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Joanna Meyer:

You're listening to the Faith & Work Podcast, where we explore what it means to serve God, neighbor, and society through our daily work.

Welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast. I'm Joanna Meyer, Denver Institute's Director of Public Engagement, and I'm here with our CEO, Ross Chapman today. Hi, Ross.

Ross Chapman:

Hey. It is great to be here. This is going to be really a special episode, I think.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. I'm excited about it. Today we're talking about the idea of approaching our work with the perspective of craft. And for our listeners, I want you to think about a time when you had work that you just treated like a job. Maybe it's one of those jobs you might have had in high school or maybe during your college years, and you were doing it really only for the paycheck. Maybe you were committed to doing a decent job at work, but you didn't have a deeper commitment to what you were doing or a vision of how excellence could look in that work.

And now, I want you to think about a work that you may have approached with the idea of it being a craft. I love what the sociologist Richard Sennett says in his book, *The Craftsman*. He said, "Craft is an enduring human impulse to do a job well for its own sake." That's our dedication to good work for a deeper value that you bring to it.

And I think any job really can have that kind of philosophy to it if we understand the right context and can think more deeply about what Godly excellence looks like in that work; which is why we're talking to our guest today, Dave Hataj, the President of Edgerton Gear. He embodies this. I would put him on my short list of people that are heroes of the Faith & Work movement because of the incredible work that he does. Ross, will you tell us a little bit about Dave?

Ross Chapman:

Sure. I'd love to welcome Dave here. Let me just introduce him. His bio is, he's been for 40 years with his family business, Edgerton Gear, which is a precision machine shop that combines old world craftsmanship with new world technology. He serves as the company's President and has grown the



business to become an industry leader and respected member of the American Gear Manufacturers Association.

Along the way, he earned a Doctorate in Transformational Leadership with a focus in marketplace theology. And he has also written a book called *Good Work: How Blue Collar Business Can Change Lives, Communities, and the World*. And he is also founded Craftsman with Character, which is a nonprofit that mentors students considering careers in skilled trades.

So Dave, you're a busy man. You've done some awesome stuff, and we just want to say welcome to the Faith & Work Podcast.

Dave Hataj:

Thanks for having me, Ross and Joanna. It's great to be here.

Ross Chapman:

So those of us who aren't really familiar with gear making, can you just tell us a little bit more of what does that mean your company does?

Dave Hataj:

Okay. So first of all, I've just got to start off by saying that modern civilization would not exist without gears. And I can say that very confidently, because everything that you have, everything that you wear, anything in the grocery store, anything you drive, literally everything in the world is made with the assistance of gears.

So our company is a custom gear manufacturer. We make gears. Typically, people think of Spacely Sprockets, for those of us who are older if you remember the Jetsons, little sprockets with teeth. But there's a lot more to it than that. There's sprockets, gears, pulleys, anything with teeth that helps drive power transmission. We make gears from a half inch in diameter all the way up to five feet in diameter, gears that help make cardboard boxes, help make vegetables canning equipment. Literally, every aluminum can in the world is made with the assistance of gears. Probably 90% of the cans in the world are made with our assistance, of our gears. I could go on and on. I've got to travel a little bit. And I have fun going into a foreign country, and I can literally go down any grocery store aisle and find a product that's been made with the assistance of our gears.

Ross Chapman:

Wow. Really-



Dave Hataj:

Exciting, right?

Joanna Meyer:

That's amazing.

Ross Chapman:

Well, exciting and comprehensive. When I asked the question, I wasn't sure what the answer was going to be. And now I feel like, well, why have I never thought of this? That's incredible.

Dave Hataj:

Most people haven't, so don't feel bad.

Joanna Meyer:

Yeah. We often talk about your work mattering. And we can say yes, your work definitely does matter in our daily lives.

Dave Hataj:

I often say to our students, I say, "Imagine the world without gears. What would civilization look like?" And last week, the kids said, "We'd all be sitting around a fire, half naked, killing things with sticks and wearing animals skins or palm leaves." I said, "You're not wrong."

Ross Chapman:

Wow.

Joanna Meyer:

And crazy to think that even though the technology has changed, the fundamental mechanism of a gear hasn't.

Dave Hataj:

Exactly. In fact, you can trace it all the way back to a... What's it? It's a leaf hopper that God created that actually has a mechanism to jump with teeth in its hips to make it explode.



Ross Chapman:

Wow.

Dave Hataj:

Yeah, yeah. So God was the original creator of gears.

Ross Chapman:

Oh, my gosh.

Dave Hataj:

Yeah.

Ross Chapman:

Wow.

Joanna Meyer:

That's awesome.

Ross Chapman:

That's great. I think we might be able to end this show right now. This is mind-blowing.

Dave Hataj:

You get me wound up and we could talk about gears for days. So I'll try to restrain myself.

Joanna Meyer:

Dave, one thing I love about your story is that you were born into this work as the son of a gear maker.

Dave Hataj:

Yeah. Right.

Joanna Meyer:

But the road to where you are today has not been an easy one. Would you tell us a little bit about the spiritual and the professional journey that led you to your leadership today?



Dave Hataj:

Yeah. I'm definitely a child of a blue collar world. And there's other facets of it as well. In manufacturing and the trades, there's an incredibly high level of addiction issues, whether it's alcohol or drugs or whatever. And so, on the spiritual side, I go back to a grandfather who literally died on the streets of Chicago as a homeless person. And on the professional side, there's only been one person in both sides of my family that I can recall that have gone to college or university. So I was the second. And so, the expectation growing up in the business was that I would follow in my father's footsteps. I worked in the shop since age five. Graduated high school, I had no idea what to do with my life. And so, the expectation is just you become a journeyman machinist, you become a gear maker.

So along with that though, with my dad being a fairly angry atheist and my mother being a very devout believer, I was caught in this world that really conflicted. And I didn't know as a teenager which way to follow. I really wanted to please my dad, but I wanted to please my mom, too. So for a while I really walked away from faith and became more like my dad. And I had a pretty radical faith experience, where at age 19 I was suicidal, I was drinking heavily, wrecked a couple of cars. And God just got a hold of me and changed my complete perspective on, "I'm here for a purpose."

And so then, when anybody has this kind of radical conversion experience, we think, "Well, now what do I do with it? And what would God have me do?" So the logical thing that we're told is, "Well, if you're going to go serve God, you go where?" I'm going to put the question back to you two. Where do we go?

Joanna Meyer:

Certainly not making gears.

Ross Chapman:

Go work for a church or a nonprofit.

Dave Hataj:

That's right. Ideally, you should become a youth worker and then become either a pastor or a missionary or a nonprofit or whatever. And so, that's the path I took. I ended up in California with the help of some neat mentors, found myself as a college pastor to college students even though I had never been to university. So that was interesting. I think they hired me as the token hick from Wisconsin who has good stories about my dogs and hunting and fishing. And I guess I have an accent. That's what they said.

But I really had a crazy burnout experience, kind of a faith crisis. I didn't fit in church. I'm a hands-on guy, and I really wasn't qualified or competent to lead a college group at such a young age. So, long story short, I ended up getting my BA from the University of California Irvine in Social Science. I'm not sure what that is to this date, but it was a degree. And then, I ended up at Regent College, again through



some mentors who said, "You need to sort out your faith. What do you believe and why?" And while I was there, I took one of those weird classes that talks about What color is Your Parachute? What's your gifts, talents, experiences, where God's leading you? And at the end of the class, it came back and it literally said, "You are ideally suited to run a small manufacturing family business."

Ross Chapman:

No way.

Dave Hataj:

That's what I said, except I was a little bit more vocal. And I went home to my wife, because Edgerton Gear was the last place I'd ever come back to. Because as I often say, it was the hole in my faith journey, where when I got to California, I got to do some really cool things in inner city LA as a pass-through. We did short-term missions to Tijuana and just a lot of cool things that we've seen in our life. And I could not understand how making gears or coming back to the family business with a quarter barrel of beer in the lunchroom fridge, pornography everywhere. In my spiritual mind, it was the darkest place on the planet. And why would God ever bring me back here? And how is the gospel or the kingdom relevant at all to a blue collar decadent environment?

So God brought me back. We thought we'd come back for maybe two years, five at the most. It turned out, my dad was having some health issues, so help him retire, sell the business, and God would show me what I was really supposed to do with my life. And 30-some years later, I'm still here.

Ross Chapman:

Wow.

Joanna Meyer:

I love it. I have some questions just about the state of manufacturing in general if we could zoom out a little bit, because I looked at some numbers. For example, the National Electrical Contractors Association had shown that the current replacement rate in the industry is dismal. So you'll have 7,000 new electricians joining and 10,000 are currently retiring. And I know that's characteristic across the trade. What do you think is causing the shortage of skilled workers in your field?

Dave Hataj:

Well, it's not just electricians, plumbers, machinists. You can go on and on. I've talked to companies that are terrified in the next three to five years that 60% of their staff are eligible to retire. So this has actually reached a crisis stage nationally, if not globally. I had some people in here from Germany last week and they said it's the same thing in Germany.



So I think there's a number of factors. The first one I referred to is we've lost a generation of young people going in the trades and manufacturing, because approximately 30 years ago, back in the nineties, some educators were taking a hard look at the future of education. And one of them was... He basically said that technical education in the future is going to be lab coats and computers. We're not going to need welding, machining, electricians, woodworkers, all of that. And it was crazy. But this guy had a lot of influence, and high schools, including here in Edgerton, shut down or drastically reduced the size of their tech ed departments. Edgerton used to have five tech ed teachers and went down to one or two.

And so, across the country we've lost a generation of kids that in the past would get introduced to the trades and manufacturing. And not only that, if you took this segment of the population, you no longer give them access to the trades and manufacturing in that really critical period in their high school career, well, a small fraction of those become tech ed teachers, right? So it just makes sense. Well now, not only don't you have the students, you don't have the tech ed teachers. My middle son, when he graduated college to become a tech ed teacher in Wisconsin, there was five students graduating to be tech ed teachers and there was 70 openings just in Wisconsin alone. So that's one factor.

But I think there's two more, and one is the perception of the media and Hollywood that a blue collar job... How many times have you seen a plumber portrayed on TV with his... Without being too vulgar, I think you got the picture. He's bending over and his pants are down a little bit. I don't have to spell it out. But Hollywood, movies, et cetera, they look at blue collar work as "less than." Right?

Ross Chapman:

Mm-hmm.

Dave Hataj:

If you really want to be successful. And I think that's played a huge role for parents having this perception that if you want to be successful, you've got to go to a four-year university. And that's where our schools really, really emphasize it. And we've lost, I think, in our hedonistic, materialistic culture, we've lost just the simple dignity of working with your hands and doing something meaningful. So I think there's a lot of factors, but I think it's a perfect storm that is devastating a lot of industries right now.

Ross Chapman:

Dave, just as a leader who's having to deal with that shortage, we'll talk about your nonprofit that's answering that in a minute, but just what's that on a day-to-day basis, in terms of that overwhelming feeling like, "Is there going to be the workforce here in the future?" And currently, what does that look like? How are you leading through that?



Dave Hataj:

Well, we're fine, we'll get into that in a second, because we started this course called Craftsman with Character because I realized, I think it's about 11 years ago now, that when I look at our other shops and our competitors or just other businesses, we're poaching each other's employees because there's not enough qualified machinists or qualified tradespeople. And I realize a while ago, that's just not going to work. That's not sustainable. So that's where we started this course, Craftsman with Character, of reaching into the high schools and finding what I call the lost shop kids, which is a whole nother topic, but the kids who don't fit in English, social studies, a lot of the classes, history classes, because they're tacit learners. They learn by working with their hands, but our entire educational system is pretty much geared, pardon the pun, but it's geared towards those students who learn through books and theory.

And so, I'm realizing, I was up at the school one day, I looked around and I said, "Oh my gosh. These kids are me 30 some years ago." So as a business owner, I realized the government wasn't going to solve our problem. The schools really didn't know what to do. And so, we had to take a proactive approach and go into the schools and introduce the kids to the world of trades and manufacturing.

Ross Chapman:

Well, yeah. Tell us a little bit more. It sounds like that's kind of the vision behind Craftsman with Character.

Dave Hataj:

Yep.

Ross Chapman:

Tell us, what is that? What does it do, and how does it work?

Dave Hataj:

So if you think about it, the logistics of it is we go in and we create a high school class, which our local school has allowed us to do. And it's actually on the curriculum. So we flip the educational model. Instead of putting kids in a classroom for five days a week, we put them in a class one day a week. Four days a week, they get to job shadow in different businesses, and not only in our businesses but businesses around the community. And just to expose them, first of all, to what's out there as career opportunities. But the one day a week we get them in the classroom, we talk about character development, worldview, soft skills. "What do you think it's going to take for you to be successful?"

And the magic that we stumbled across is that this aging demographic of folks in their fifties and sixties... I was just at a shop last two weeks ago and I walked through a customer's machine shop, and I think I saw one person under the age of 40. And they're terrified. One of them said, "In the next three years,



we're going to lose so much wisdom and experience." But when you get to this age, I just turned 60 this year, and I can say this for my older guys in the shop, there's this sense of legacy that we want to pass on something in the next generation. No matter how screwed up your life may have been and what happened in it, you get to the end, you say, "You know what? I'm passing soon. And have I made the world a better place?" Right?

And I say that because we have an army of people with this aging demographic, the Baby Boomers, who are asking that question. And then, we have all of these kids that don't fit in our traditional educational system who are coming from broken homes. We see the breakdown of society. You see these kids that are lacking a sense of purpose, and they're really lacking healthy relationships.

So I often say it's a issue of supply and demand. We have a huge demand for young people to come into the trades, and we have a supply of people who want to mentor, to pass something on, and we have students who desperately want to be mentored. And somehow, our course basically puts the two parties together and creates an environment where these relationships can take place. And it's just been magical watching these kids be transformed, because maybe in the first time in their life they have somebody who cares for them. And it's not at church, it's not downtown at the bar. In a work environment, where we're given what I often say, everybody has a tremendous need for, and that's a sense of purpose and it's a sense of community or being in a healthy relationship with somebody else, somebody older.

Ross Chapman:

Wow. That's really cool. And I imagine some of the stereotypes that are out there about the kind of work quickly go away once you get in the building and you see how people are doing the work and what that life is.

Dave Hataj:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Ross Chapman:

So there's something that the whole program's kind of based around, this Craftsman's Code. Can you tell us about that? What is the Craftsman's Code?

Dave Hataj:

Well, I wanted something for the kids to remember that they could memorize. And they would have to memorize it because you're really talking to students who have been taken for granted, overlooked. They don't often fit in school. Their self-esteem is pretty shot. And so, I wanted something that they could hold onto that would break through maybe that poor self-esteem or that faulty worldview. And our



society just does such a horrible job of helping kids think that they're the center of the universe. And so, from a biblical perspective, I wanted to kind of take the gospel and contextualize it with a non-religious religious language that would make sense to the kids, that would be truth, that could penetrate their heart and help them to be transformed.

Ross Chapman:

That's great.

Joanna Meyer:

I want to read a few lines from the Craftsman's Code, because it's just beautifully poetic. So humor me. We can hear Dave's poetry at work. One of the tenets of the code is that, "I am not the center of the universe. The trades stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us, who learned and contributed to the body of knowledge. Great accomplishments and advancements have happened and will happen because of a commitment to the collective good of the trade. The world needs me." I love this one. "The world as we know it would not function without my trade. From basic necessities to extravagant luxuries, my trade supports them all. Therefore, I will commit to giving my best efforts." And I could go on. But it's just beautiful. It elevates the purpose of the students' work that you're doing.

Dave Hataj:

Well, Joanna, it's just real fun too, because number one is "I'm not the center of the universe." Number two is "I don't know everything or nearly as much as I think I do." And as a parent, it's one of the best parts of my week when I can get a bunch of teenagers in my lunchroom. And we make them recite this every week. And to make a 16 or 17-year old say with conviction, "I am not the center of the universe." It's a beautiful thing. If anything, just for the comic factor, it's worth it.

Joanna Meyer:

It's so counter-cultural.

Ross Chapman:

That's great.

Joanna Meyer:

I love it. Tell us more about how, you alluded to this, but how your biblical faith, I know you have a degree in theology, how did that really form the tenets of this code?



Dave Hataj:

Well, again, I go back to my growing up years, being in a home where my mother is a great believer, my father is an angry atheist. So I was having to walk this line of how do you contextualize or talk about faith in a non-religious way? Right? And in our culture especially, we throw around these religious terms that polarize people, that really just separate us.

So with these kids being, for the most part, completely unchurched, having no frame of reference for any of this, I really wanted to figure out, what's the heart of the gospel? And number one, it starts with humility.

Ross Chapman:

Ooh.

Dave Hataj:

And so, I wanted to help the kids understand that you cannot understand truth until you understand that you're not the center of the universe. And you don't know everything. And humility is just a huge part of being able to learn and grow. And then, from there, it's just the dignity of the human, of the person. And we build on that as well with every person has unique gifts and talents. And then, trying to expose the lie of money and materialism, and there's something deeper than those things that our society teaches us. So that's where pay is reward for my efforts, but not my main motivation.

So it was a lot of thinking and praying, "Lord, how do I communicate to these kids in a public school, by the way, that we can't talk about religion. How do we communicate the truth of the gospel and help them be prepared to hear who you are in however God's going to break through to them on their journeys?" Does that make sense?

Ross Chapman:

That was great. Yeah, I just think it's a beautiful contextualization for the audience you're trying to engage. And they're going to be challenged with some different viewpoints than they probably hear regularly. We're even just thinking of social media and your camera's always on your face, so you're always the center of the universe. And just to say out loud every week, "I'm not."

Dave Hataj:

Yep.

Ross Chapman:

It's really putting them in a proper view of their relationship to the Creator, which is wonderful. It's great.



Dave Hataj:

Well, and along those lines, Ross, I really believe that when you can put truth out there, you let God do the rest. And we are called to really emulate truth and goodness in whatever capacity. And I think when you get these students and these kids on that journey of being truth seekers, I'm pretty confident I know where they're going to end up.

Jeff Hoffmeyer:

Hi, I'm Jeff Hoffmeyer, Vice President of Advancement here at Denver Institute for Faith & Work. And I'd like to invite you to become a part of our new Monthly Partner Community. Whether it's a monthly commitment of \$25, \$50, or any amount, your generosity will support Denver Institute's ongoing efforts to help men and women love God, their neighbors, and society through their daily work, including this podcast. To say thank you as a Monthly Partner, you'll receive a welcome box. You'll have exclusive access to private digital content, personalized vocational coaching, and discounts for Denver Institute content and experiences. To become a Monthly Partner, simply visit denverinstitute.org/give or see the show notes in today's episode. Thank you in advance for your generosity.

Joanna Meyer:

I'd love to know more about where they're ending up. What has been the lasting fruit of the program, both in individual lives and I'm guessing also for the industries not only at Edgerton Gear, but maybe other shops in town that are the recipients of these students?

Dave Hataj:

Yeah. Oh, boy. That's a big question. I can talk about our shop. Our average age used to be like everybody else, late forties, early fifties. And we've been running the program for over 10 years. Our average age in our shop right now is 29.

Joanna Meyer:

Wow. Is it?

Dave Hataj:

And compared to most companies, it's in the late fifties or even early sixties. So what's really been revolutionary for us is taking these kids... And that ties in, how has it transformed lives? I've got kids who were D students who are absolutely failing. The school didn't know what to do with them. And those are our favorites. Give us the ones that everybody's out of tools with, because a lot of my machinists, we were all in the same boat as teenagers. Nobody knew what to do with us. Everybody said, "Well, when you graduate high school you're done if you're not going to university."



So I have several stories, actually I have more than several, but the two highlighted are two kids that were D students. They just didn't want to go to school. They hated school. And they took our course and they got hooked up with some of these mentors that just cared for them, and we talked about all these truths. And the next semester, they made the Dean's List. They're straight-A students. And the school is going, "What just happened?" And both of them went to tech school, made the Dean's List. One in particular made the Dean's List all four semesters. And now, these young guys are becoming my next generation of leaders.

And we have testimonies of parents who said, "We don't know what happened, but you changed our son's life." And when I say we, it's a collective effort in our company because we have what we call a mentoring culture, that all of us collectively love on these kids, discipline these kids, give them a sense of purpose.

And it's so fun to go throughout our community, because we partner with other businesses through this and we see our kids all over town. And we go, "Wow." One two kids are taking over their dad's business. And when they start the course, like me, they want to get as far away from their dad's business as possible. And we get to share those stories, and it's the most life-giving thing that we've done as a company, not only for ourselves but for these kids.

Ross Chapman:

I was just reflecting when you said earlier you would never want to go back to Edgerton and do the family business because it was so dark.

Dave Hataj:

Yep.

Ross Chapman:

And, "Why as a Christian would I go there?"

Dave Hataj:

Yep.

Ross Chapman:

And obviously, I think it's clear. Well, your story shows why we're supposed to be the light of the world. Jesus asked us to carry that presence into the dark places that He's put us uniquely to be in position to bring light to it. And your story is such a powerful one for that, so I'm just feeling really excited about that and glad people got to hear that a little bit more.



Dave Hataj:

Well, let me bring it down a little bit, Ross.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah, please.

Dave Hataj:

Because this was hard. This was gut-wrenching. Like I said, there's a quarter barrel of beer in our lunchroom. There was pornography everywhere. And I don't feel like I really saw much fruit at least until the 10-year mark.

Ross Chapman:

Wow.

Dave Hataj:

And I would say at the 20-year mark I went, "Wow. I want to be here." But there were so many ups and downs and times that I'd say, "Lord, get me out of here. I'll do anything to move on to get out of here because I don't see what you're doing." And we'd have little victories here and there, but it's been a long journey. And it went from... It almost destroyed my marriage. I'll be very open. At the 10-year mark, my wife later said she was going to leave me because I was angry, I was frustrated, I was depressed. It was just a real gut-wrenching period. So I say that because I think there's a lot of folks in those kind of jobs that are saying, "God, why do you have me here? And what's the fruit?" And I can say 30+ years later, I can't imagine being anywhere else. But boy, it took a long time to get there.

Joanna Meyer:

What were some of the choices that you made or practices that you adopted that sustained you in those really hard years?

Dave Hataj:

Oh, that's a good one. I'm an introvert, and the way I recharge is I have to just be outside in the woods doing something. There's a great book, I can't remember the title, called Sacred Pathways. And it talks about how all of us have different ways that God relates to us and we relate to God. So it was a lot of alone time, great mentors who just believed in me that I would call up and cry and say, "I can't do this anymore." And I struggle to answer the question because I look back and I go, "I don't know how God sustained me." But it was just holding on and saying, there were so many days, "Lord, I just can't do this anymore."



And it was that sense of perseverance, and I say sense of perseverance because I tried to run away several times and God said, "No." I tried to sell the business, God said, "No." And how did He say no? Right when I thought we had a buyer, the economy fell apart and things tanked. And it was like circumstances were just set up that there's no way I could run away anymore and there's no way I was going to get out of this. He knew what was best for me. And my wife has been amazing just sticking with me and helping me sort through the dark times.

But I think bottom line, Joanna, is that I think from an early stage, I just realized, "This has to be a work of God. And my relationship with Him is more important than anything." And I remember one night, I think this was one of the key turning points, there was this sense of surrender, where I literally was in bed and I prayed. And I was working 14, 16-hour days because of some shortage, staffing issues and so on. And I remember one night I said, "Lord, if you want to kill me on the shop floor. If you want my life, I give up. Whatever you want, whether I live or die, I just wholeheartedly give myself to you."

And it was weird praying that, because we would have so many orders that would pour in, I'd curse God. When the orders were coming, it was like, "Lord, no, we can't do it. We're all overworked already." And there's things like that. I was so frustrated that I wanted to control what I thought this should be our trajectory. And he just said, "No." Because when you exhibit, I think, kingdom values, oftentimes businesses can be very successful, because people are looking for vendors who are honest and have integrity and are committed to excellence. And so, that created this momentum that grew the business so fast that it was really, really difficult. But I think bottom line, it came down to just, "Lord, I don't know what the future holds, by I just surrender to whatever you want to do with us."

Joanna Meyer:

Okay. I'm going to ask us to zoom out a little bit, and for you to use your Doctor of Transformational Leadership skills.

Dave Hataj:

Okay.

Joanna Meyer:

So we can talk a little bit about how do we approach our job as a craft? And the context that I'm using for that is anyone can look at their job and treat it like a job, where you just do it for the paycheck. You kind of put your time in. You're only doing it for what you get out of it. And I would say treating your work like a craft is seeing a deeper purpose, embracing the spirit of what excellence in that work might look like. And I would say even being other-centered. You're not doing it only for what you can get out of it, but because of the importance and the dignity of the work itself. I'm wondering from your work as a tradesperson, how would you describe what it means to approach work as a craft?



Dave Hataj:

Great question again. I think you hit on a couple of things already. My guys out in the shop, they have this saying that, "Is it good enough?" And they hate that. "No, it's not good enough. Would you buy it?" And so, there's not a sense of good enough. It's got to be this commitment to excellence no matter what. And sometimes, they take it to an extreme, which is okay.

But really, it's understanding that you are uniquely created with certain skill sets and talents and gifts that God has given us. And so, the craftsman is going to say, "Okay. What is excellence?" And there's this dignity that says, "I'm going to be committed to doing my best because I understand that I'm serving the greater needs of not only the world, my community, those around me." And there's just this commitment, this dedication to just giving your best efforts at all times, and employing those gifts and talents in a way that creates things of beauty and excellence that makes modern civilization function, because we do our trade with a level of dignity that even when nobody's looking, even though it doesn't matter to anybody else around us, we know when it's right and we know when it's wrong. And we're going to live to this code that we're going to put our best efforts forward at all times.

Ross Chapman:

That's great. I love that. We have a bunch of people listening from all kinds of different industries and different jobs or crafts. And I'm just curious, how would you add to that specifically for people who may be further removed from the final product, and so they find themselves playing a role, but they don't always get to see the big picture or the impact. It could be an office job, it could be a manufacturing type job. What encouragement would you give them with that craftsman mindset? How does that help them in their day-to-day work?

Dave Hataj:

I think God put me through the paces to pound this into me through several jobs, that I go, "Wow. Why am I doing this?" And one of them, when I was going to Regent College, my part-time job was working at a state park. And my role was to get up early in the morning before anybody else, open the park. And we had seven bathrooms, and my job was to clean bathrooms. So here I am going to graduate school, all getting high and philosophy and theological about these lofty ideas. But then, in the mornings, I'm dealing with about as earthy of things as you can imagine.

Joanna Meyer:

Ugh.

Ross Chapman:

Yeah.



Dave Hataj:

And I will say, it is unbelievable what humans are capable of in a public restroom. And so, there are so many mornings I'm doing this and the sun is coming up and I'm looking out over the Puget Sound. I'm like, "Lord, what is this?" And I actually did an independent study that summer on the value and the purpose and the depth, the theology of cleaning bathrooms. And what it taught me, I came up with this whole list of things and how we're benefiting people. One, other people are aren't having to deal with the mess that I'm opening the door to with horror some mornings. We're stopping the spread of disease. We're giving people a pleasant bathroom experience. Families come to the state park and we're enriching that whole experience for them, even though they may never recognize it or appreciate it. And the list goes on and on.

And that experience really taught me that... As Christians, we bring... I titled my book Good Work because God's superpower is goodness. And when you think of and go back to Exodus 34 with Moses' encounter with God, and then in Titus, I call it the book of good work, because throughout scripture we see this emphasis of, "Do good works. Do good deeds." And it's not to earn salvation, but it should be an expression of our faith.

And in any environment, I'm realizing that if you're working at a convenience store, if you're working in an office, wherever you're at, when you emulate and strive to be good and emulate God's goodness, and be an expression of His goodness in every decision and every interaction with somebody, it just changes the world. It really does. When you go into a office or a shop, you can see what everybody's mood is every morning. You can sense how everybody's doing. And just the simple act of saying good morning to somebody and look them in the eye, or when you're stopping for coffee in the morning. And there's other jobs that I've worked at, but I think God's just really taught me that no matter the environment, His goodness is this powerful agent of change that literally transforms businesses, communities, people.

We often, I think, overlook what God wants to do through us. And what I've been camping out on, some scripture the last year and a half, is Ephesians 3, especially 20 and 21. He says, "Now to him who is able to do imaginably more than we could ask or imagine." Is sounds pretty cool, right? But then, it says, "According to His power at work within us." So I'm a big believer in the theology of presence, that just when we're present in a situation, the Holy Spirit is working in us and through us to change the whole dynamics of that organization or that room or that business. We may not always know the right words, we may not know what to say obviously, but our actions speak volumes. And just because we're there, the Spirit is working in us and through us to bring about change and reconciliation.

Joanna Meyer:

Dave, I wonder if we could offer you the final word. It's kind of a tradition of giving our guests a chance to exhort our listeners a little bit. Would you speak to us about what it looks like to bring a godly vision of craft to our daily work?



Dave Hataj:

You know what? I think it's just pretty much what I said, this sense of goodness. I get so frustrated when Christians have this opportunity to just shine light and be salt, and instead they have that mindset of, "We're just going to preach. We're just going to tell people." And in business, quite frankly, is in my mind, there is such a clear dividing line between those companies that are kingdom companies, that are really striving to serve the world, and those who aren't. And it is so easy today. There's no blurred lines. Either you live for goodness and service and commitment to excellence or you don't.

And so, I don't think there's ever, at least in my experience, ever been a better time to be salt and light, right? And because our world is so broken, people often lament, "Oh my gosh, it's getting worse and worse." And I say, "It's getting better and better for our light to shine," because just really striving to be that person of integrity and excellence and humility, oh my gosh, it stands out more than ever. So I would say keep striving to be that agent of transformation that that allows God to live in us and through us. And obviously, it comes down to, frankly, that personal relationship with Jesus. Can I say that? Am I allowed to say that?

Ross Chapman:

Absolutely. Salt and light have no volume, but you can't miss them. Because they don't speak. We're not hearing salt and light, but we're seeing it and we're noticing it. And I think that's exactly what you're saying.

Dave Hataj:

I just got a letter this morning from one of my employees. It was kind of funny that we're talking about this. His wife had a horrible pregnancy and had a miscarriage and she almost died. She got sepsis. So he's been off of work for two months and he sent me this beautiful letter today. He's going to have to take a different job because he needs to be closer to his wife because his wife has all these issues.

But in his letter, he said, "When I came to work for you, I had faith. I was a person of faith. But then, I've had so much tragedy in my family life and my personal life that I walked away from it. And now, this tragedy has brought me back to it." And he goes, "Just being here at Edgerton Gear has just been such a tremendous gift." And it just reminded me that God showers us with gifts every day, but we can either focus on the tragedy or focus on the goodness in our lives. And obviously, I teared up reading it because collectively, as a company, he expressed really well what I long for us to be, are just agents of peace and understanding and love and truth. It's really cool to see that guy come back with that.

Joanna Meyer:

I love that.



Dave Hataj:

That's great.

Joanna Meyer:

I love that idea of transformation in the context of making gears. And God invites us to be agents of change regardless of what our profession is. We can be managing a team or designing spreadsheets or standing in a courtroom. And all of those settings are opportunities for us to be people of goodness, hope, truth, love, beauty, all of those attributes of God.

Dave Hataj:

Amen. Amen.

Joanna Meyer:

Well, Dave, thanks for joining us today. I have been a fan of yours for many years, and it's just a gift to share your story more broadly within our community.

Dave Hataj:

Well, thank you Ross and Joanna. I really appreciate being here, just our friendship, so thanks again.

Ross Chapman:

Well, thanks for joining us on the Faith & Work Podcast today. I just want to let you know a couple ways you can continue learning. If you would like to learn more about Dave's story, you can check out his video at Faith & Co. You can find this in the show notes. It's also a great way to share with others just his quick story. You can also learn more about The Craftsman's Code and Dave's book, *Good Work: How Blue Collar Business Can Change Lives, Communities, and the World*. All those can be found in our show notes on our website.

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Joanna Meyer:

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