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_The QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence_

2901 Liberty Heights Avenue
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“BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HUNGER”: SOCIAL JUSTICE AND THE REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Author: Rev. Solomon Iyobosa Omo-Osagie II, PhD
Institution: Baltimore City Community College

Introduction/Abstract

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, commonly known as the Beatitudes, was a call for social justice. Throughout his ministry, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. embraced this call and epitomized the urgency with which the clergy was to address the issues of social injustice in the society. His refusal to abandon the “old ship of Zion,” in the face of intense opposition to his clerical passion for social justice placed him in the category of a prophet of his time whose calls for national righteousness went unheeded. His work in this arena aroused the moral fabric of a nation.

Social justice and injustice pose a twin challenge in most societies. This challenge has come about as a result of intra-variations of values, norms, beliefs, and practices that define societies. Race, in the context of the American social experiment, has been the elephant in the room of societal discourse. Even religion, with all its attendant and implied moral relevance and guide in societal formation, has created a culture that in some instances has led to and perpetuated social injustice.¹

As religion has often been manipulated by some zealots and extremists on all sides of the religious spectrum who use religion for their personal agendas and proclivity to bring about forced conversion and destabilization, the centrality of religion being a matter of personal intuition and

conviction, remains a vital part of a just society. When extremists pursue myopic and fringe ideologies in the name of religion, it’s religion, otherwise divine purpose to “serve a real and permanent good”² for mankind, can become a tool to inflict pogroms and other acts of injustice on the people.

However, with particular reference to the United States and notwithstanding the prospect of the misapplication of the implied and moral relevancy of religion in the American social experiment, there have been exceptions. For example, the Bishop Charles Harrison Mason of the Church Of God In Christ (COGIC) and the Bishop Richard Allen of the African Methodist and Episcopal Church (AME) transcended the narrowness and doctrinal oppressiveness of misapplied religions through their messages, sermons, and writings that were born out of a Pauline-like suffering but yet hungered for social justice.

Perhaps no other figure in the African American or American religious experience in the 20th century was adept at fusing Christological tenets with real and practical social issues of his time than the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Throughout his work both as a man of the Cloth and a social crusader,³ Dr. King exemplified what Paul meant by God not giving us the spirit of fear,

² Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish born Pittsburg millionaire Steel magnet of the Nineteenth Century was influenced by his religious convictions of addressing and pursuing what was right and just and went about doing deeds that propagated social justice using his huge financial prowess.
³ I have opted to use “Crusade(r)” instead of campaigner here for literary and semantic shock effect to describe King’s quest for social justice. I am paralleling it in the same context as the Christian Crusade of the 12th and 13th centuries. The main difference here is that King’s was a non-violent crusade even when there was violence all around him. In the Christian Crusades, the thought was to conquer evil (non-Christians). In King’s days, the evil was social injustice in the vicissitudes of African American life and the quest for fairness and equality. King set out to conquer this behemoth of anti-Beatitudes and social injustice. See the following and selected compelling works: William D. Watley, Roots of Resistance: The Nonviolent Ethic of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1985); John J. Ansbro, Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Making of a Mind. (New York: Orbis Books, 1982); C. Anthony Hunt, Blessed are the Peace Makers: A Theological Analysis of the Thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Lima, Ohio: Wyndham Hall Press, 2005); Vincent Harding, Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero (New York: Orbis Books, 2008); James M. Washington, (ed.), A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986); Martin Luther King Jr., Why We Can’t Wait, (Harper & Row Publishers, 1963); Clayborne Carson, (ed.,) The Autobiography of Martin
but of power, love, and a sound mind. King was a powerful figure who spoke truth to power. He was a man with a made up mind to do God’s will even in the face of threats to his life and disrupted family life. One of the underlying points of most followers of Christ is to do God’s will in their lives. King demonstrated this shared belief about doing God’s will.

An important aspect of that God’s will is to do justice to one another, love one another, and be a voice for those who do not have one and are oppressed. God raises those He has chosen for special service. Throughout the Old Testament, Biblical accounts are replete with instances where God called out people – Judges, kings, and prophets - Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, etc and anointed them for specific tasks. It is in this context of God being a God of specifics that King figured. Usually, God raised prophets to be voices for those that are oppressed. In his case, it is plausible that King was one of such raised prophets of his time. Following in the tradition of the prophets in the Old Testament, much of what King spoke about concerning matters of social, economic, moral, and political import in society came to pass either during or after his death.

When examined closely, there are striking resemblances of Kingian prophecies to Isaianic or Jeremiaic prophecies in the sense that they prophesied at times of social, cultural, and political upheavals. Consequently, they were further shaped by their environment, which further proves the omnipresence of God. God had to be everywhere so that His prophets can minister to God’s people everywhere. Each of these prophets was not well received in part because they spoke the truth and were uncompromising in their accentuating the truth. Although the truth

made the prophets free, many of the hearers were not quite at the point where they were ready to accept the truth. For King, one of the central points of his ministry was social justice. This essay explores social justice as a recurring theme in King’s works and how it mirrors Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as recorded in the Gospels according to Matthew 5:3-12, and Luke 6:20-22.

King’s articulation of social justice was heavily influenced by the Beatitudes. Jesus was a leader to behold. One of the attractive parts of His life was in the way that He lived: by example. He admonished those who followed him to emulate Him. Hence, as “Christians” – followers of Christ, we are to follow in His footsteps. Also, during Jesus’ ministry, He always had a special place in his heart for those that were downtrodden and felt rejected by society. He took the issue of social justice with as much seriousness as he took on the issue of righteous living. And so on the Mount of Olives, Jesus gave his followers a guide as to how they were to live and treat others.

These followers had to represent Jesus in ways that showed compassion, care, love, fairness, justice, and righteousness. Jesus gave them these guidelines because he knew that he was not always going to be with them. Consequently, while he is not with them in person, they were to take on his “burden” of standing up for social justice.

Jesus was saying to them that even those who feel or are mistreated belong to God and that they are somebody special in God’s sight.4

It was this implied meaning of the Beatitudes that King articulated his notion of \textit{somebodyness}, which highlighted the dignity of each person in the universe of the human family.5

\footnote{4}I am defining burden in this context as a freely accepted responsibility to shoulder other peoples’ concerns, problems and challenges. It was not much of a burden for Jesus because there is nothing too hard for Him. But for the practical purposes of His followers, they considered the issues that Jesus dealt with to be burdensome as multitudes of people constantly sought to have Jesus do this and the other.
In King’s mind, everybody is somebody because each person has a purpose for being here on earth. When people are marginalized or neglected, we are rejecting that very truth that humanity will be held back if someone is left behind. Of course, King was writing and speaking at the time in the context of what was going on in the society. Racism and all the other “isms” were robbing society of its full potential. King was also saying that in the kingdom of God, everybody was somebody. When Jesus gave the Beatitudes, he expected his followers [Christians] to apply them in the time that we now are until he comes back to establish his permanent kingdom where evil will be defeated and goodness will prevail.

In this context, the evil that Jesus was referring to was that of social injustice, which had eaten deep into the fabric of society during King’s time. One way that would have brought racial respite at the time of King’s ministry was for the power structure to embrace the notion of somebodyness. But on the other hand, an embrace of this notion would have meant that racism, segregation, and de-facto segregation would have been nullified.

This would not have been feasible because racism was central to maintaining the social and dominating order used to justify racial inequality.

King’s exposure to Protestant liberalism and the philosophy of personalism also shaped his work in fighting for social justice for the downtrodden. The school of Protestant liberalism shaped King’s social justice work in the sense that it couched our social interactions and humanity within the context of morality and immorality. The things that are moral are clearly of God. In this

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6 It is very telling that more than three decades after King articulated this notion that we had an administration that enacted a law called No Child Left Behind in 2001. This law, which dealt with the need to reform our educational system at the pre-secondary level, highlighted the importance of not living anyone behind. Apparently the “namers” of this law recognized that at the rate that we were going, the full potential of our children may not be fully realized. Likewise, King was of the view that the society would be missing out if we did not cultivate a mindset of making everyone feel like they were important and they had something important to say and to contribute. Everybody had a place at the table of fairness and opportunity.
7 See the excellent work on these influences on King by Kenneth L. Smith and Ira G. Zeep, Jr. Search for the Beloved Community: The Thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1974).
sense then, when we revisit the Beatitudes, we find that society had been clearly immoral in the way that it has treated the less fortunate in society. King was driven by the sense of moral rightness in pursuing social justice. In his view, being a Christian meant living out the beliefs of your Christian faith. Part of that belief was to do what Jesus did while here on earth.

The other major school of thought that influenced King’s social justice work was personalism, the notion espoused by Edgar Sheffield Brightman that “conscious personality is both the supreme value and the supreme reality in the universe.”8 In order words, a sense of self is a belief held by the universality of humanity and when people are devalued it creates a void in society. God is real in the lives of people and because of this they can connect and they have an intimate experience about the reality and the personage of God. Knowing this, then, they are somebody in God. King was speaking here from the context of a people who have had to rely on God when society tried to socially ostracize them and the government turned its back on them and refused to provide them with the basic protection that any government owes to its citizens. Social injustice then is perpetuated by those who failed to see the value in each individual.

While this may have been the case, it was still the individual in question who has to take a more active role in the self-actualization of this belief. But this self-actualization was problematic during King’s time because social and economic oppression was endemic and permeated every aspect of society that it became liberalized oppression.

King’s time was one of searing segregation and discrimination, which greatly damaged the psyche of African Americans and their sense of self-worth. In a well-crafted sermon, King replicated one of Apostle Paul’s epistles. In a letter to the Ephesians, Paul admonished them to remain steadfast and true to their new faith. But King “rewrote” the letter to fit America. He saw

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many similarities to the concerns Paul had that prompted him to write to the Ephesians. An excerpt of King’s letter read,

...So Americans I must urge you to get rid of every aspect of segregation. The broad universalism standing at the gospel makes both the theory and practice of segregation morally unjustifiable. Segregation is a blatant denial of the unity which we all have in Christ. It substitutes an “I-it” relationship for the “I-thou” relationship. The segregator relegates the segregated to the status of a thing rather than elevate him to the status of a person. The underlying philosophy is diametrically opposed to the underlying philosophy of segregation, and all the dialectics of the logicians cannot make them lie down together.⁹

King was recasting America’s stance as a Christian nation. King’s letter was packed with rhetorical questions. Could a nation that considered itself to have the fear and appreciation of God engage in the practices that king described? Would a nation that had developed ways to extend the benefits of an advanced society and make life easy make the same life extremely difficult for other members of that same society? As King saw it, America’s ways were not right and figured that Paul, the church planter, would have been concerned and called America to clean up its acts.

For over two centuries slaves were told by their captors that they were less than human and that they were only good for cheap and slave labor. This mantra was used so many times that some slaves accepted it without understanding it as a form of Miseducation.⁹ The notion of personalism is analogous to a puzzle. We are all part of the puzzle of life and the questions of life can never be fully answered until all pieces of the puzzle (people) have come together and filled the whole. In the Beatitudes, this puzzle was evident because each of the followers of Jesus had a personal

⁹ Audio speech delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, 4 November 1956 Available at http://www.stanford.edu/group/King/publications/sermons
¹⁰ In his seminal work, The Miseducation of the Negro, Carter G. Woodson wrote that the white master did much to manipulate the psyche of blacks during slavery to the point that what they were taught by whites and believed to be true even when it was not, conditioned them to the extent that whites did not even have to be present to control black thought and action.
responsibility to exhibit these characteristics in their dealings with those with whom they came in contact.

In many ways, King was hungry; not in the natural, but more so in the spiritual sense. He wanted to be led by the spirit of God as he pursued the cause for social justice with vigor.\textsuperscript{11} He yearned for a time when America will see the contradictions in its stated creed and beliefs. The milieu of the south was such that all that America had claimed to have stood for violently contradicted the reality of life in the south. In addition to the theological influences on King’s intellectual development by scholars such as Reinhold Niebghur, Dietrich Bonhoffer, Paul Tillich, and others, events like the Montgomery bus boycotts, Selma campaign, and the poor peoples march were the root of King’s practical social justice crusade.\textsuperscript{12}

While the intellectual component of King’s development may have given him a sort of mainstream “validation,” the social justice-leaning campaigns endeared him more to the black community. To be sure, he was also embraced in other circles; however, the “relevance” of the social justice causes spoke more to African Americans.

King was part of the community and therefore had a captive audience. He assiduously exploited his connection with the black community along with his mainstream credentials to mesh the social justice issues and the need for America to live out the true meaning of its creed.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{11} For a closer discussion, see Richard Deats, \textit{Martin Luther King, Jr.: Spirit-Led Prophet} (New York: New City Press, 2003).
\textsuperscript{13} By validation, I am referring to the dawdling thought among some members of the intellectual elite who may have held diminutive opinions of blacks and their constricted intellectual ability. The fact that King graduated from one of the elite universities in the world made such thought a moot point. They had no choice but to recognize King as a distinguished theologian in his own right. If they had not validated him, the elite would have stood on very shaky ground. In King’s time, intellectualism was not preeminent in the South; survival was the dominant thought. Therefore, I am using relevance here to mean that real-life issues of boycotts and other campaigns that King spearheaded were of more pressing need for the black community. It is not being suggested here that blacks were not interested in matters of the intellect. They were. But at the end of the day, they were looking to make a change in their present conditions. Showing an impressive array of theological diatribes would have accomplished little in a race to
King also extolled the words of several prophets including the minor prophet Micah as he sought to carry out his mission of social justice. The prophet admonished the Israelites and reminded them that God expected them to do what was right and to do justly, to love, and walk humbly before Him.\textsuperscript{14} It did not seem that King saw America squaring to Micah’s admonition. King’s work in social justice was also akin to the Old Testament prophets including Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah who warned the people about their ways and sought to get them to repent or face a harsh punishment from God. Just like the Old Testament prophets, King was, to a large extent ignored by mainstream America. His speeches and sermons on social justice issues were widely quoted but rarely emulated. He spoke at great lengths about the need for America to match its rhetoric with true and transparent actions especially as it related to social justice among other issues.

Perhaps a more worrisome reality for King and his social justice works was the indifference exhibited by some ministers who thought that getting involved with social justice work was an entanglement with non-spiritual and therefore divinely and hermeneutically insignificant.

He was frustrated that some ministers had become single-focused on heavenly matters at the peril of neglecting relevant and earthly matters. Indeed the Bible admonished us to think on the things that are heavenly and above. At the same time, we were not to be ignorant of our surroundings. Things that are below cannot be overlooked. King agreed that getting souls to God was important, but at the same time, there were things here that needed to be addressed. The body had needs that had to be met. Human beings have to survive and live a meaningful life while they are here on earth waiting for the rapture. While they waited, they still had to be productive.

\footnotesize{survive. In short then, social justice was central to blacks and their community where King carried out the bulk of his works.}\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14} See the \textit{Holy Bible}, Micah 6:8}
In this vein, King took the Jeremiaic question, is there no balm in Gilead... is there no physician...and turned it into a statement in the wisdom of the slave forefathers and foremothers that there is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole …and to make the sin sick whole.¹⁵ The society during King’s time had become sick from its pervasive social injustice and the ministers had a duty to speak truth to the power of social justice. In his estimation, blacks had been physically, emotionally, psychologically, and mentally wounded. Before souls can be led to God, King believed that these ministers had an obligation to partake in the totality of the healing process.

The social conditions – racism, discrimination, and segregation - were part of the contributory factors that led to blacks’ wounded souls. These souls needed to be made whole.¹⁶ In essence, King’s vision of social justice was not generally shared by all the ministers of his era. These ministers apparently did not believe that religion should mix with either politics or economics. But it is very difficult to keep them all separate because they are inter-dependent. It seemed that these ministers had resigned themselves to the way things were in the south and the nation. Perhaps, the embedded intransigence in southern culture and values that still placed racism at the top of the social order may have forced them to consider it a waste of time to attempt to change things that may turn out to be more difficult for African Americans.

This fact of clerical and theological schism notwithstanding, King forged ahead with his belief in social justice as essential in ministering to and healing the soul.¹⁷ The actions of these ministers amounted to ceding moral authority that every member of the clergy has to speak out

¹⁵ Ibid, Jeremiah 8:22; See also, Lewis V. Baldwin, There is a Balm in Gilead: The Cultural Roots of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1991) and ______, To Make the Wounded Whole: The Cultural Legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr. (Ibid, 1992).
against all unrighteousness in low and high places. There were clearly things that needed to be addressed and the pulpit would have been the most appropriate place for the reasons that the pulpit has power, authority, and validity. The pulpit is most recognizable because it has had the most influence in shaping and molding as well as the social and moral indoctrination of African Americans.

It was evident that in King’s mind, poverty, social justice and policies were intricately linked and it seemed that if the government was not going to be an advocate for the poor, someone who understood Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount should step up and be a voice for social justice. King organizing the poor peoples’ march and campaigns were evidence of his embrace of this particular teaching – the Beatitudes. Jesus reminded us that we will always have the poor with us. He did not say that we should abandon them or write them off from society. They are and will always be a part of the society. We have the poor among us not because God made them poor. God endowed each of one of His creations with gifts and abilities. Some take longer to develop their gifts and talents. Consequently, Jesus charged us through the Beatitudes to help those who have yet to reach their place in God.

How is it that a nation so blessed with human and material resources can have so many children going to bed hungry and waking up hungry? There is a detachment between the government and its citizens when it becomes oblivious to the peoples’ struggles. To what extent would an expanded electorate be a check on social injustice? In order words, if people vote, including the poor, perhaps there would be a government that identified with social and economic issues facing ordinary people.

Suffice it to say, on the one hand, the frequency of political participation by the poor has
not left much room for celebration. This same group is the most affected when non-compassionate administrations take office and squander any and all goodwill that ought to be a part of any legitimate government. King’s quest in this regard could be redeemed if the socially downtrodden became politically aware. On the other hand, King’s social justice crusade awakened the political instincts of many churches and has led to political activism in their communities. Such involvement has led many churches to re-assess their social justice priorities. The Church has always played a role in shaping the lives of African Americans in the past, now, and will continue to do for future generations.\(^\text{18}\) The impact of King’s legacy can be seen in most churches today, where it has become a standard feature that there be auxiliaries that dedicate their skills and talents to pursuing social justice as a collective responsibility but more so as a priority of the church.\(^\text{19}\)

His fight against social injustice stressed the importance of taking care of the poor and needy. Although King was not born into “wealth” in the western sense of abundant and tangible materialism, he came from an educated family by black standards and therefore had an “advantage” over many others whose families did not have the benefit of a high school, not to mention college education from one the most prestigious universities in the United States – Boston University. King could have followed this privileged background to anywhere he wanted to go, especially getting away from the racial insanity of the south. Instead, he returned to the south where matters of social justice were most profound.

He knew that there were more poor people in the South than there were in the North. In King’s mind, poverty and social policies were intricately linked and if the government was not


\(^\text{19}\) Major African American denominations in particular, including African Methodist and Episcopal (AME) Church, United Methodist Churches, Black Baptists, Church of God in Christ (COGIC), among others and many non-denominational churches and ministries such as The Potter’s House (Bishop T.D. Jakes), City of Refuge (Bishop Noel Jones) are actively engaged in social justice causes.
going to be an advocate for the poor, someone who understood Jesus’ teaching on the Mount of Olives should step up and be a voice for social justice. King organizing the poor peoples’ march and campaigns were evidence of his embrace of this particular teaching – the Beatitudes. Jesus warned that the poor we will always have with us, but He did not say that we must abandon the poor or write them off from society. They are and will always be a part of society and it is an act of injustice to neglect and leave them essentially to their own devices.

Perhaps a question to ask is would an expanded electorate be a check on social injustice? In order words, if people vote, including the poor (thank God many of the barriers to political participation such as the value of property that you must own in order to vote had been removed by King’s time) had voted, perhaps there would be a government that identified with social and economic issues facing common, poor and average income people. Unfortunately, the rate of political participation by the poor has always been low. It is plausible that King’s social justice crusade would have had a more profound impact on the people themselves if eligible voters participated and elected candidates who better identified with their values. It is one thing to fight for and gain the right to a desire, it is quite another to make the gains pay.

In many of King’s sermons and teachings, he laid emphases on atonement and forgiveness. He enjoined America to do right and acknowledge that it had made mistakes in the way it had treated not just its black citizens, but its standing in the eyes of the world. America has not always been the favorite of many nations not because it is a bad nation. Rather, America has incurred the wrath of the rest of the world due to its policies that placed national and vital interests at the heart of those policies. King called out America’s immorality in the ways that it treated its black and poor white citizens as well. Even where King was not blatant in asking America to make
atonement, his pronouncements leaned in that direction. There is forgiveness in atonement. There is reconciliation in atonement. There is harmony in atonement. There is peace in atonement. As it were, blacks and poor people had nothing to gain by rejecting such atonement if offered. However, to King, it did not appear that white America, through a predominantly white power structure, was ready to make atonement for centuries of systemic mistreatment of blacks in particular and poor people in general. King’s perspective on atonement is that it has liberating power and when activated could wipe the slate clean for the nation and be trusted again by its citizens who were on the social fringes of society.

King tried to help America understand the value of atonement but America rejected him. It may have been that America did not heed his warnings because the white power structure amalgamated King in the same category as all blacks – inferior. So it did not matter how reasonable, eloquent, and peaceful King was, to many he was just another black man who can never be greater than a white man.

In King’s campaign, empowerment permeated the entirety of his work. From organizing the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC), they were geared towards empowering people to either give them a voice or make their voices louder. Much can be said about people who are down on their luck due to circumstances beyond their control. It is both a psychological and moral boost for someone with whom they can identify come by and galvanize and motivate them to believe that they have more power than they thought. King’s ability to mobilize so many people threatened the white power structure of the South. But this did not matter to King because once blacks latched on to his mission to empower them they could carry on with the struggle while he focused on other areas that needed attention.
Even King himself was empowered by the people that he tried to empower. Although in one of his speeches he complained how tired and discouraged that he felt sometimes, he still had a remarkable way of empowering the people and that helped him to remain engaged as long as he did. His ability to remain focused on his goals and mission, reassured that if there is no pain there is no gain. More importantly, if you believe in the rightness of a cause and other people are not on board with you, you need to encourage and tell yourself that you can make it. King had opponents who were not on board with his campaign. He aptly borrowed from the words of the apostle Paul that as a minister of the Gospel, one has to be encouraged even in the face of opposition. A minister of Gospel must first encourage self before encouraging others to be encouraged.

It is fair to say that King’s life and works have been extensively studied and critiqued. But because his life and work have had such a profound impact in the contemporary church and society, there is a need to continue to examine the many facets of his work.

Clearly, there were prophetic pronouncements during his lifetime and those pronouncements have continued to resonate with the nation that he left behind. His works have left legacies of society’s commitment to social justice, inter-faith dialogue about peace and harmony, and the importance of atonement and forgiveness. It can be argued that to some degree many organizations that otherwise had parochial interests may have been “shamed” and “guilted” and have picked up the mantle of social justice and broadened the scope of their works.

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21 By “shamed” and “guilted”, I mean that some organizations that were involved in causes to improve and enhance community life were challenged in their missions and focus. That is, organizations that in the words of Andrew Carnegie, that do “real and permanent good in this world,” _The Gospel of Wealth_, realized that doing “real and permanent good in this world” cannot be done in isolation of social justice. And so out of shame of being viewed as neglecting the poor in society and guilted by not doing enough to eradicate or minimize poverty and economic and
While there is still much work to do, the society has fared better than it was before and during King’s time. His overarching works have had a transforming effect on society as a whole. To be sure, it was after King’s ministry that the Black Power Movement truly shook America. It was after King’s ministry that Black Theology as an academic discipline although it had its roots in the Great Migration, became relevant to the black experience. It was after King’s ministry that affirmative action programs truly went into effect.

King’s significance was not just local and national. It was global. He did not travel to all seven continents. But his works impacted all continents as people embraced the painful but powerful non-violent approach to social justice and change. His works demonstrated that there was a global yearning for harmony and human dignity. His works were stepped in liberation theology, which gave voice to the oppressed and the socially marginalized not just in the United States but also in Latin and Central America. The powerful arguments proffered by liberation theology empowered and continue to empower marginalized groups to become more resolute in demanding change and doing so with the morally sound rationale of rightness, fairness and justice. A notable permanence is that in addition to groups’ collective agitation for social justice, the oppressor and the oppressed will unavoidably interact and occupy as well as share space. In this regard then, the onus falls upon the oppressor to link hands with men and women of goodwill and from across every strata of society to work for, fight, and demand that social justice becomes ingrained into the fabric of the nation. As recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 26:11, Jesus, while

social depravation found themselves embracing the cause and causes for social justice to which Dr. King gave and lost his life. These organizations, including Andrew Carnegie Foundation have been instrumental in providing funding and other resources to promote the cause of social justice and fairness in society.

he was at the home of Simon, a poor man who previously had leprosy, counseled that the poor were, essentially, not going anywhere. Consequently, in his social justice works, King imbibed this counsel and was propelled to champion social justice not just for African Americans but also among poor whites and other groups. God is the God of all.

As evidenced by King’s personal thoughts on issues of social justice and the snail pace with which the nation dealt with it, it was understandable that many of his critics advocated a more radical and retaliative approach by calling for a “fair exchange” of injustice meted out to white Americans if the nation remained lackluster in dealing with social injustice. But as a student of the Gandhian philosophy of non-violent change, King was aware that an eye for an eye will most likely lead to colossal blindness. In such case, eyes will not be able to see the coming of the glory of the Lord. Herein then lie atonement and forgiveness. In the face of unparalleled injustice, there was still a blessing in hungering for social justice. Racial and social injustice notwithstanding, there was little choice but to hunger for and do that, which is socially just and fair and pleasing to God.

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BUILDING STRENGTH THROUGH HUMAN RESOURCES

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ABSTRACT

This study explains how to maintain constructive employee Relations help a company can achieve superior efficiency, quality, innovation, and customer responsiveness, leading to a competitive advantage. This study based on the principles, experience, research, and engagement in corporate level strategies. This remarkable research of training management is filled with common sense lessons about learning the truth and teaching the principles of great service. Managers, through their choices related to business strategies, can build resources that enhance a company’s distinctive competencies. Distinctive competencies will shape the company strategies. To achieve superior responsiveness to customers, a manager must give customer what they want, which can be attained by: training employees to think like customers and help a company lower its costs, differentiate its product, and achieve superior innovation. The purpose of this article is to achieve the projected management performance level; the company needs to formulate well-structured and formulated business objectives that would involve the operational, financial and human resource aspects of business management.

Keywords: Business Strategy, Organizational Behavior, Vision, Responsiveness to Customers, Management Performance, Quality Management, and Communication Skills.

Human resource management is an important function in every organization. It is the driving force which provides a foundation for successful business practices in companies. There are many key functional areas of human resources management which contributes to the overall performance of an organization. The federal equal employment opportunity laws influence fair employment practices which also contribute to the success of many organizations. Organizations frequently experience changes and must be flexible in order to adapt to specific trends which affect diversity, age and skill deficiencies of their employees.

In today’s economy most organizations are moving away from the traditional workplace. According to my research the new ways of working most organizations are formalizing themselves to an alternative workplace. With trends in the workplace employers and employees both are benefiting in many ways. In an organization employees should be able to adjust to the changes that are coming about day to day and in the near future. Organizations are now moving to designing jobs that are motivating their employees.

Corporations and individuals are faced with difficult challenges and choices every day. In this global economy, it is important to not only follow a set of rules, but maintain a set of values with high-integrity behavior. Organization’s need good values to link their mission and define their company’s culture. These values can be translated by behavior which can be observed, communicated, taught, measured, and rewarded. An organization that understands the benefits of values linked tightly to a mission will be able to transmit those values to their employees and help to create a competitive advantage.
Many companies realize the importance of providing high-quality products and services to their consumer base (Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, 2014); if companies are unable to adhere to these standards, they will experience difficulty in many aspects of managing their business. For this reason, and to affect high sales levels to their consumer base many companies have turned to a form of total quality management (TQM). This particular style of holistic management represents the continuous, company-wide effort to improve the ways people, machines and systems accomplish work (Noe, et. al., 2014).

Two trends that affect the way companies do business include globalization and off-shore competition. These external factors are forcing management to institute new methods for improving business and manufacturing functions (Duchessi, Schaninger, & Hobbs, 1989). Implementing a materials resource planning (MRP) system is just one of the ways companies are implementing and practicing TQM initiatives as well as addressing the external factors that influence the way business is conducted.

The implementation of a MRP system requires significant understanding of work flow in organizations as well as the human resource (HR) planning process and can best be approached from a total quality management (TQM) perspective; this particular approach is highly practical since it has entrenched and extremely effective methods and processes that are designed to meet the needs of both external and internal customers (Noe, et. al., 2014). “To promote quality, organizations need an environment that supports innovation, creativity, and risk-taking to meet customer demands” (Noe, et. al., 2014). The best way to implement a MRP is using an action plan identified in 1982 by Mehra and Reid and specifies six key areas of impact: Organization, purchasing, inventory function, forecasting, scheduling, and engineering change.

**Organizational Structure**

One of the key areas carefully analyzed was the organizational structure, specifically the structure related to staffing or human resource management. According to the authors, successful implementation of a MRP requires review of not just expertise of the existing staff, but also the organizational structure and staffing changes that will be necessary in light of the implementation of the new system. Coupled with the key areas identified by Mehta & Reid (1982) above, three human resource functions likely to be affected by the implementation of a MRP include human resource planning, recruiting and training and development.

HR managers have to be fully aware of the needs of the organization as well as both external and internal factors that affect the workforce. In order to effectively recruit a highly skilled workforce, HR managers have to be vigilant about learning about and understanding the needs of their organization and the organization’s people. The implementation of a new technological aspect of management will bring with it the need to learn and understand how the system works and how the system will make work simpler and more productive, from all management aspects. This is why training and development is one the key function areas of HR management that will contribute to the successful implementation of a MRP system.

“From the day cavemen used the first chisel, technology has had an enormous impact on the nature of work” (O’Toole & Lawler, 2007) and is just one of the trends driving organizations to change
the way they do business and thus change the way human capital is managed. “The TQM system …influences the nature of work…a method designed to facilitate employee problem-solving related to the development and implementation of the quality processes” (p. 51). Two ways in which the HR Manager can help the organization carry out these changes successfully include the ability to conduct an operational analysis and encourage total quality management. Conducting an Operational Analysis should include surveys of employees as well as customers. This will determine whether the implementation has been successful in meeting consumer demand; a survey of employees can determine whether they are confident in their abilities related to the MRP system and whether they are motivated to continue using the system.

Total Quality Management

Encouraging Total Quality Management (TQM) is especially useful in performance measurement (Noe, et. al., p. 241). This includes training and development, particularly with managers of line staff so that energy levels are maintained and employees not only feel motivated to do the work they’ve been tasked with, but also to encourage connection to the work that has to be done. Setting clear expectations and ensuring people feel recognized when they uphold high standards is one of the simplest ways to positively influence employee behavior (Gostick & Elton, 2012).

As early as 1984, it was determined that the nature of management commitment in the company and the implementation process used primarily distinguished success from failure in implementing MRP systems; “MRP is a concept of management which must focus on the need to change the way decisions are made and the resulting manufacturing philosophy (Anderson & Schroeder, 1984). Likewise, Cox and Clark assert that one reason the implementation of MRP systems have failed across specific industries is because companies have not acknowledged a transition to an automated system requires a complete change in organization procedures, discipline and focus (1984). Perhaps this is the reason why HR managers have to remain knowledgeable of workforce trends and improve or enhance their skill set as needed. Three human resource management skills that would be especially important for success in leveraging the new MRP system (in a high performance work system) include research, planning and prioritizing tasks, and communication skills.

Organizational Change: Communication Skill

The ability to plan and prioritize tasks is especially important, particularly when attempting to implement organizational change. People are resistant to change, especially if they do not understand the reason for the change and how the change benefits their role within the organizational structure. The common misconceptions is that technological implementations result in downsizing. The implementation of the MRP system is primarily to increase the efficiency with
which small orders are placed. By focusing on small orders, the company can effectively learn how to manage larger orders, thereby stimulating significant increase in sales.

Communication skills, including negotiation skills are essential to informing the organization’s human capital about how and why a MRP system is to be used. Again, it is the nature of people to be resistant to change, especially if they do not understand the reason for the change. Proactively, it should be the nature of human resource managers to effectively communicate the need for the change, involve key aspects of the organization’s management in the decision-making process, and inform all users of the system on how to effectively use the system for their particular needs.

This communication skill does not limit itself to the verbal form, but also expands to written and electronic forms of communication. The change should be openly communicated to the management team and employees through multiple channels including memos, emails, posting on the company’s intranet and during daily meetings. This will provide the management team and employees the opportunity to ask questions through different channels, depending on which method they feel most comfortable.

Complex problem solving is a vital skill for a human resource professional to process during a change process, such as implementing a materials resource planning system, because it will assist in overcoming obstacles that may hinder a successful change. In order to guarantee organizational effectiveness, the company’s human resource strategy must align and work together with its business strategy.

The organization may face a limited labor market depending on location and the increased need for employees. This limited labor market could be due to an inadequate number of unskilled workers that are in the location near the manufacturing company. The organization can provide additional training to these potential employees who lack the technical skills needed to perform the job; however, this would create an additional factor related to the extra cost involved.

As a result of the planned growth of the organization, the human resource department will need to develop advanced training for new employees who may not possess the technical skills needed to perform the job required. This is because the labor market in the area near the manufacturing company may be limited; therefore, the organization may need to hire employees who do not possess all of the desired skills needed to successfully perform their job.

Imagine that you are the HR manager for a retail store. Your store sells clothing, shoes, handbags, linens, etc. The company recently had its worst quarter, and you want to improve employee performance through sales of the merchandise and through offering excellent customer service. The employees are less motivated, due to the recent negative media attention the company has been getting about its earnings. You want to implement a new performance management system, modify the employees’ current behavior, and link compensation directly to performance.

There are employees that believe that reward systems in general and incentive systems in particular influence performance. In some recent studies it was noted that many workers prefer that pay be linked to performance, reinforcing the motivation to use such reward systems. When
pay is contingent on performance, individual and group performance are consistently higher than when this contingency is not present.

**Job Description**

To create a retail sales associate job description there are many elements needed. First is the location for the job. A Retail Sales Associate works in a retail store, assisting customers in the selection of products. This position can be found at any retail outlet from chain stores to boutique stores and across a large variety of products. In most job descriptions, the next element normally details the salary or hourly rate for this position.

As the HR manager, there will be changes in these salary requirements to include pay for performance measures that will be detailed further in this paper. A Retail Sales Associate hourly and overtime rates are in the range of $8 to $12 and $12 to $18 respectively. Annual salaries usually are between $15,000 and $30,000 for employees that high performers and work more than 32 hours per week. All retail sales associates report to a department manager, who is responsible for establishing their weekly schedule as well as conducting performance based evaluations.

Next are the specific job duties and knowledge needed to perform the job of a retail sales associate? General duties include greeting customers at the store and offering them assistance, Judging whether a customer prefers to be waited on or to shop by themselves, Guiding customers who know what they want to correct section of the store or make suggestions to customers who are not completely sure what they want from the store, Offer suggestions on color, sizes, etc. depending on the customer’s requirements and requests, and provide information on the store’s products, including any warranties and return policy on merchandise sold.

A retail sales associate should also be able to receive cash and credit card payments and bag the products and goods sold. There is also specific knowledge needed to be a retail sales associate, those include knowledge of the particular products that they are selling and an interest/initiative to learn more about it and similar products offered by our competitors, an affection for interacting with a variety of people, a patient and professional manner to assist customers throughout the entire process of purchasing products, the ability to speak another language is an added bonus, and a working knowledge of computers and ability to work with most billing systems (Jean M. Phillips, 2009).

Another important element of the job description for a retail sales associate is the educational requirements. Most in this position require at least a high school diploma or general educational equivalent like a GED. As the HR manager, we are adding the additional element of 1-2 years’ experience working in this area.

The last element of the job description for a retail sales associate is the phrase “other duties as assigned.” This statement will accommodate any special projects or changes in the current job duties.

In the creation of the organizational behavior modification (OBM) plan, we have to define the key behaviors that are necessary for job performance.
The first key behavior is a willingness to learn. All of the products that we sell will not be familiar to a retail sales associate. However, we want them to have a willingness to learn about the product and how we compare to our competitor. Another key behavior is the ability to work well with others. As noted in the abstract, we are suffering some significant losses and we must all work as a team in order to overcome the deficits. No one individual will help us get there; it will take all sales associates, supervisors, and managers to help us meet this goal. The last key behavior needed to do this job as a retail sales associate is motivation. Motivation is essential because the associate must see the need for new skills and understand how they can be successful in this job. (Fisher, Schoenfeldt, & Shaw, 2006).

There are many ways that an HR manager can measure whether the prospective retail sales associates exhibit the key job performance behaviors we just discussed. The first way is by observation from supervisors and managers. The supervisors and managers will have direct contact with the associate to determine if they have a willingness to learn, work well with others and have the motivation to perform this job in accordance with organization/company standards. Another method of measuring the key job performance behaviors is guest surveys. Each guest will be given a survey on the receipt to rate the performance of the sales associate that either provided assistance or processed their payment when they purchased goods from the stores. These results will be shared with the sales associates during a performance evaluation or depending on the severity of the comments, immediately.

We must establish the new performance standards and inform our employees in a manner that sparks interest and enthusiasm. One way to inform the employees is by sparking a competition between departments. This will be shared in a company meeting prior to opening of the store. Each department will have a product of the week that has traditionally been a low selling item, they will earn a point and the department that earns the most, earns prizes and additional discounts off goods and services at the store. Another way to inform them is during their evaluations with managers and supervisors. Each retail associate will receive a sales goal for the week. Those associates that have higher sales will earn more hours on the schedule for that week. As a consequence, those who have lower sales will not be scheduled for as many hours on the schedule and if no progress is made, will eventually be terminated. We cannot afford to continue have low sales from our associates.

**Performance Evaluations**

The first method of providing feedback to employees is performance evaluations. Many organizations wait until 90 days has passed before completing an initial evaluation. Since we are a crucial time, we must change this to a review after training has been completed, and every 30 days until the 90 days have been achieved. As the HR manager, there will be many that will not exhibit these key behaviors after training. It is better that we terminate the employment of those associates at this point than continue with them and cost the store more losses in revenue. Once a successful 90 days has been achieved, performance will be measured semi-annually unless behaviors or lack of sales warrant immediate attention. (Milkovich & Newman, 2008)
Another method of providing feedback to employees is to have a formal meeting with the sales associate, their direct supervisor and the HR manager will act as a mediator. This will allow the employee to get direct feedback from their supervisor and also understand that there are consequences to poor behavior and the HR manager can ensure that all appropriate information is given during this meeting.

Leaders should always reinforce positive behaviors from its employees. Direct supervisors should provide immediate praise when an employee is exhibiting a behavior that leads to great sales. One method is by attaching a bonus to a particular item that is sold. This will allow the leaders of the organization to give a bonus to employees such as earning one dollar for each unit or product sold and this allows the employee to get a bonus in their pay.

A leader could also reinforce the positive behaviors by allowing an employee more hours on the schedule or being able to have an extended break time or lunch paid for by the store. As noted in an interview with a former store manager for a major department store, positive reinforcement can also be given by gathering all associates for a group meeting and making a public acknowledgement of the positive behaviors and also giving them a pin signifying that they exhibit this behavior (Preston MBA, 2014).

It has been noted that the first step in using the OBM approach, is the organization’s objectives have to identify from the strategic plan of the company. Each successively lower level in the organizational hierarchy is charged with identifying work objectives that will support the attainment of organizational goals (Milkovich & Newman, 2008).

There are benefits that the organization will gain by using the OBM approach. OBM can encourage innovation and creativity because the employees are free to determine how they will meet their goals. Such a process can be valuable in gaining the commitment of employees because they are actively involved in setting goals.

The organization will also empower employees because they have a degree of latitude in deciding how to meet their goals. Management by objective can lead to performance improvement, predominantly if goals are specific, moderately difficult and accepted by the employees and if the procedure has top management commitment (Fisher, Schoenfeldt, & Shaw, 2006).

**Pay For Performance Plans**

Although some pay for performance plans can be problematic, there are some reasons to align pay to performance. The first reason is to provoke motivation in the employees or sales associates. The employee should feel that he or she can influence the results of their performance and control the performance that the organization is measuring (Fisher, Schoenfeldt, & Shaw, 2006). Another reason to align pay to performance is to reduce costs.

Many organizations maintain employees who are low performing and not reaching established sales goals. Some employees need the motivation or added incentive to perform well and managers need the assurance of knowing that the payout to the employee was truly earned.
If the store wants to make a profit, aligning pay to performance of its sales associates can be an effective tool.

The HR department has the added task of ensuring that all current sales associates meet the job descriptions and new performance management goals. Success may be made difficult by the nature of the task ahead for the organization. However, using the performance management objectives, ensuring the employees truly earn the payout received, could save the store from closing and/or having massive layoffs.

**Successful Business Practices**

Human resource management is an important function in every organization. It is the driving force which provides a foundation for successful business practices in companies. There are many key functional areas of human resources management which contributes to the overall performance of an organization.

The federal equal employment opportunity laws influence fair employment practices which also contribute to the success of many organizations. Organizations frequently experience changes and must be flexible in order to adapt to specific trends which affect diversity, age and skill deficiencies of their employees. In today’s economy most organizations are moving away from the traditional workplace.

According to this study the new ways of working most organizations are formalizing themselves to an alternative workplace. With trends in the workplace employers and employees both are benefiting in many ways. In an organization employees should be able to adjust to the changes that are coming about day to day and in the near future. Organizations are now moving to designing jobs that are motivating their employees.

In planning employee job descriptions, Human Resources Management (HRM) evaluates the needs of the business immediately and in long-term strategic planning. Along with executive leadership, HRM develops positions that increase productivity and functionality. For example, in consideration for a management position, should the expectation be that the newly hired manager be responsible for administrative as well as leadership functions? Or would it be more beneficial to the business to incorporate an administrative assistant position as well? An administrative position would increase productivity and functionality for the newly hired manager.

According to Becker & Grove (2011), a socially responsible human resource management hires, develops, and manage employees while valuing them as investments. Research has shown that hiring employees on the basis of cognitive ability results in employees who more rapidly acquire job knowledge and have higher job performance (Becker & Grove, 2011). Hiring and retaining knowledge workers on the basis of ability to learn and contribution has a higher payoff than solely based upon labor costs (Becker & Grove, 2011).

In reality, HRM may not be to recruit and select the “best and the brightest” for its entire workforce. Recruitment and selection of employees has to be a balance between hiring those with high performance skills at the onset and those that have high potential, whether in cognition and skill to be beneficial to the company over time.
Practice has proven that the success of an organization lies in its people (Anca-Ioana, 2013). Employees represent capacity for development and growth (Becker & Grove, 2011). An organization's objectives can be met only if it has the necessary human resources and competencies (Anca-Ioana, 2013). Employees that are well trained and developed increase the intellectual and proprietary value of the company (Becker & Grove, 2011). Many new employees come equipped with most of the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to start work while others require extensive training before they are ready to make a significant contribution to the organization (Massey & Campbell, 2013). Training is a continual strategic process that works increases competences and deters performance problems for the organization (Massey & Campbell, 2013).

Providing Constructive Feedback

Human resource management plays a critical role in shaping people and their activities to achieve maximum performance (Anca-Ioana, 2013). One goal of human resource management should be providing constructive feedback that motivates employees to want their organization as well as developing the type of organization that the employees want in order to achieve its goals (Anca-Ioana, 2013). HRM works with executive leadership to ensure that employees who continue on the job are productively and safely performing their job responsibilities as well as contributing to the overall growth of the company.

Management of employee performance is usually assessed through a standardized, as created by the company, performance review form which is completed by the employee’s direct supervisor and other designated stakeholders. Based upon the result of the evaluation, the executive leadership and HRM make a decision as to whether to continue to invest in the employee or “cut their losses” for the good of the company.

HRM works with executive leadership to determine the most competitive, and yet budget conscious, compensation and benefits for each position. The employee expects that the value of the work of the position is demonstrated through the amount of compensation offered. It has been found that cost-of-living increases, promotion possibilities, and having the HR manager evaluate job applicants lead to higher retention rates (Massey & Campbell, 2013). In this economy, health care benefits are valued equally, if not higher, than monetary compensation. HRM management has to consider the cost of rising healthcare costs, as well, in compensating employees.

According to Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart & Wright, (2014), human resource management includes “the policies, practices and systems that influence employees’ behavior, attitudes, and performance” (p.3). Human resource departments have many functional areas that attribute to the success of an organization such as job design, recruiting and selection, training and development, managing performance, compensation and benefits, employee relations and labor laws. All of these functions overlap within one another to move the business forward and create an environment of profit.
Recruiting and Selection

Job design focuses on what a job entails and the requirements needed to complete a job. Organizations must set clear expectations on what a job is about so that the additional functions of human resource management can follow such as recruiting and selection. Recruiting and selection can begin after a job has been established. This function involves seeking applicants and identifying applicants based on certain skills, knowledge, and abilities (Noe et al., 2014). For example, a human resource department will post their position to bring in resumes and then select people to interview.

Organizations are seeking to obtain the right candidate that meets certain criteria and it is necessary to go through the recruiting and selection process. Similarly, training and development is important once a candidate has obtained a position in an organization.

This function focuses on strengthening the knowledge and skills of employees so that they can fully integrate into the organization. For instance, many employers have their employees go through compliance and systems trainings as things change. In addition, organizations integrate development in order to “improve employees’ ability to meet the challenges of a variety of new or existing jobs, including the client and customer demands of those jobs” (Noe et al., 2014, p. 8). Nevertheless, performance management is also important to management favorable and unfavorable behaviors. Favorable behaviors typically yield a positive result for employees such as bonuses, increases, and promotions. Unfavorable behaviors typically yield corrective action procedures. These are both measured through job appraisals and evaluations.

Compensation and Benefits

The human resource department is necessary in order to support managers through delivering a fair and concise message on performance. Compensation and benefits is easily equated to a major function of human resource management. Typically when an employee has questions about their compensation or benefits, the function of human resource management is immediately leveraged. Human resources professionals are involved with establishing the proper compensation structure and benefit packages for employees. These professionals also must do research to ensure they are fair and equitable in the pay scales available for certain positions. Employee relations inside an organization include everything involved with creating a positive work environment which empowers employees to reach out to their human resource department for assistance.

This is subject to but not limited to personnel policies and fostering a positive work environment. Human resource management plays an important role in being the mediator for these matters. Labor laws are important for all organizations to maintain in order to avoid legal action. These laws oversee issues of safety, health and employment rights. For example, there are many federal laws that have been enacted to protect employees in the workplace from anti-discrimination, sexual harassment and work hazards.
All of these functions play a critical role in the realm of human resource management. Human resource management is responsible for many activities of an organization. Thus, effective human resource management is the start for an organization to have a strong advantage over their industry competitors.

**Equal Employment Opportunity**

Equal employment opportunity is the federal government’s approach to providing individuals with an equal chance for employment regardless of their race, religion, sex, age, national origin, sex and color. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was established from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and signed into law in 1964 by President Johnson (Noe et al., 2014).

Federal equal employment opportunity laws were established to protect employees in the workplace and provide fair practices. Civil Rights Act of 1991 (CRA 1991) was an amendment to multiple statues enforced by the EEOC. A major change of the CRA 1991 was the allowance of compensatory and punitive damages which includes elements of monetary losses and pain and suffering over and above the actual losses.

The purpose of awarding these damages is to discourage repeat offenders in other organizations. Organization handbook provides the basic source of human resource information for the company. It describes all of the key associate policies, procedures and guidelines for U.S. associates. Within the firm handbook, there is a section which focuses on the values and commitment to diversity within the organization.

The company states that workplace diversity contributes to the firm’s reputation to achieve competitive advantage. There is also an insert that states all associates are expect to comply with the spirit and intent of the Equal Employment Opportunity Policy and that there is fair treatment of all associates and applicants for employments without regard to race, religion, sex, age, national origin, marital status, genetic information or any other classification protected by law.

**American with Disabilities**

American with Disabilities Act (ADA) was created to protect employees from being discriminated based on a disability. The ADA has worked to ensure fair practices by first defining what is considered a disability. Under the ADA act, a disability is defined “as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of having such an impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment” (Noe et al, 2014, p.69). Within the guidelines of this definition, the ADA further details each part of the definition in order to provide transparency on what each item means.

The ADA also mandates employers to provide reasonable accommodations. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 requires employers to provide equal pay for equal work in an organization. Employees would need to prove unequal pay by showing that the effort, responsibility and skills of the job and the other person are all not equal (Himmelberg, 1996). A discrepancy in these guidelines would allow legal recourse for an employee based on the Act.
The burden of proof on these cases falls in the hand of the plaintiff and sometimes it may be difficult to incriminate an organization if there are fair practices. Typically, women are discriminated against and incur a lower salary than their men counterparts. Back in the late nineties, many U.S. women made around 85-95 cents on the dollar compared to men (Himmelberg, 1996). Organization focuses on a pay philosophy that ensures eternal market competitiveness, internal equity and a link between pay and performance. The company frequently participates in numerous salary surveys and compensation roundtables to gather market data. There are annual merit increases and bonus award programs awarded based on performance.

The company has frequently sought out employee feedback by doing associate surveys and asking about what employees want in regards to their compensation structure. For example, there was need for more transparency on grade levels and ranges and as a result most company now has this information posted on the intranet website. The website provides minimum, midpoint and maximum salary ranges for a given grade level. In conclusion, employees have a right to work in their organizations with fairness and freedom from improper treatment. These laws provide a baseline on what rights employees have to pursue their potential for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Other the other hand, employers needs to protect themselves from lawsuits and negative publicity due to unfair treatment. It’s also important that they are able to operate in a free market while still being fair to their human capital which is their employees.

The labor workforce in the United States

The labor workforce in the United States is constantly changing. Due to these changes, organizations must adapt to the trends that affect their labor force. One major trend that is affecting the workforce is the aging workforce. According to Noe et al. (2014), the older population is currently not in a hurry to retire while the younger generation is starting in the workforce. Within my organization, we have seen an influx of college graduates applying for careers. One thing that the organization has done to bridge the gap in the age differences is offering a generational differences training which discusses the differences between Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennial.

This training has bridged the gap in allowing each generation to understand what motivates one another. Most organization has also revamped health benefits which now mandate associates to get biometric screenings to lower healthcare costs. In addition, there are healthy incentives such as reduced pedometers, gym memberships and webinars on healthy living. All of these incentives are to promote a more healthy work environment for associates. This positively impacts employees by fostering a healthy worker who can be productive at work despite getting older. The next major trend affecting organizations is diversity.

This organization has conducted a lot of diversity roundtable discussions specifically with women in the workplace. This roundtable discussion involved women coming together to discuss trends and challenges faced in the workplace. Every year, there is also a diversity and inclusion web-based training that talks about how the company is building a brand around diversity and inclusion. It offers role plays on how to work with others and how to lead conversations. Another major trend is skills deficiencies in the workplace.
Continuous Learning

At most organizations, we will foster an environment of continuous learning. There is a corporate learning and development department whose sole purpose is to develop continuing education for the organization. There are management workshops, delivering and receiving feedback classes and consultative coaching trainings.

We also utilize a web-based learning system in which associates frequently complete self-study programs to stay abreast of changes. For example, every year associates are required to complete an annual Code of Ethics training. Associates who have financial licenses are also required to do continuing education trainings which are required by the Securities and Exchange Commission. A large amount of companies is very aware of the trends that are impacting the labor force and they have continued to foster growth and changes to keep up with the need. They have positioned themselves by having a department that ensures skill deficiencies are avoided.

According to Halzack (2013), 88 percent of workers in the Washington area region said that workplace flexibility was important to them. Flexibility with work-life balance seems to be important with Americans today so that they can spend time with their families. The majority organization stresses the importance of work-life balance and they provide a work environment to do so. It’s not just indicated in benefits and time away from work but it is also included with flexible work schedules and telecommuting.

The largest part of the organization is made up of many departments such as call centers, technical support, and back office processing departments. Many of the positions in these roles do not operate on a standard eight-to-five shift. There are night shifts which range from 12pm – 9am as well as four ten-hour work days including working on Saturdays and Sundays.

The ability to offer flexible work schedules seems to work with individuals who have other priorities that cannot fit into the typical eight-to-shift. Many employers feel that accommodating their employees allows them to be competitive from a talent perspective and retain strong employees (Halzack, 2013). Telecommuting has also been popular nearly all organizations.

The company has been able to deliver this effectively to their employees by providing the software and email applications necessary to work from home. The technical support department is also very helpful in making the transition easy for associates. It’s also helpful when associates cannot make it to the office or they are working part-time. In conclusion, flexible work conditions make it easier for employees to enjoy their work.
References


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