



Gleanings

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Wisdom

The lazy man does not roast his game, but the diligent man prizes his possessions.
Pro 12:27 (NIV)

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The Question of Time

What do Microsoft and Worthington Industries have in common? Neither company keeps track of employees' time. Although both companies are in businesses that are labor intensive, neither worries about how much time employees work. Instead, each company focuses on production rather than time. Microsoft measures production based on goals that are assigned to each person. Worthington ties a major part of employee compensation to profit. The whole question of time becomes irrelevant because neither company wants to buy time; they want to buy production.

Sadly, most companies buy time not production. When an organization buys time that is what they get. Unless employees have strong internal motivation, marginal production is normally the result of paying employees for their time. Buying time seems to be the default for most companies because buying production requires creativity and ingenuity. It also requires employees who wish to sell production not time.

I learned the value of buying production when I worked in the family business, a mechanical contracting company founded by my father. On one occasion, we successfully bid a large industrial piping job for a paint manufacturing company. As we considered how to execute the job, we began to be very concerned about the labor budget. In fact, we were more than concerned; we were scared to death. Someone had the idea of offering the job foreman a percent of the savings if he completed the job under budget. What we discovered was stunning. By motivating the foreman to produce, the job was completed well under budget. As a result, the foreman earned a nice bonus, and a marginal job turned into a very profitable job for the company. The key was simple; we bought production not time.

John Kerry, Janet Jackson, and Public Nudity

"I don't make decisions in public life based on religious beliefs." So says presidential candidate John Kerry according to the February 7, 2004 edition of *World* (page 16). The sentiment expressed in this statement is frequently heard in the United States today. The conviction that religious beliefs are not relevant to public policy, education, business, and non-profit life is growing. In fact, this concept is becoming so prevalent that many view it as axiomatic. If this is true, why is the FCC conducting an investigation into the incident at the recent Super Bowl where Janet Jackson's costume malfunctioned? The outrage over the incident is fascinating. It appears that the FCC, NFL, et al believe that public nudity is wrong or, at least, inappropriate. What or who says it is wrong? Most would answer the question that public nudity is inconsistent with public values, but why? In a humanistic world where everyone is free to define his or her own values, how could public nudity be wrong? In her apology, Ms. Jackson did not state that public nudity was wrong only that she was sorry if she offended anyone. The



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concept of right or wrong inherently implies the existence of a universal standard of ethical conduct that transcends any one individual. Doesn't this sound like a religious belief? If it is true that everyone's values are rooted in their religious convictions and decisions are rooted in values, then decisions are rooted in religious beliefs.

Ms. Jackson's religious beliefs apparently don't prohibit public nudity, so she participated in a very public act of nudity. However, she doesn't wish to offend people. Perhaps that is because offended people don't buy her recordings or attend her concerts. Without fan support, she will not make money.

As for the chairman of the FCC, his decision to investigate the Super Bowl incident to see if decency laws were violated implies a value system that does not accept public nudity. This means that at some time in the past, lawmakers believed that there were absolutes that apply to everyone. This sounds like making public policy decisions based on religious beliefs, doesn't it? I guess Mr. Kerry didn't pickup on this inconsistency. At least, I have not heard any criticism by Mr. Kerry of the FCC's investigation of the event. Perhaps if Mr. Kerry becomes President, he can apply his principle of bifurcating religious beliefs from public life. This would make way for public nudity and anything else that traditionally has been viewed as immoral public behavior. But wait a minute. If Mr. Kerry is true to his word and applies his principle of bifurcating public policy from religious beliefs, he would be practicing the value called integrity, which means that one's actions line up with one's words. Then would not Mr. Kerry be making public policy decisions based on religious beliefs?

The Rebate Illusion

Upon buying some office products recently, I was given a rebate receipt stating that the manufacturer of the product would pay me \$5. While that sounds good, the steps required to claim the money became laborious. The receipt outlined a multi-step process to make the claim. However, at the bottom of the receipt, there was a web address indicating that I could file for the rebate on-line. This seemed efficient; however, when I went to the site, I found that it was not user friendly. When I finally found the correct page, I was given the same information that was on the receipt. In the end, I threw away the receipt – the hassle was not worth it.

Sharing my frustration with a rebate expert, I discovered some interesting facts. Rebates are not customer friendly and not intended to be. The onerous claim process is intended to discourage people from making claims. Manufacturers use rebates to boost sales by giving the illusion that the consumer will be rewarded. In reality only about 25% of rebates are claimed and many of the claims are not paid because of customer errors.

So why aren't rebates issued at the point of sale? Then everyone entitled to a rebate would get it. Clearly, this would cost the manufacturers more money, but it would be much more customer friendly. The technology is available to issue rebates this way. The problem is the greed of the manufacturers. Instead of truly blessing their customers with a cost savings, they want to entice customers to buy with the illusion of giving customers something back. Manufacturers who operate this way are simply revealing their worldview. Instead of seeking to treat their customers well, they view selling as sport to see if they can trick their customers. In the end, these companies are sowing bad seed and will reap a bad crop.