



## Minding the Gap - April 2015

A Faith and Work Publication

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

**“Teleopathy’!!! What?”**

At the beginning of March, Incarnation was honored to have Ken Goodpaster, Prof. Emeritus University of St. Thomas with us for two evenings to address a significant issue we face both at work and beyond. The issue is one he's identified as "teleopathy". Teleopathy is actually a term, which Ken coined and now appears in the Dictionary of Business Ethics. As Dr. Goodpaster defines teleopathy it is: "the unbalanced pursuit of purpose in either individuals or organizations". More simply stated he defined it as "goal sickness"; explaining that while goals are important and even vital to both individuals and organizations they can be something on which we obsess, to a point of dangerous imbalance.

The 'anatomy' of teleopathy or goal sickness is initially fixation where individuals, instead of them owning the goal, the goal owns them. This leads to rationalization as justification for our fixation, and finally the unbalanced state of detachment of the head from the heart of our being. Again, we want to emphasize this isn't an "either/or" concern - either you have goals or you don't, but an issue of holding goals in balance. Goodpaster gave a great example of how this condition can be critical to life when he spoke of "channelized attention" in which Top Gun (elite fighter jet pilots) pilots fixate on their instrument panels to track an enemy jet when in a "dog fight". The reliance on the instrument panel becomes so extreme that they fail to look beyond their cockpit to the landscape outside and realize they are about to hit the side of a mountain or something similar. Their goal becomes their demise.

Then there is the account in Luke 24:13-32 where just after the crucifixion of Jesus, two travelers are walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. A "stranger" joins them and inquires as to what they are discussing. The travelers are so fixated on getting their account of the crucifixion told that they fail to recognize this stranger is Jesus - the very center of the story they're relating. He attempts to break them out of their fixation and give them perspective through instruction about the patriarchs and prophets, but for whatever reason they don't realize it's the risen Christ with them.

To carry on, it's important for us to understand that this isn't just something that happened with the followers of Jesus 2000 years ago, but can happen with us at work today. Yes, we are in danger of teleopathy when we become fixated on a goal which we, as individuals or as an organization, have before us to the point of ignoring the life-giving perspective which the teachings of Jesus can give us. These values or principles provide insight and discernment about the weaknesses and dangers of any given goal especially with regard to the impact on the lives of individuals and their 'community'. Again, the challenge before us is to discipline ourselves to create 'space' where we are able to reflect and apply our faith values/principles to any given goal we have before us.

Blessings to all in your faithful endeavors!  
- Jim Grubs

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