

Dignity, Pride and Joy in Work

The 12th of Dr. W. Edwards Deming's 14 Points for Management begins, "Remove barriers that rob people of pride of workmanship." He also wrote extensively and spoke often about the importance that people experience "joy in work." Well, if it's supposed to be so joyful, why do we call it work?

The late Pope John Paul II provided an answer to that question with an essay about the grace of work. Following is an excerpt for your consideration on this Labor Day, 2013.

"...And yet, in spite of all this toil – perhaps, in a sense, because of it – work is a good thing for man. Even though it bears the mark of *bonum arduum* [meaning "a difficult good"], in the terminology of Saint Thomas, it is a good thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy; it is also good as being something worthy, that is to say, something that corresponds to man's dignity and increases it. If one wishes to define more clearly the ethical meaning of work, it is this truth that one must particularly keep in mind. Work is a good thing for man – a good thing, for his humanity – because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being.' ...

"[It] is well known that it is possible to use work in various ways against man, that it is possible to punish man with the system of forced labor in concentration camps, that work can be made into a means for oppressing man, and that in various ways it is possible to exploit human labor, that is to say the worker. All this pleads in favor of the moral obligation to link industriousness as a virtue with the social order of work, which will enable man to become, in work, 'more a human being' and not be degraded by it not only because of the wearing out of his physical strength (which, at least up to a certain point, is inevitable), but especially through damage to the dignity and subjectivity that are proper to him."

How many systems and practices exist in American management today that oppress and exploit the worker? To those of us blessed with good jobs, work is indeed a good thing. It is a source of enjoyment, pride and dignity, as well as income for our families. Let's continue to try to identify and eliminate all barriers to people's pride, joy and dignity in their work.

Blessed John Paul II reigned as pope from 1978 until his death in 2005.