections led me to the world-of-work, and how this metaphor might be applied at work. In this context, we're often speaking about the element of **accountability**. This has to do with our own accountability, but likewise with the accountability to and for those around us (coworkers, bosses & direct reports). From my work life, I've often experienced a resistance to accountability. It's been something viewed as rather negative, as a last step - "It's not happening so I need to confront him/her", or even a trespass on one's integrity - "Don't you trust me?".

As people of faith and while living in the world-of-work, we often take on the role of the "pruner" - people who are involved with accountability. The question is one of: "How might we **reframe accountability** to make it less threatening and more challenging?" I think there are a number of elements we need to keep in mind and heart:

- It needs to be **authentic** - both honest and compassionate.
- It works best in the context of **relationship** - the one being held accountable must know s/he can trust you, that you're committed to her/him, that you truly care for them. Know that these qualities take time to develop - people need to experience them.
- When addressing one's thinking, behavior or attitude, it is vital to check back with the person to let him/her know you are **still in relationship**. That the issue has not broken/ended your relationship - to say: "I know we had a difficult conversation yesterday, but I just want to be sure you're o.k. or see if you have any thoughts or questions."
- Focus around the issue and its significance to the group/process - not the person.
- Be sure to **really, really listen** to their perspective on the issue, and take it seriously.
- It's always helpful if the accountability issue is **specific** and **time-limited**.

Indeed accountability is a great challenge, but one that, with the blessing of God's spirit, is worthy of our best effort.

Blessings to all in your faithful endeavors!

- Jim Grubs

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