

Today I'd like to talk about the world of work, especially as it relates to the business world. It is argued that business is the major institution in society today & most of us and our loved ones are destined to spend more time there than at church, the academy, or with families so what happens at work matters! Our work experiences in fact are critical in shaping the person we become.

Mary Ward believed there to be no separation between her work & her life which we celebrate as her charism. So what is the equivalent of a charism in secular life, specifically in today's modern business context / world of work? The word charism comes from a Greek root meaning 'gift'. Traditionally charism was thought to be proof that the Divine was intimately present in the work one was called to do. Our search for a purpose in life makes us similar seekers of God's presence and therefore work matters.

How do we, in the business world, find that higher order purpose, to find God at work & be a candidate for an infusion of grace even if a tiny sprinkle compared to Mary Ward's infusion.

During my 15 years as a consultant working within many major Australian corporations, I have witnessed how this search for a higher purpose to bring meaning to the world of work stalks modern workplaces and largely goes unmet. Work is increasingly important as our traditional foundations of meaning and connections – community, family & organised religion – declines (refer powerpoint).

It is frequently said that we live in a globalised society and we have to think and act global. Business, and in particular, multinational corporations however are the only truly global citizens commanding higher social authority than many nation states, moving people & capital around the world, creating & destroying community prosperity, deciding whether to opt in or out of major debates such as climate change, social security nets & political stewardship.

There are two dominant stories being played out in business organisations today and my chosen role is to remind people that they have a choice in deciding which story they

choose to be part of and therefore the role they play in co-designing the world that emerges.

For many, the first story is one of increasing individualism & time impoverishment. We live in an age of paradox. On the one hand we have never had it so good while on the other we have never felt so alone (slide). This paradox is reflected in the annual "Eye on Australia" compiled by Sweeney & Grey Advertising which shows that 61% of Australians are now seeking greater spirituality in their lives. They are looking for this in their workplaces and since for many work has become an all consuming life task that leaves little time for other activities & commitments, it is not surprising that meaning is being sought there.

People often say that I have a great job going in & out of major companies discussing the ethical dimensions of workplace as the social backdrop to business - what has in fact often become the undiscussables for those inside the organisation - how people treat each other inside the organisation & how the organisation impacts on the social, environmental as well as the economic well being of local communities in Australia and all countries where they operate. They are usually taken aback when I tell them that it's not as great as it seems & that the typical response to my arrival is one of indignation and opposition. For most, ethics continues to be confused with personal morality standards & I'm challenged to defend management's right to tell employees what's ethical or perhaps more outrageous, to dare to suggest that current management practices may not be ethical.

At a macro level I'm challenged to build the business case for why leaders should embrace the new philosophies of sustainability, corporate social responsibility, the idea of profits & principles and the other new social expectations of business rather than remain content to value & measure bottom line success only.

For the moment it is true to say that not all businesses or organisations are the same & just as companies differ in size, so too there exists different ways of doing business - what I refer to as the good, the bad and the ugly of the business world. The Good try to

do the right thing most of the time and many are signing up to the new social and environmental accountabilities of sustainability. They seek to define the rules of success and ensure that their organizational systems support these stated rules and values. The Bad espouse one set of values but live out of another. They adhere to the letter of the law but ignore its spirit. Their leaders practice a predisposition to the philosophy of public virtue and private vice – the do as I say philosophy. The Ugly believe in a completely different set of rules for business than the rest of society. They are characterized by insider greed and a winner takes all mentality – the Enrons, WorldComs and, here in Australia, Pan Pharmaceuticals. In these organisations, employees find themselves compromised – they are prisoners to their need for security, superannuation schemes, standard of living, parental approval or public image. Typically they find themselves behaving in ways not of their choosing because they feel they have no option.

Every generation has its defining moment – the moment when its members are knocked out of their complacency & challenged to accept responsibility for their impacts on others & change its course. We are in that moment now. Climate change has been our wakeup call.

1. On our watch we have seen the selfish consumption of natural resources at the expense generations to come
2. The rise of individualism – not in my backyard syndrome - at the expense of community progress
3. The drift to vicarious living – be it celebrity monitoring, Big Brother Voyeurism or virtual computer identities - instead of building meaning into our own.

The good news is that we do have new generations who do not wish to sign up to the greed is good philosophy. They are looking for new models of capitalism that find their origin in an *ethic of care* vs. the current *ethic of rights* – intellectual rights, property, contractual /political rights - the paradigm that has so successfully bequeathed to us a world where many now feel that they live in an economy not a society.

This new generation have ethical ambition. They are redefining success, reclaiming quality of life & moving to a new vision of coexistence with nature & the primacy of interpersonal relationships. They are not prepared to sacrifice today for tomorrow or put the market's needs first! There is no deferred gratification for them; today matters. Many of them share a guiding vision of a restorative economy & want to be part of the solution to the world's current social & environmental challenges. At work, they are seeking a values match between their personal values and the companies they are prepared to work for. They are combing websites to see who are the good corporate citizens and looking to their employers to provide them with opportunities to help them build a sense of higher purpose into daily life.

The new economy too has spawned new models and new business leaders who are both leading & responding to these new values and expectations. They are championing core social values alongside economic goals and enabling employees to make informed choices about the company they wish to work in and I will elaborate on these later.

Many however seek to hold back the tide of progress and they continue to ignore their people's needs e.g. Beyond Blue's depression research released last week showed how the legal profession with its impossible and unethical culture of long hours has won for itself the accolade of facilitating the highest rates of depression amongst professional groups. It is notorious for asking its recruits to work 12 & 15 hour days - in the process robbing them of their youth, their energy and, as reflected in their depression rates, their sense of purpose.

The legal profession is not alone. I purposely choose them as I know it is a profession of choice for so many of the Loreto girls and I'd like to suggest that perhaps we are colluding with these exploiters of youth by not holding the profession more accountable for its workplace practices. There are similar ethical questions that need to be asked of the professions as to why women continue to be discriminated against in promotions - despite graduating in equal numbers they continue to be excluded from the corridors of power. The sad reality is that if you want to make it to the top of your profession, you

must choose between a relationship and family life or professional success. The price for the top job is typically to remain childless and, it simply doesn't have to be this way.

I'd like to finish by telling you more about the many good stories that need celebrating so we can offset the naysayers. For me, there has never been a better time to be in business because there are so many new business leaders pioneering new business models and inspirational visions to make a positive social contribution as well as achieve business goals including:

- The Google founders with their corporate mandate "do no evil" who along with 3M allow their people to spend 20% of their time at work on their own personal projects
- Muhammad Yunus founder of the Grameen bank who invented micro finance lending the world's poorest tiny amounts of seed capital to setup their home enterprises & now lends to 4.4m poor to help them help themselves out of the poverty trap & receives an 99% repayment record!. His model was copied around the world and here in Australia by Westpac & ANZ to help poor Australians join the market economy.
- Anita Roddick, founder of the global BodyShop chain, she championed "trade not aid" with developing countries & heralded in the modern corporate social responsibility movement.
- Jeff Skoll, first president of e-bay and founder of Participant Productions Films set up to bring a social conscience via Hollywood to the world. He has funded such projects as George Clooney's *Syriana*, & Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth*.
- Ray Anderson of Interface carpets – the world's largest carpet manufacturer who decided to make his company into a global leader modeling what's possible in a Restorative economy.
- The Founder \$223m Patagonia company who says he's in business to make a better world, not clothes & pioneered recycle innovations and grass roots advocacy to protect the environment

- Fuji Xerox 's CEO who pioneered product stewardship – the concept of “cradle to cradle” responsibility and changed the way manufacturing works for everyone. There are many many more....

These business leaders make explicit commitments from the very top to balance what's good for business with what is good for society. They create workplace contexts where employees can feel passionate about their work because they know they can change markets, tackle deep social issues and build new ways designed to grow people and the bottom line.

We all hold within us the potential for greatness & the potential to be of great service to others. Work is such an essential part of everyone experience, it needs to be talked about BUT not as something separate to our search for purpose & sense of spirituality but as a core pathway to building a life of meaning. We need to remind our children to ask the big question first - who do you want to be, what sort of person do you want to become and then help them to choose an organisation or career that will enable them to build a life of meaning rather than fragment their life into separate portfolios of work and personal.

Building bridges was our theme so I'd like to suggest that perhaps it time that we recognise our need to build that critical bridge between our religious commitments and our places of work.

Mary Ward was a women of her time who responded to the changes & challenges of the Reformation period with vision & creativity. We can follow her footsteps in how we approach our work & find God's presence in how & where we choose to work. We can choose to be a part of the new story unfolding in business workplaces, we can choose to be doers of justice and seekers of truth while we go about our work.

I hope you and yours choose wisely. The fate of many who don't get the opportunity to choose may depend upon it.

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