



Minding the Gap - September 2014

A Faith and Work Publication

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

"Sharing the Burden"

As I was driving along I-494 the other day, my eyes caught this phrase on a billboard "Will power or we power?". This was clearly a solicitation for some service to help you solve a problem. Since I was moving at 85 mph I didn't have time to read the rest of the sign - Oops! (j.k.). However, I think this phrase is an apt description of how we often view leadership when it comes to the world-of-work. It is viewed as a singular or individual responsibility - i.e.: "I do it by myself", "my way or the highway", "it's really lonely at the top", etc.

In fact, if one thinks of leadership in a shared context, it will probably be viewed as counter-cultural or at least suspect. From time-to-time shared leadership will be acknowledged as a possibility, but rarely pursued. Normally, corporations, and organizations in general, seem to seek a lone senior leader who makes all the decisions and gives the direction. Studies show again and again that singular leadership puts an unmanageable burden on that particular woman or man. With this approach burnout is not uncommon. In fact, in my experience, I worked with a CEO leader who had a complete breakdown from this unmanageable responsibility. Creativity is also severely curtailed because there is "no room" to reflect due to the fact that "the 'tanks' are always coming over the hill!" Authority may also be warped because statements made by the singular leader are viewed as orders rather than a perspective. And, as my former "boss" once said, "Knowing who to blame for a failure doesn't make it right"... or solve the problem. Finally, we know that prudence or wisdom is not the possession of a single person, but it is shared. I remember a former colleague of mine becoming so frustrated with the current CEO and his

authoritarian approach to leading that he went to him and said (which I'll never forget): "You may be smarter than any one of us, but you're not smarter than all of us together!" And, if on some extremely rare occasion that person is smarter and wiser than all the rest, what is the organization going to do when s/he leaves?

It is striking to read Scripture and recognize the teaching and admonition for the shared approach to leading. Ecclesiastes 4:12 speaks of the strength and unity of two and three standing together against adversity. Then, there is the great story of Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro's advise for Moses NOT to judge (or decide) alone. Saying: "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people."(Ex 18:17&18). I encourage you to read the whole story (Exodus 18:13-27) - it's very enlightening! Jesus also makes the very encouraging statement of: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there among them"(Mt. 18:20) - very encouraging!

This shared approach to leading may take many forms, and it doesn't negate the existence of positions such as CEO, President, Board Chair, Owner, etc., but it does reframe or create a new paradigm for leading. This new approach is characterized by two elements. It's view of people becomes very positive and trusting. Believing that with the right training and equipping, people can be trusted to bring significant perspective and make good decisions because "God don't make no junk"(Clarence Campbell). And secondly according to Matt. 18:20, in inviting others into the leading process we are invoking the company of God's Spirit which generates creativity, energy, wisdom, endurance and the "fruit of the Spirit" which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."(Gal 5:22).

Blessings to all! -- Jim Grubs

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