

OVERCOMING EMPLOYEE DISCONTENT

By Rick Boxx

Businesses are often so driven by the bottom line – maximizing profits – that they are reluctant to increase payroll costs. Such a strategy might boost profit margins over the short term, but can have a disastrous long-term impact on the people who perform the work to make the company profitable.

On numerous occasions I have observed that this overemphasis on the business's bottom line can cause considerable discontent in lower-paid workers, like we have seen repeatedly in the news as workers speak out and protest in a quest for higher wages. Numerous factors can affect a worker's sense of contentment on the job, but feeling undercompensated is one of the greatest causes of discontentment.

One radical way of changing this would be for business executives to start viewing their employees in a more personal manner, regarding them as their "business family," rather than as faceless drains on the company's finances.

This is especially true if we adopt a biblical perspective of the employer-employee working relationship. Rather than being an "owner" or "boss," God calls leaders to consider their roles as that of a shepherd, responsible for the well-being of the sheep – their "flock." For instance, 1 Peter 5:2-3 teaches, *"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not greedy for money, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."*

Another passage, from the Old Testament, offers a similar perspective: *"Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds, for riches do not endure forever, and a crown is not secure for all generations.... You will have plenty of goats' milk to feed you and your family and to nourish your servant girls"* (Proverbs 27:23-27).

The point is simple: As leaders and executives, our responsibility is not only to safeguard the company's bottom line – although for a business to survive it must make a profit. We are stewards of all of those who work for us. They have been entrusted to our care, and we have a responsibility for making certain they are treated fairly and equitably. External pressures should not be required for us to properly provide for those in our employ, and that includes being willing to compensate them generously, acknowledging their vital contributions to our corporate success.

What would be the outcome of balancing concern for the company's bottom line with an equal awareness of the financial needs of our workers? In all likelihood, it would result in improved productivity and profitability. In other words, the bottom line could be enhanced by paying employees wages at a level they deserve. As 1 Timothy 5:18 says, *"You must not muzzle an ox to keep it from eating as it treads out the grain.... Those who work deserve their pay!"*

If you desire a harmonious and profitable workplace, consider being a shepherd, not a dictator. Setting the tone for a positive working environment, recognizing valued contributions by workers, and compensating them generously will help in ensuring corporate success.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Do you lead or work for a company that seems to put profits far ahead of any other concerns, including how employees are compensated? If not at present, have you ever been part of such a working environment? What was that experience like for you?
2. Has there ever been a time when you felt you were not being compensated adequately for the work you were performing? How did you feel about that?
3. What do you think of the biblical concept of a leader in any context, including the workplace, approaching that role as being a shepherd, a steward of the people under his or her care?
4. How do you think compensation affects employee morale and performance? Are there other factors that you think have an even greater impact on the quality and quantity of their work? Explain your answer.

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Mark 10:44-45; Luke 12:42-43, 16:10-13; Philippians 2:3-4