

Pride and Dignity in Work

A Labor Day Message from W. Edwards Deming and Pope Francis

In Point 12 of his 14 Points for Management, Dr. W. Edwards Deming urged leaders to “remove barriers that rob people of pride of workmanship.” He always emphasized that when one has a job, he experiences joy and pride. Too many practices in American management, Deming insisted, rob people of that pride and extinguish the intrinsic joy one experiences in a job well done. This further robs the worker of dignity.

Pope Francis has spoken extensively about the dignity that exists and is found in work. His comments are consistent with one of his predecessors, St. John Paul II, and his staunch defense of human dignity that is damaged by the lack of a job. Both men noted the need to provide welfare for people who lose their jobs. But they added that keeping a man on welfare or government assistance for too long will destroy his pride and dignity.

Francis said that the two biggest social evils that need to be addressed today are the loneliness of the old and the unemployment of the young. “We are running the risk of having a generation that does not work. From work comes a person's dignity.”

The pope even believes that unemployment is a bigger problem than worldwide hunger. “Not having a job is not simply a question of not having the means to life; no. We can eat every day, we can go to Caritas, we can go to an association, a club, we can go there and they will give us something to eat. But this is not the problem. The problem is not being able to bring bread to the table at home. This is a serious problem, this takes away our dignity. And the most serious problem is not hunger, even though the problem exists. The most serious problem is that of dignity. For this reason we must work and defend the dignity that work gives us.”

Finally, both Pope Francis and St. John Paul II issued warnings about not only excessive materialism, but also a “globalization of indifference.” Deming defended pride of workmanship. Indifference may be viewed as the opposite of pride. We seem to stand back, look at high numbers of unemployed people, and regard them as a new normal in our world.

Deming insisted, however, that unemployment is not inevitable. “It’s a sign of bad management; lost the market.” He added, “It’s about time for American management to wake up!”

Best wishes for a safe and Happy Labor Day. Over the next week or so, see if you can identify and start to remove one barrier to someone’s right to pride and dignity in work. Look for ways to improve quality, reduce waste, enter a new market, and create jobs.

Notes

J. A. Coleman, “Pope Francis on the Dignity of Labor,” [America Magazine](#), America Press Inc., New York, NY, November 20, 2013.

W. E. Deming, Out of the Crisis, MIT Center for Advanced Engineering Study, Cambridge, MA (1986), pp. 77-85.

_____, Management's Five Deadly Diseases: A Conversation with Dr. W. Edwards Deming, Encyclopaedia Britannica Corporation, Lake Orion, MI (1984), videocassette.

NCR Staff, "Pope's Quotes: Dignity of Work," National Catholic Reporter, National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company, Kansas City, MO, August 20, 2014.

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