

What You Are Paid No Measure of What You Are Worth

Cliff Meadows belonged to the first church I served as Pastor, in southern West Virginia. He had retired from the C&O Railroad as an executive high enough up to know about the deep underground command quarters prepared for the President and top government officials at The Greenbrier in the event of nuclear attack.

Cliff once told me the story of how he got started on his career path with the C&O. He had made a favorable impression in some capacity that led the personnel director to invite him in for an interview. Once it became apparent he would be offered a new position, he was asked, “How much do you think you’re worth?” Cliff told me that he answered along these lines: “There’s no point in talking about that. You haven’t got it. But I can tell you how much I’m willing to work for.”

How I wish there were more folks in this world who understood what Cliff knew early on in life! What someone gets paid is no measure of what they are worth. Indeed, it is also no measure of the worth of the work they do.

I cringe whenever I hear that someone “earns” a six- or seven-figure salary. Really? Many people get paid that much, but few really “earn” it. Lots of people making big bucks make negative contributions to society. They hardly earn what they get paid. Meanwhile, many people who barely scrape by earn every penny they make, and then some. They make real contributions to society, cleaning toilets, nursing the sick, sewing clothing, growing food, preparing meals, teaching children, building houses – you get the idea.

I can’t say whether I earned the income I received while employed. But I never thought it measured my worth as a human being, or the worth of my contribution to society. It was, finally, what I was willing to work for.

The really lucky people get paid for doing what they love. Others take less-than-ideal jobs mainly to put bread on the table.. Some will do almost anything if the price is right. Others couldn’t be paid enough to do the same.

Two points: 1) the amount a person gets paid bears precious little relation to the worth of that person’s work as a positive contribution to the lives of others and society; 2) every person is of infinite worth in the sight of God.

Copyright 2015 by Byron C. Bangert