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**Labor Day, September, 2018 Part I
What are the health benefits of work?**

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Twenty years ago, in a Labor Day, September 3, 1998, article for *The Examiner*, I wrote:

In 1880, in novel, *The Brothers Kamarazov*, Russian author, Fyodor Dostoyevsky commented on man's need for creative and satisfying work; he said: 'To crush, to annihilate a man utterly, to inflict on him the most terrible of punishments so that the most ferocious murderer would shudder at it and dread it beforehand, one need only give him work of an absolutely, completely useless and irrational character.' Here is the greatest curse. It is not the absence of leisure or pleasure; it is the absence of meaning in one's work.

In 1995, in *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge said, 'Early on...we recognized that there is a burning need for people to feel part of an ennobling mission.' If you want to kill a man, take away his work. Who has not known a person who withers and dies soon after retirement from his life's work? Senge adds the comment, 'Having no work at all is a terrible problem...(Man's) deep spiritual need (is) for fruitful work, for the genuine employment of his talents and energies...Human beings are creative by nature, and are goal seekers and problem solvers. Every human being needs to be an originator of ideas and a creator of structures.'

Born of an age which gave birth to the labor movement, President Theodore Roosevelt said, 'Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.' Without work 'worth doing,' man finds life hardly worth living. Are there exceptions to this principle?

Probably not!

If you look for the population which has the least hope in the world, it would probably be residents of death row. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge comments on the ennobling effect of work on death row inmates. He said: 'The most surprising account...of the spiritual need for usefulness being met comes out of the Texas State Penitentiary at Huntsville, where the inmates on death row have been allowed to leave their cells and go to work making uniforms for the prison guards. 'Noting the positive benefit which work had on the conduct, cooperation and attitudes of death

row inmates,' Senge concluded, 'The same force that can bring death-row prisoners positive morale can certainly build positive corporate spirit in our businesses.'

Money is not the issue of work for the lottery can provide money, but it cannot provide meaning and purpose in life. Only meaningful and creative labor can do that. As we celebrate

Labor Day, this year on September 3rd, let us celebrate our nature - given to us by God -- through which we can find ennobling and enriching, constructive activities for our lives. And, and let us celebrate the heritage, given to us by the labor movement, which has given the voiceless the right and capacity to speak!”

Focus on the health benefits of work

An internet search for “What are the health benefits of work?” produces extensive links to sites in Australia, New Zealand, England and Canada. After reviewing over 100 links, only these were found from the Unites States:

1. Harvard University addressing the health benefits of volunteering. Among other things this report states, “Volunteering provides many benefits to both mental and physical health.

- Volunteering increases self-confidence.
- Volunteering combats depression.
- Volunteering helps you stay physically healthy.

Volunteering is good for your health at any age, but it’s especially beneficial in older adults. Studies have found that those who volunteer have a lower mortality rate than those who do not, even when considering factors like the health of the participants.

Volunteering has also been shown to lessen symptoms of chronic pain or heart disease.

2. The Center for Disease Control commenting on the benefits to employers for promoting health in their staff.
3. A Fox News report of the health benefits of working from home.
4. LiveStrong on the health benefits of biking or walking to work

After reviewing 70+ articles, a study from the United States on the health benefits of working is finally listed. The study is entitled, *The Mental Health Benefits of Work: Do They Apply to Welfare Mothers with a Drinking Problem?* (J Behav Health Serv 36(1): 96–110.) and states: “A longstanding tradition of employment-related research has shown mental health advantages of employment. However, given welfare reform mandates for employment and a welfare population with disproportionately high rates of depression and co-occurring substance abuse problems, it is unclear if women on welfare reap this advantage. ..Studies of the U.S. labor force provide broad support for the beneficial mental health effects of employment on depression.”

Caution

However, even with the affirmation of the value of work in our lives, we must avoid the temptation to associate our personal value with our work. To others, human beings have intrinsic value without regard to society’s judgement of the significance of their performance in the work place. And, a person’s value does not diminish when they are no longer able to perform work.

It is critical to recognition the distinction of the value of work as viewed by the worker and the value of the worker as viewed by society. It is imperative for workers to recognize that their value is not diminished nor eliminated when they are no longer able to perform the work which has given them a sense of personal value.

Child Labor

One of the greatest contributions of the Labor Movement has been in the providing of protection of children from abusive labor practices. Nevertheless, as we protect children from “sweat shops,” work is a critical part of successful child rearing. That work may involve wages, or it may simply be chores in support of the family and an earn allowance, but responsibility as a child prepares a person for a successful life.