

Leading Self: Purpose Driven Leadership

November 12, 2020

I read an anthology of diverse authors, "The Future of Work"; with Fred Best, editor. The different authors include Abraham Maslow, C.Wright Mills, Robert Heilbonner, Alvin Toffler, Peter Drucker, and Marshall McLuhan. Except for this one,"no adequate history of the meanings of work has (ever) been written." ('The Future of Work', pg. 6; quoted from C. Wright Mills) 57

The general concept as explained by Best, is that work has changed over the centuries, and is always evolving. C. Mills writes about different conceptions of the place of work in the minds of men. The Greeks thought that "work brutalized the mind (and) made man unfit for the practice of virtue.(C. Mills, pg.6) The Hebrews saw work as 'painful drudgery. Early Christianity saw work as punishment for sin that also served as obligatory to one's religious community (see: St. Augustine).

The authors try to offer their perceptions about what the future of work might look like, in relation to common belief, at the time of publication and in the present. They are performing what is referred to as "knowledge work". 119

Published in 1973, the future they write about is the present time that we are experiencing in (2020) the twenty-first century. I wanted to see how closely they would have predicted what is, and has taken place since then. The underlying premise is that just as life is ever changing, so is the nature of work evolving. Fred Best suggests that "future" changes could be as dramatic and life altering as the Industrial Revolution. Many in society today believe that those momentous changes are now upon us. 88

The history of work in this country, according to Abraham Maslow, grew out of human need. When mankind's "physiological needs are relatively well satisfied", a new set of needs emerge. Maslow calls these the "Safety Needs". They include "security; stability; dependency; protection; freedom from fear, from anxiety and chaos; need for structure, order, law, limits; strength in the protector; and so on." (The Future of Work; Maslow, pg 20)

Agriculture in the United States was the occupation of 70 to 80 percent of the population in 1800. Today it is 8 percent, with two percent of the 8 being basically, just unemployed. The remaining 20 to 30 percent were engaged in handling goods; such as tanners, printers, blacksmiths, or service providers such as merchants, clerks or legislators.

Between 1869 and 1900, an increase in goods and services , brought about by the invention of machinery affected our until then agriculturally dominant market economy. Manufacturing began using raw materials that "were taken from the earth, and fabricated, processed, packaged

and transported to the point of sale.” (Heilbonner, pg.53) This factory employment created goods needed by the farmer to lower costs and increase productivity. The resulting production of food created competition between farmers, facilitating the move to cities. Labor continued to move to the factories in the cities; as more “helpful” inventions made farming “easier”. According to Heilbonner, the move toward machinery and invention produced new, non-demand initiated inventions. The new technology such as in a market society created its own demand, and work moved further towards the handling of goods.

A great exodus of labor due to this new supply and demand created a new market, and the advertising that came with it. Populations moved during these extraordinarily stable times, into the cities; moving into manufacturing, mining, construction, utilities, and transportation. Since farming was not meeting a greater demand, while becoming increasingly more efficient than before, the move met with no resistance from the agricultural sector.

Because of the great drought, at least in part brought about by agricultural practices, the Green Revolution beginning in the 1940s changed agriculture from traditional methods to modern technological research using fertilizers, and plant breeding. The invention of the tractor and the cotton gin, as well as new electrically operated mills and irrigation systems; all changes aided by the Soil Conservation Service, soil tests becoming the standard practice.

The original premise being that labor and work are in flux, and constantly changing; once in the city many also moved into the service sector for employment. Unlike with agriculture, these occupations have not increased in productivity since 1869 or 1900. Included in the service sector are teachers, janitors, sales clerks, waiters, cooks, file clerks and barbers. The “knowledge” worker is just a more recent version; an up-graded “skilled-worker”, who sees himself or herself as a professional but not as an intellectual. (Peter Drucker, pg. 61-3\_)

Some people see these changes as an end to work. But some see it as new freedom, from a life of predetermination into a life with more choices. In 1955, the knowledge industries, which produce and distribute ideas and information, rather than goods and services accounted for one quarter of the U.S. gross national product. This was already three times the proportion of the GNP spent in the country on the knowledge sector in 1900. (Drucker, pg 58)

Included in the knowledge worker category are nurses, dieticians, medical and X-ray technicians (technologists), social and psychiatric case workers; but also the better paid engineer, accountant, medical technologist, computer programmer, systems designer, or information specialist. The original “knowledge” worker had a narrower choice of professions; clergyman, physician, lawyer, teacher, or civil servant. The lack of these types of choices and opportunities in developing countries, is frequently referred to as neo-colonialism. In the Western World education was not a right, but a privilege, until around 1850, education began to be made available to the gifted and ambitious among the poor and under-privileged. Since the Brown v. Board of Education, Supreme court decision of 1954; it has been assumed and was clearly enforced that the right to an education is permanently and solemnly embedded in the U.S. Constitution.

Knowledge (worker) opportunities exist primarily in large organizations, business enterprise, government agency, large university, research laboratory (like the NIH where they torture and kill thousands of animals each year), or hospital. Knowledge opportunities used to be largely for independent professionals working on their own. Proposal writing teams often work together for a few weeks. Once the proposal is submitted, however, the proposal team is disbanded.

Today they are largely for people working within an organization or as part of a team. When working in a “knowledge” profession within a large organization, training begins with a team who will be working together, for either a short period of time, or for longer. Teams last only as long as needed to solve specific short-term problems. Rather than the traditional one person training method, this new way replaces the old bureaucracy. The key word will be temporary. These will be adaptive, rapidly changing, temporary systems. Problems will be solved by task forces composed of relative strangers who represent a set of diverse professional skills. (Warren Bennis, pg 73-79)