

Chapter 9: Justice and Work

Getting Started

Introduce teens to the concept of peace by summarizing, in your own words, the material on page 167 of the Teacher’s Manual, “Introducing the Chapter.” Optionally, you may also have them read the chapter summary on pages 245–246 of the Student Text; or ask them to read about work on pages 221–222 and a Christian view of work on pages 223–227 of the Student Text. Then have them read the following story. A note about this article: Some of the economic concepts addressed in this article are beyond the understanding of many high school teens. Advise teens that they do not need to completely understand the economic dynamics discussed in the article. Help them to focus on the “big picture”:

- the principles of justice motivating the company to achieve a living wage;
- the fact that achieving a living wage involved overcoming difficult obstacles;
- the importance of working toward justice despite the obstacles one faces; and
- the need to address justice issues on both a local and a societal level.

The Story

What are the responsibilities of an employer to its workers related to a wealth distribution? This topic is covered in depth in the following article.

DISTRIBUTORS OF JUSTICE: A CASE FOR A JUST WAGE

By Michael J. Naughton

In this Jubilee year, the issue of wealth distribution, especially as it relates to the larger macroeconomic issues of international debt and globalization, has received a good deal of attention and analysis. For this we should be thankful. What has not received much attention, however, are the responsibilities of managers and entrepreneurs toward wealth distribution in their own businesses. How should managers and entrepreneurs, especially those who bear the name Christian, distribute resources within their limited sphere of influence? Or to put it more bluntly: How do they become distributors of justice, rather than maximizers of self-interest? So as not to be too abstract on this topic, I want to examine a specific organizational practice that has specific implications for wealth distribution—wages. . . .

Access the rest of the story at www.americamagazine.org/gettext.cfm?articleTypeID=1&textID=771&issueID=300 from *America* magazine.

Discussion

Lead the teens in a discussion of the following questions:

1. According to the author, how do business owners and managers typically view the role that wages play in their business?
In a nutshell, wages provide a reason for employees to work toward the business’s goal of making a profit. More specifically, the article says that wages help organizations achieve increased productivity and efficiency, customer satisfaction and retention, and shareholder wealth by attracting, rewarding, retaining, and motivating employees who best achieve those goals.
2. From a Christian perspective, why does work always have a value beyond the wages that are paid for it?
“Work is always more than its economic output or instrumental value, precisely because work changes God’s creation, and we in turn change ourselves.”
Can you share any examples of when you have personally experienced this higher value of work?
3. Why did the managers at Reell Precision Manufacturing want to pay its workers a living wage?
Because the company operated on the basis of Judeo-Christian values for the “growth of people.” The managers recognized that the workers deserved a living wage because they were “persons made in the image of God who deserve to have at least their minimum needs met.”
4. What made it difficult for Reell Precision Manufacturing to achieve its goal of paying employees a living wage?
The living wage for the area was \$11, but the market wage for the industry—the wage that the company’s competitors

were paying—was \$7. Making up the difference would have put the company at a competitive disadvantage that could have put the company out of business.

What other kinds of challenges face business owners and employees who attempt to act justly in the workplace?

5. How did the company overcome the obstacles to paying employees a living wage?

It increased the value of employees' work from \$7 an hour to \$11 an hour by changing the company's organizational structure, giving employees more responsibility, and providing training to new employees.

What principles of Catholic social teaching were reflected in the way the company reorganized itself?

The principles of participation and subsidiarity.

6. Why is it important for society as a whole to help businesses pay employees a living wage?

Apart from a comprehensive commitment—a social commitment—to a living wage, those who decide unqualifiedly to pay living wages in highly competitive, commodity-driven, price-sensitive markets risk economic disadvantages that cannot long be borne. If the market wage in the industry is below a living wage, and there is no place to reduce labor costs, employers who decide to raise wages unilaterally will price themselves out of the market.

Take Action

The mission of a Christian business

- In this activity, teens develop a mission statement for a Christian business based on their reading and discussion about justice and work.
- Briefly explain to the teens that many organizations, including many businesses, are guided by mission statements. Explain that a mission statement states the organization's "mission" (purpose and goals) and the means the organization uses to achieve that mission, including its guiding values. If possible, find some mission statements on the web to read to teens as examples. Point out that in order to be useful, most mission statements are short and to the point.
- Divide the teens into groups. Instruct each group to start its own business by choosing a product or service to sell and giving the business a name. Suggest that it would be ideal (but not necessary) for them to choose a type of business in which one or more of them have actual work experience. This should take no longer than five minutes.
- Ask the teens to create a mission statement for their business, using their reading and discussion about justice and work as a guide. The mission statement should answer these questions: What are the goals that this business wants to achieve? What are the values that will help this business achieve those goals?
- When the teens are finished, have each group share its mission statement with the whole group. Ask each group to explain why it chose the goals and values it did. Help the teens imagine how their mission statements might play out if they were applied to a real business. How would customers be affected? The environment? Workers?
- Enhance this exercise by having teens invite business people to critique their mission statements. For instance, the teens might seek out parishioners who are employed in the same type of business their group hypothetically created. Alternatively, you may wish to invite business leaders from the parish or local chamber of commerce to attend the session in order to offer feedback to the teens.

Additional Activities

- Have teens discuss the case study on page 241 of the Student Text. (Remind the teens that the church teaches that the use of nuclear arms is always wrong.)
- Have teens conduct the work-related interview on page 239 of the Student Text.
- Discuss the stay-at-home parenting topic raised in "Creative Learning" exercise "b" on page 171 of the Teacher's Manual.

Additional Resources

For additional books, videos, and websites related to this topic, see pages 167–168 of the Teacher's Manual.