

Danville News Column
Robert John Andrews
Friday, 10 June, 2011
“Loving Work”
Word Count: 750

The current jobless rate climbs higher. Meanwhile, graduates spill forth from colleges desperate for work (with an average debt load of \$50,000), preferably landing jobs matching their studies. Meanwhile, High School seniors must register their intended majors and careers with the guidance department to earn scholarships (equal exercises in optimism).

It may seem superfluous for me to point out how my children face a dauntingly different work world than what I entered when I was their age, but I'll say it anyway. Weirder is how dramatically different is the work world their grandfather entered. Grandpa's dependable, predictable work world is as archaic as the typewriter, as uncommon as teenagers planning to apprentice as plumbers.

Fact: a century ago the overwhelming majority in developed countries worked with their hands -- on farms, in domestic service, at craft shops, and a few in factories.

Fact: fifty years ago 50% did manual labor, with over half employed in factories.

Fact: 15% of the workforce today labor in factories, with “Knowledge Workers” the fastest growing group; that is, jobs requiring formal and advance schooling.

Fact: obsolete is employer or employee loyalty. How many jobs will folks have in a lifetime? 10.8 for those eighteen to forty-two years old. 23% will have fifteen or more, 14% will have zero to four jobs. Most, during their lifetime, will begin three entirely new careers.

Fact: average longevity in a job for wage earners is four years; for young adults the average years on a job is 2.7.

Meanwhile (for those of us lucky to be working), some love what we do, some fear being laid off, some do what we do because we face few other options and need the paycheck. Which are you? Are you happy with your occupation? Father's Day lurks around the corner so this topic speaks to plenty of guys I meet. Young folks: please take a lesson from where we've been and where many of us are.

Key factors for job satisfaction have been identified. They include: decent wage or salary; job security (good luck with this today); pleasant facilities and good equipment; your talents are valued and used; flexibility and independence; what you do is worthwhile and beneficial; there are opportunities for advancement, enrichment, personal growth; you enjoy your co-workers; and last, you have a boss who isn't an idiot.

We all seek satisfaction. It's the prime human drive. When we aren't satisfied, we tend to go looking for it in alternate and (frequently) unhelpful ways. Which is why someone wise shared some material at church years ago that especially is useful for those of us who've been working for decades and might be brooding, wondering if a change is in order for our remaining years.

The material presumed that at this point in our veteran careers we've gained some idea about what we're good at and what we're lousy at. It's far easier to enhance what we're good at rather than try to raise our areas of incompetence to mediocrity.

It's as necessary as visiting the dentist to revisit why we ended up doing what we are doing. Did we fall into by accident? Is it what we expected? Did you always want to do what you're doing? If you could do something over, what would it be? Any regrets?

Did you take advantage of all opportunities to grow, get certified in other fields, open new doors for yourself? Or did you paint yourself into a corner as have dozens of my friends and colleagues by them failing to become versatile, marketable? It'll take more than Grecian Formula. How many of you feel trapped?

Last, what happens when you take the "mirror test?" Are you who you want to see in the morning? Is what you are doing consistent with what you value? For that matter, do you know what you value?

This material, by Peter Drucker, sketches out three basic directions we can take.

First is the new career. You bring a sudden halt to what you have been doing and risk doing something novel and stimulating. Example: the librarian who becomes a farmer.

Second is the parallel avocation. You keep doing what you're doing, mostly because you must if you wish to pay your bills, but you engage in some parallel enterprise that you find rewarding. Example: the dentist who enjoys photography.

Third is the social entrepreneur model, where you gradually decline your investment in your original career and craft an oblique career which eventually takes over. Example: me.