

THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

By Robert J. Tamasy

Do you give or receive job performance reviews where you work? Or have you ever been given such a review in another job? Imagine having your boss or supervisor meet with you for a performance review and describe your work with terms like, 'mediocre,' 'adequate,' 'so-so,' or 'doing just enough to get by.' How would you feel?

At best you would probably realize that hoped-for promotion probably will not be coming very soon, or that you should not expect to receive a substantial bonus based on how your work is assessed. At worst, it might be wise to start looking for another job – the sooner the better.

Watching the recent Summer Olympics, with thousands of athletes competing from well over 100 different countries, it was evident that *mediocre* and *doing just enough to get by* were not part of their mindsets. Even though most of the athletes knew they would not be returning home with gold, silver or bronze medals, they still wanted to do their best to represent and bring honor to their nations.

If one phrase could have been used to describe those hard-working, determined Olympians, it was "the pursuit of excellence." Whether it was striving for precision on the diving boards; performing intricate and demanding routines in gymnastics; trying to run the fastest on the track; churning through the water in swimming events; or demonstrating amazing feats of strength and dexterity on the field, it was obvious the competitors had invested countless hours preparing for their events. They understood it is not good to perform on the global stage and embarrass themselves.

What if we each took the same approach to our work? We might not be vying for international acclaim, or for gold, silver or bronze medals. However, pursuing excellence in what we do – whether making sales presentations, designing a website, conducting a meeting, or emptying trash cans – is certain to gain the attention of people we work with, especially our bosses. Here are a few of the things the Bible says about cultivating a work ethic of excellence:

Excellence and hard work are recognized. There are many talented people in the workplace, but what sets some apart from the rest is their commitment to carrying out their responsibilities with excellence, going the extra mile when necessary. *"Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve before kings; he will not serve before obscure men"* (Proverbs 22:29).

Work can fulfill a higher purpose. When we go to work, our intent is usually to satisfy the expectations of the persons that serve as our bosses and supervisors. But in the Scriptures, we are exhorted to realize our work should aim even higher than that. *"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building"* (1 Corinthians 3:9).

Excellent work can lead to greater responsibilities. We might be tempted to think, 'When I get an important job, then I will really work hard and show what I can do.' Even if your current job seems unimportant, it might be a training ground for much greater, more fulfilling responsibilities. In a parable, Jesus Christ told about pleasing a demanding boss: *"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities'"* (Luke 19:17).

Workplace; Pursuing Life With a Shepherd's Heart, *coauthored with Ken Johnson*; and The Heart of Mentoring, *coauthored with David A. Stoddard*. Bob's biweekly blog is: www.bobtamasy.blogspot.com.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Did you watch any of the Summer Olympics? Some portions might not have interested you, but what did you think of the amount of time, energy, effort and sacrifice the athletes expended for the honor of representing their nations in the Games?
2. When was the last time you had to undergo a performance review? How did you feel about that? What kind of assessments did you receive, and what did those mean for you?
3. Hearing the term, "pursuit of excellence," what does that mean to you? What do you think it should look like in the workplace – pursuing excellence?
4. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, why is striving for excellence in our work important? What does it have to say about our faith and commitment to serving God and others?

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

2 Chronicles 31:20-21; Proverbs 16:3; Ecclesiastes 2:24, 3:22, 5:18-19; James 2:20-24

Challenge for This Week

This week might be a good time to do a personal job performance review. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest, how would you rate yourself in terms of attitude, motivation, productivity, effectiveness, and most important, being a worker that serves as a good example for others to follow.

Think of someone – or more than one person – whom you admire not only for their accomplishments but also for how they approach their work. If there's an opportunity, ask what motivates and inspires them in the workplace.