

CREATING IDEAL ENVIRONMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES

By Robert J. Tamasy

In the workplace we talk about "ergonomics," which is defined as "the study of the relationship between workers and their environment, especially the equipment they use." Everything is considered, from noise factors to chair design to computer placement, analyzing the environment in which people work.

Evaluating the physical working environment has been important. But another type of "environment" also deserves attention: The place where employees can maximize talents, gifts, experience and passions.

While I was editor-publisher of a suburban newspaper, we had a staff member that was like the proverbial round peg attempting to fit into a square hole. I will call her "Mary." Our editorial staff was small, so we tried her in a variety of roles. Initially I assigned her to cover school board and local commission meetings. Then we had her write about social functions and women's events. She took a turn at sports reporting. Mary was eager and a hard worker, but none of these seemed a good "fit."

Finally, after I had to terminate the full-time photographer, I asked Mary if she would like to give that job a try. It involved everything from taking photos at civic meetings and sporting events to pictures of houses for real estate ads. Mary lit up like a 1,000-watt bulb. She found her niche, work she did with passion.

Thankfully, I had stuck with Mary until we had found her place – a role that enabled her to flourish. She became a happy, fulfilled employee. It took time, but we had discovered where she belonged on our staff. And it was rewarding for me to help her find joy through the work she performed for us.

One of a leader's most important responsibilities is to empower employees to find their "environment," that area of interest and expertise where they can flourish. The old U.S. Army motto states, "Be all that you can be!" The Bible also affirms the importance of this leadership function:

Each of us is uniquely designed and gifted. No two individuals are exactly alike, not only physically, but also in terms of abilities, interests and passion. "*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" (Psalm 139:14).

We all have a specific purpose to fulfill. The Bible tells us God has determined a specific purpose for each of us, and as leaders we can help in seeking out that purpose and enabling them to fulfill it. "*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart*" (Jeremiah 1:5).

The best leaders and managers get the most – and best – out of their people. Jesus told the "parable of the talents," in which a businessman tested his servants on their capacity to manage his interests. In a similar way, leaders are responsible not only for property, but also for proper utilization of the human resources under their stewardship. "...*Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things...*" (Matthew 25:14-30).

Good leaders make the proper care of their employees a top priority. If employees are not thriving, we need to ask why. We might be expecting them to be square pegs trying to fit into round holes. "*Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds*" (Proverbs 27:23).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What about your own “environment” – do you feel you are presently working in a role that enables you to feel fulfilled by utilizing your unique talents and abilities? Explain your answer.

2. Why do you think so often people find themselves assigned to jobs that do not fit their skills and capabilities? And when people realize that, why do so many of them remain in unsuitable jobs?

3. Do you agree with the biblical statement that God has created each of us uniquely, including the types of work we are equipped to perform well? Why or why not? If what the Bible says is true, what difference should that make for us – as workers, and as leaders?

4. How can leaders and managers effectively know “the condition of their flocks” in terms of assessing not only how well they are performing their jobs, but also whether they are in the right roles for being able to flourish as business and professional people?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to review additional passages that relate to this topic, consider the following verses:

Exodus 35:30-35; Proverbs 22:29; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 3:17,23-24; 2 Timothy 3:17