

Good Work: How Blue Collar Business Can Change Lives, Communities, and the World

By D. Hataj, Moody Publishers, 2020. \$15.99

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Integrating successful business practice and faithful discipleship in Christ is difficult because no singular method is available. In his book, *Good Work*, David Hataj provides a first-person perspective on how he has tried to integrate his faith with business, working as a second-generation small business owner in a blue-collar company, Edgerton Gear. The author is overt in connecting biblical principles (usually referred to as “kingdom principles”) to business practices. When the author uses direct Scripture references to illustrate a point, he uses the Message translation.

Three overlapping concepts frame how he conducts business through the lens of faith. The first comes from Van Duzer (2010):

There are two legitimate, first order, intrinsic purposes of business: as stewards of God’s creation, business leaders should manage their business (1) to provide the community with goods and services that will enable it to flourish, and (2) to provide opportunities for meaningful work that will allow employees to express their God-given creativity. (as cited in Hataj, 2020, p. 42)

The idea of “meaningful work” as a purpose of business is a recurring theme throughout the book. The second concept is a quote from Jewish philosopher Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides) in which he states the highest level of charity is that

Money is given to prevent another from becoming poor, such as providing him with a job or by teaching him a trade or by setting him up in business so he will not be forced to the dreadful alternative of holding out his hand for charity. This is the highest step and the summit of charity’s golden ladder. (as cited in Hataj, 2020, p. 229)

The final concept that frames the message of the book is taken from Dallas Willard (1998). Willard talks about how Christ declares that we need to be living out righteousness beyond ethical perfection but through a *true inner goodness*. This inner goodness must be defined by

the objective measure of God, not a subjective individual definition of goodness. These themes permeate the discussion of business practices, personal wealth, company culture, and managerial burnout.

Since business practices guide all aspects of the book, Hataj spends time discussing how these are balanced with spiritual ideas such as purpose and calling. Using the two legitimate purposes of business from Van Duzer (2010), Hataj discusses issues such as product quality, business relationships, and level of professional service. Producing a high-quality product is critical because the gears produced allow the machinery of the modern world to function, thereby helping the community flourish. Business relationships include interaction with employees, suppliers, and customers. The author discusses in detail how customer relationships are preserved by charging the best possible price every time. In managing employees, the author discusses the concepts of being prophet, priest, and king, thus reflecting Christ’s call on our lives. This engages employees on multiple levels to address a variety of needs. Developing high school students into potential future workers through a trade-based curriculum called “Craftsman with Character” is shown as a way to integrate the ideas from Van Duzer and Moses ben Maimon. As it relates to professional service and inner goodness, the struggle is how to meet your customers’ needs without customers abusing the business relationship.

In several parts of the book, the corrupting influence of money is recognized, so the morality of pricing, profit, and wealth is discussed. In trying to find the appropriate price for a customer, the author rejects the concept that price should reflect what the market can bear and instead should reflect only the cost of producing the product and a level of profit to ensure financial sustainability. The author identifies examples of failing to reflect true inner goodness such as a competitor charging significantly higher prices for rush jobs and pricing for pharmaceutical companies. This discussion extends to personal wealth

and income where the book decries the income disparity between chief executive officers and average employees. To combat this, Hataj decides on a level of income sufficient to live modestly and direct potential corporate profit to business operations, employees, or charities. However, nowhere does the book discuss how to develop the necessary level of financial sophistication to find a price and profit that is not too high nor what an appropriate income level for a business owner should be.

The book has a unique perspective on creating a culture that reflects Christian values. The types of workers employed by Edgerton Gears operate in a world where yelling, cursing, and abusive language are how workers and supervisors communicate with each other. Hataj discusses how it took significant effort to create a new paradigm of communication between the members of his company. He also addresses how company culture was changed from one that had alcohol and pornography in the work area to one that reflected Christian values. Making these changes led to significant turnover which created additional problems for him as a business owner.

The author provides honest insight into how, even when trying to conduct business according to a true inner goodness and live by a purpose or calling, this does not exempt anyone from trials and hardship. Early in the managerial transition from father to son, several of his employees worked in secret with a vendor to create a separate shop to compete against Edgerton Gear. The author addresses how difficult it was to deal with this betrayal of the family-owned business. In later years, Hataj received a negative health diagnosis due to overworking and not delegating, which required him to step away from active management of the company for three years. These examples highlight the difficulties faced by small business owners regardless of their adherence to spiritual principles.

Hataj clearly communicates that the information he provides is from his perspective and is not necessarily generalizable to a greater population. Additionally, the author uses the phrase “leave it to the experts” so that he does not miscommunicate any position as an expert to issues related to leadership theory, marketing, or other business-related issues. However, there are several concepts which could be explored through scholarly activities. Many chapters focus on how he experienced becoming a second-generation small business owner and how transition of power and ownership and changes to culture created success and challenges. For those researchers looking for first-person experiential information about these entrepreneurship issues, this book would be a good resource. If researchers are looking for ways in which blue collar workers integrate faith in their daily tasks, this book does not provide much detail.

A second value for scholarship of teaching is the unique perspective of working in a blue-collar business and the dynamics that are very different from white-collar positions for which most college students are preparing. If business faculty are preparing entrepreneurial students or students (like the author) who inherit a business in a blue-collar industry, it could help provide practical ways for students to implement business practices influenced by Kingdom principles.

The third opportunity for research is a case study related to the author’s “Craftsman with Character” high school curriculum. The author discusses how the experience in the course has changed both students and shop workers. From a leadership or employee development perspective, this could be interesting analysis.

Good Work provides a good voice to further the debate on how Kingdom principles should influence how individuals live out their faith in the workplace. As a supplementary textbook in a business course, it could be an effective way to engage students in this debate because first-person stories resonate well with many students. The book should not be used as a definitive authority on the integration of faith in the workplace but rather one voice in a growing chorus, which is what the author seems to intend for this work.

REFERENCES

Hataj, D. (2020). *Good work: How blue collar business can change lives, communities, and the world*. Moody Publishers.

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