







# WORK

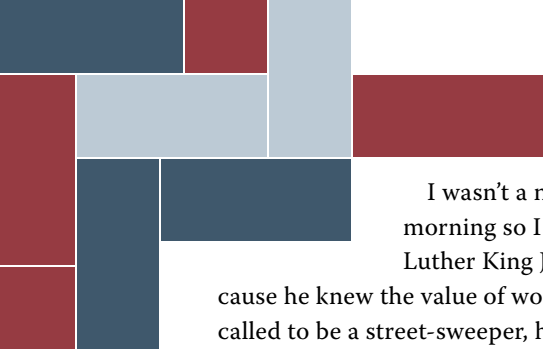
## —What's It Really Good For?

By FRED GRATTO

**M**any years ago, Andrew Carnegie, the famous American steel maker, observed: “The average person puts only 25 percent of his energy and ability into his work. The world takes off its hat to those who put in more than 50 percent of their capacity and stands on its head for those few-and-far-between souls who devote 100 percent.”

I thought of this recently when I joined several others for a community service project. The plan was to paint a house and a little garage nearby. The morning was hot and sticky, and the painting took longer than I expected. After a few hours, I thought we were done so I started to put the tools away. As I walked around to let everybody know we were almost ready to go, I noticed no one had painted the back of the garage that faced a narrow alley. When I asked about this, the college students said they didn't bother to paint it because they thought no one could see it from the house. That was accurate enough, I guess, but I pointed out that anybody who drove down the alley would see it, and so would the person who lived next door. I mentioned that they should have done their best because the paint job mattered to someone. But they hadn't shown up to hear a speech, so I only made one more point: It's important to faithfully handle both big jobs or small tasks, even ones that may go unnoticed.





I wasn't a name-dropper that morning so I didn't mention Martin Luther King Jr., but I could have because he knew the value of work. He said, "If a man is called to be a street-sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause and say, 'Here lived a great street-sweeper who did his job well.'"

Not everyone has this lofty perspective on work, of course. Nonetheless, by way of words and example, leaders can enhance their organizations by helping people learn to regard work as an opportunity and a blessing.

## 10 TRAITS OF PEOPLE WHO LOVE THEIR WORK

Work is one of the best things in the world. We're all better off working, in spite of what Tom Petty said: "It just seems so useless to have to work so hard and nothin' ever really seems to come from it" ("Here Comes My Girl"). I don't agree with Petty, because lots of good comes from work. The following are some common denominators among people who thrive on the job:

### 1. *Attitude . . . being mindful of what a good one does for you*

When the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright was 83, he was asked which of all his great works he considered his masterpiece. His reply: "My next one." Even though he had been designing tremendous homes for many years, he knew he could do better. With a humble attitude like this, you'll always do good work. Actor Harrison Ford expressed a similar view: "I realized early on that success was tied to not giving up. Most people in this business gave up and went on to other things. If you simply didn't give up, you would outlast the people who came in on the bus with you." There is a lot of truth in the notion that "it takes years to become an overnight success."

### 2. *Awareness . . . of all the things you get from a job other than money*

Historian Charles Kingsley observed that we learn a lot of life lessons on the job: "Thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do which must be done, whether you like it or not. Being forced to work and forced to do your best, will breed in you temperance, self-control, diligence, strength of will, content, and a hundred other virtues which the idle never know." A paycheck won't give you any of these things. Your job, not your money, is more likely what gradually changes you most over the years. Consider this assertion from critic John Ruskin: "The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it." Here are some characteristics you might acquire or improve because you go to work:

- a. **Physical Stamina.** It takes a lot of effort to get up every morning and work hard every day. Because you keep moving, you increase your ability to keep moving.
  - b. **Emotional Stamina.** You learn to carry out the responsibilities of your job without becoming overwhelmed. You learn how to recover from setbacks quickly, and you learn how to get along with people.
  - c. **Desire.** You acquire and develop an inherent commitment to influencing people, processes, and outcomes to accomplish organizational goals. You learn a lot of "want-to" at work.
  - d. **Empathy.** Diversity is important, so it's helpful to develop an understanding of the values and perspectives of others. We need to know about other cultures, beliefs, and traditions. This happens most often at work.
  - e. **Prudence and Decisiveness.** You learn when to act and when not to act. You learn to consider all the facts relevant to a situation before making a decision. At work, you grow out of vacillation and procrastination.
  - f. **Self-Confidence.** Training and experience develop an assurance that you can handle the demands and challenges of a job. You learn that those who display a lack of self-confidence soon sink.
  - g. **Dependability.** You learn how important it is to do what you say you are going to do, and be where you say you are going to be. People need to know they can count on you, no matter what.
  - h. **Responsibility.** You learn that whatever you are charged to do, it is your duty to get it done. You learn that you can delegate tasks, but you can never delegate responsibility. By way of accomplishing things in the face of challenges, you acquire courage, resolve, and credibility.
- ### 3. *Confidence . . . evidenced by security and determination*
- There are lots of skills needed to succeed at work, and confidence might be at the top of the list. My father often told me that confidence needed to be one of my strongest assets. Teddy Roosevelt offered a similar perspective long before my father thought of it: "When you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, 'Certainly I can!' Then get busy and find out how to do it." Maybe, just maybe, when we tell ourselves we can't do something, it's just an excuse we have made up. My father told me, "Freddy, you're gonna have two lives. The one you got, and the other one you'll make." He told me to work harder than anybody else—he sure did. He taught me of this healthy perspective from



Teddy Roosevelt: "I am as strong as a bull moose, and you can use me to the limit."

#### **4. Initiative . . . being a self-starter with lots of gumption**

We don't hear much about gumption anymore, but most of us still know what it is. It's internal motivation, showing the inclination to do things without having to be told or reminded. Somebody observed, "Too many people are ready to carry the stool when the piano needs to be moved." There's some truth to this, and that's why we need more gumption than ever these days. I've noticed that people who have their fair share of it plan ahead and stay alert for opportunities to help. At work, when a person with gumption sees something that needs to be done, they do it.

People with gumption don't say, "I didn't know" or "It's not my job." People with gumption choose difficult jobs because progress and satisfaction are found in challenges. People with gumption have energy that rubs off on others. People with gumption start strong and finish strong. "Today's greatest labor-saving device is tomorrow," as President Woodrow Wilson once said, but don't use it. Get started—do it now. Don't wait to do what's next.

#### **5. Persistence . . . sticking to your goal, no matter what**

Success in most endeavors is the result of small steps in the right direction, not a consequence of one big stroke of luck. You can't earn a college degree in just one semester. Accomplishing anything is often just a matter of hanging on over the long haul.

Arriving at a desired destination is like going down a toll road. If you keep paying the fee, you can get anywhere you want to go. Persistence is amazing stuff. That's how the snail reached Noah's Ark, according to the famous preacher Charles Spurgeon. Did you know that Theodore Geisel, otherwise known as Dr. Seuss, was rejected by 23 publishers before he found one willing to take a chance on him?

#### **6. Teamwork . . . encouraging, supporting, and helping others**

I went to a county fair a few summers ago and saw a horse-pull contest. As I recall, one horse pulled a sled that weighed 3,000 pounds. I thought that was quite a lot until I saw the winning horse pull nearly 4,000 pounds. When that contest was complete, both horses were hitched to a sled to see what they could do. Together, they pulled almost 9,000 pounds, but individually, they only pulled a total of 7,000 pounds. That's a 2,000-pound improvement—and we can make a similar difference at our jobs when we work together. My brother and I learned this a long time ago; when we were kids, we discovered that we could walk forever on train tracks and not fall off, if we reached across and held hands.

#### **7. Enthusiasm . . . taking affirmation and excitement to work**

In high school I had a summer job loading watermelons into big trucks. It was hard on my back. Some days after work, I would stop



at my grandmother's house for a big glass of sweet tea. While there, I often complained about my job. One day, tired of my whining, she told me something like this: "Make the best of it and be all there. In every situation, give your best and you'll be blessed with other opportunities." Maybe she heard that perspective from President Harry Truman, who said, "I studied the lives of great men and famous women, and I found that the men and women who get to the top were those who did the jobs they had in hand, with everything they had of energy and enthusiasm and hard work." Enthusiasm is the most special elixir because it makes work gratifying and fun. With it you can accomplish just about anything.

### **8. Passion . . . pursuing a mission that captures your interests and energy**

Indiana University's former basketball coach Bobby Knight once proclaimed, "There are no office hours for champions. The more I want to get something, the less I call it work." I like this perspective, because most people yearn to do something that really matters. In fact, here's what I know: We're all the same. All of us want three things: to be liked, to be respected, and to do work that matters. If you think I'm right, it might be a good idea to keep this in mind regarding the people who work for you. Theodore Roosevelt, a man of tremendous ambition and unbelievable accomplishments, saw it this way: "Far and away the best prize life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

### **9. Vision . . . seeing beyond daily duties; claiming new objectives**

It's good to think ahead and have a vision for the future. Remember, it wasn't raining when Noah built the Ark. There's nothing wrong with being a dreamer, because dreams can drive you to accomplish your goals. A dream can help you consider what your organization might be doing in five or ten years. A long-term plan gives you hope for the future. Hope is wonderful because it encourages you as you work and wait for better days. "A leader is a dealer in hope," wrote Napoleon Bonaparte. Hope is fuel that propels you into the future, and you need it. Author Hal Lindsey asserted, "Man can live about 40 days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air . . . but only for one second without hope." Do you agree? What are you going to do about it?

### **10. Relationships . . . everybody needs friends at work**

Cicero was one of the greatest thinkers of the Roman Empire. Here's one of the things he was thinking about: "Friendship improves happiness and abates misery by the doubling of our joy and the dividing of

our grief." This is right on the mark, because friends give hugs, offer pats on the back, and share smiles. Friends help friends through problems, anchor them in reality when they are facing big decisions, and hold them securely when they are sorely tested by life's many unexpected obstacles. This is why friendship is so important, because life is sometimes tough, and the road can get rough.

Sooner or later, all of us need someone to help us to stay determined in the face of daunting challenges, to affirm our worth, to give us hope when we're faltering, and to occasionally inject us with courage. As a poet once wrote, "Friends are the flowers in the garden of life." One of the best things you find at work is the opportunity to meet good people and share your lives with them as you proceed down your career path. So, what if you took time to be available? What if you made plans to impact the lives of those you work with?

My observation is that effective leaders help both themselves and others to do more when they create environments where work is valued rather than merely tolerated. A man I know owns a small ice cream shop that does a mountain of business. One day I asked how he manages to do so well despite competition from national franchises. He said he always puts too much hot fudge on the sundaes and does much more work than he needs to—and this impresses people so they keep coming back. What a great idea!

Excellence starts with you. ☺

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