

THE IDOL FACTORY Part 2

OVERVIEW:

Each of us wrestles with our own personal idols, but idolatry affects organizations and entire industries. In this session, you'll explore common workplace idols, at both the individual and institutional level. This session is heavily discussion oriented as the goal is to identify sins unique to group members' workplaces and industries.

DISCUSS:

Recap: An idol absorbs our hearts and minds more than God. It's anything that we turn to looking for what only God can give (meaning, value, significance, etc.)

Individual Idols

The workplace is one area of life where idolatry flourishes. Loving our work is a good thing, but when it becomes the **SOURCE** of our identity, hope, or purpose it becomes an idol. A clear sign that work has become an idol: overwork.

“Moritz Erhardt, a healthy and athletic 21-year-old intern at Bank of America Merrill Lynch in London, collapsed and died in his shower on August 15. Described as the "superstar" of the internship program, he regularly left the office at 5 a.m. only to go to his apartment to take a shower and change his clothes before returning to work. In the days leading up to his death, Erhardt pulled eight all-nighters in a two-week period. The cause of death is believed to be exhaustion-induced epileptic seizure.”ⁱ

- Consider your life. What attitudes, emotions, or actions reveal that you've allowed work to become an idol? (i.e. anxiety, snapping at family members, unbalanced schedule)

Institutional Idols:

In addition to the idols that are unique to each individual, organizations—and even entire industries—can be prone to patterns of idolatry. Identifying these patterns is the first step in engaging idols with the hope of the gospel.

At the institutional level idolatry might mean worshipping a company's brand or reputation, looking to a certain ideology to solve life's problems, or idealizing a certain of lifestyle. Read the following quote from Neil Postman's book *The End of Education*, in which the author argues technology has become an idol for some educators:

“As the discussion proceeds, important distinctions are made among different meanings of “belief,” but as some point it becomes far from asinine to speak of the god of Technology—in the sense that people believe technology works, that they rely on it, that it makes promises, that they are bereft when denied access to it, that they are delighted when that are in its presence, that for most people it works in mysterious ways, that they condemn people who speak against it, that they stand in awe of it, and that, in the born-again mode, they will alter their lifestyles, their schedules, their habits and their relationships to accommodate it. If this is not a form of religious belief, what is?”ⁱⁱ

- How does Postman describe this form of idolatry? How (if ever) have you seen similar attitudes in your workplace or field?

Common Workplace Idols and How to Identify Them:

- **Reputation:** What qualifications or achievements do people strive for to demonstrate their importance? By what metrics do people measure themselves (# of followers, what people say about you, strength of “brand”)?
- **Significance** – What do people have to achieve to feel good about themselves (role, job title, status symbol)? Where do people turn to find hope when things go badly? Complete this sentence: I (or we) matter because _____...
- **Power or Influence** – What indicates that a person or organization has “arrived”?
- **Control** – What are your colleagues’ or company’s greatest fears? What do people do to demonstrate control of a situation? What happens when people lose control?
- **Security** – Where do people find confidence? What makes them feel safe? What’s the biggest threat to their status, identity, or well-being?
- **Competency** – Valuing knowledge or perfection. How do people respond when their competency is threatened?
- **Wealth** – What are prominent status symbols in your industry? What will people sacrifice to achieve financial security?
- **Ideology** – What do people in your field believe is the solution to your industry’s most pressing problems? Think practically—how does idolizing a specific worldview play out in the workplace?

As a group, pick two or three of the idols from this list and evaluate them using the questions below:

- How do you see this form of idolatry expressed in your organization or industry?
- What are the consequences of this form of idolatry?

- How does it affect *your* life? How are you tempted to adopt this way of thinking/acting?
- How does the gospel message differ than the message offered by this idol?

To prepare for next session:

Ask group members to continue looking for the idols present in their workplace. Start the next session by discussing the group's observations.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

“Overcoming the Idol of Insecurity” by Greg Ayers, The Institute for Faith, Work and Economics
<https://tifwe.org/overcoming-the-idol-of-insecurity/>

“Work Reveals Our Idols” blog by Christopher Page
<https://inaspaciousplace.wordpress.com/2014/06/25/work-reveals-our-idols/>

ⁱ Bethany Jenkins. “How to Humanize the Workplace”, *The Gospel Coalition* March 14, 2014.

ⁱⁱ Neil Postman. *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, p 38