



## Minding the Gap - October 2014

A Faith and Work Publication

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

### "Success and the Gospel"

Success is a critical value for us – individually and as a society. At the same time, I am reminded of C.S. Lewis' book *The Screwtape Letters* where Uncle Screwtape in responding to his nephew's question of: How do we best deceive people?, basically states that the best way to deceive is to warp what is truth ever so little. So it is with success that it can be easily distorted into something that misses the "mark".

The question then arises, what is success and what does it mean to be successful? Generally in the world of work it might be thought of in terms of reaching a goal, or receiving recognition for yourself or your organization. In business, success is often a profitable year, the marketing of a new product, or an increase in your customer base. Author, Gregory Boyle comments that: "Great stock these days...is placed in evidence-based outcomes. People (investors) in particular, want to know if what you do 'works'". Indeed there is truth and credibility in this perspective.

However, when looking at Scripture in general, and specifically at the teaching of Jesus, there seems to be strong indication of success being affiliated with faithfulness rather than accomplishment. Throughout Christian scripture the quality of people being faithful is praised as being good or successful. In Jesus' parable of the talents (Matt 25:14ff), he does a 'double take' (to use a recent insurance ad phrase) where the ones who have invested their talents have accomplished good things, and yet, are praised for their faithfulness (RSV). More recently, Mother Teresa in her long-standing work with the poor said, "We are not called to be successful but faithful."

So, what might being faithful in the world-of-work look like? At Reell, my company of employment, being faithful was illustrated in the story of a major customer who stated that as a part of their new purchasing policy, we needed to make a 5% cut in the cost of our product or they would no longer buy from us. We informed them that it would be impossible to make such a cut; however, they could rest assured that our final shipment to them would be of the same quality and on "their doorstep" on time. Reell was determined to be faithful to their contract.

I am very convinced that "hidden behind" success (in the sense of accomplishment) stands the principle of being faithful - to our promises and in our relationships. Now, the results may be somewhat or even very much delayed, but the impact will be of great benefit for the Kingdom of God. Once again, as people of faith, we are faced with the challenge of "to whom will we listen?" Will it be the standard for success, which misses the mark by only a little bit, or the view of success, found in being faithful to the standards of our Creator? Greg Boyle says it very clearly: "Salivating for success keeps you from being faithful, keeps you from truly seeing (listening, paying attention to, taking seriously) who's in front of you."

Blessings to you all in your work and beyond!

-- Jim Grubs

Incarnation Lutheran Church, 4880 Hodgson Road, Shoreview, MN 55126