

Joy at Work at Work

C. S. Lewis once said, “Joy is the serious business of Heaven,” and certainly we look forward to the everlasting and unfathomable joy that coming into the full presence of God will bring. Yet as the Lord’s Prayer invokes God’s will on earth “as it is in heaven,” then perhaps joy is “the serious business” on earth as well.

What is this earthly joy that is the foretaste of heavenly joy? In this life, at least, it is much about feelings—feelings of unbounded elation, uplifted hearts, a sense of well-being and peace, of being appreciated, and the childlike elation at being alive. For a person living in joy, the intervals of sadness and sorrows in life serve to give definition and clarity to a prevailing experience of joy.

The thing about living in joy, in a state of joyful spirit, is that it is a choice. It does not depend on possessions or others. As Henri Nouwen put it, “Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.” To live in joy we need to choose that which causes joy.

Joy arises out of love. First is the joy or rejoicing that comes from choosing to appreciate God’s love for us and to delight in the beauty of all of God’s creation, human beings and nature. Second is the joy that comes from choosing to accept God’s invitation to love and to participate with Him in His ongoing creation and care of people and the natural world in our times.

At work this participation can take many forms. We can choose to respect all our co-workers, to be appreciative and tell them “Thanks” for all they do. We can choose kindness and compassion. We can willingly mentor a newcomer or a person in a new position. We can choose to make a difference for the good in the lives of our co-workers and customers or those who receive our services. We can be open to and nurture friendships, even, or perhaps especially, with those on the fringes of our workplace’s social groups. And, perhaps more difficult, we can let others love us and care for us. “I can do it myself,” is the frequent cry of my three to four year old granddaughter. It was my attitude for much of my adult life, also. Yet the truth is my best has been done in conjunction with others, both at work and at home. The students in my school would not have turned out as well if they had only me to interact with and learn from. My children and grandchildren definitely would not be as good persons as they are without the presence, influence, and love of my wife. I would not be what I have become without accepting their influence and love of me.

One of the hardest ways for me to bring joy into the workplace would seem like it should be the easiest. I have been advised many times to laugh more, not to be so serious. The strange thing is that I don’t feel all that serious but my face is. I’m more of an introvert who has not really paid attention to his facial expressions, except perhaps when playing cards with my brothers. My interior feelings and my exterior expressions are not necessarily the same. But my point is that people who carry a joyful expression, a smiling face with twinkling eyes, bring joy to others simply by that fact.

It is one of the odd things about joy. Several writers have commented to the effect that if you attempt to keep it for yourself, it fades away; and if you get out of yourself and give it generously to others, it increases in you. You cannot successfully chase it for yourself, but you can give it to others and, in the giving, receive it liberally.

If you want a measure of the quality of your spiritual life day by day, each evening look back over your day and note the joys you have given and experienced in your day; for a joyful heart can only be the result of a heart in love with God and all his creation.

JOY — A Faith Based Value at Work

1. What does applying the faith-based value of joy in your workplace mean to you? What do you think it would mean to those with whom you work? How does its meaning change for your different workplaces, for example, home or where you volunteer?
2. Why is it important to gain an understanding of joy in the workplace and how to apply that understanding?
3. How do/could you apply the concept of joy in your workplace(s)?
4. What would happen in your workplace if you took and actively applied the value of faith-based joy in your workplace(s)? How would the workplace sound different? Look different? Feel different?
5. What first step are you willing to take this week?