

EAS/Employee Assistance Services
Employee Assistance-Psychotherapy
Tom Lavin MFT, LADC
557 California Avenue
Reno, NV 89509
775-323-3330
www.EASEAP.com

Doing Good Work
Tom Lavin, MFT, LADC

September 2005

*“We make a living by what we get,
we make a life by what we give.”*

Sir Winston Churchill

September is the month that celebrates work with Labor Day. It's a good time to reflect on the role of work in our lives. The above quote by Sir Winston Churchill prompts us to ask, “What am I getting from my work, and what am I giving from my work?”

We spend 20-50+ hours a week at work. The time and energy we put into work is significant: we affect our work, our work affects us. It is important, from time to time, that we pause and ask: “Do I feel good about myself...and my work?”

Harvard Professor Howard Gardner has written a provocative book that supports thoughtful reflection on our relationship with our work, entitled Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet.

Some core ideas in reflecting on work include:

“Good” means both “high quality” and “ethical/responsible”. Good work, as “high quality” means that our work is expert, that it meets high standards of quality. Good work as “ethical/responsible” means that our work takes into account the social implications of our work: does it contribute to the common good of our community?

Dag Hammarskold, the former Secretary General of the United Nations once stated a simple, yet profound question that can help us

examine our behavior: he ask, “Do you create or destroy?”

Combining Hammarskold's question with Gardner's concept of work being ethical and responsible, we are prompted to look at our work and ask: “In the work I'm doing, am I part of the problem, or part of the solution? Am I contributing to the benefit of others?”

Often, when we do not feel good about the quality of our work, can become cynical and disillusioned and feel anxious and ashamed.

When we feel good about our work, we feel enthusiasm, personal pride and a connection with the community.

Professor Gardner's 4 M's of Good Work:

1. **Mission:** Along with making a living with my work, do I have a sense of mission, a sense of purpose? Do I believe that who I am and how I do my work makes a difference?
2. **Model:** Do I have a role model-someone I emulate? Someone I want to be like? Do I have a mentor, a coach who can support me in being the best I can be? (Conversely, do I have a Tormentor-someone who provides an example that I do not want to emulate?).
3. **Mirror #1:** When I look in the mirror, do I feel proud of myself or embarrassed of myself? How can I do my work in a way that generates healthy pride?
4. **Mirror #2:** Am I proud of my work group, my profession? What changes can I/we make to enhance the quality and ethics of our work?