

Hey, did you catch the previous Whitestone podcast episode that was titled “Love the Sinner, Hate the Sin”...? If you haven’t, go take a listen. That episode made at least two major points:

- First, that many businesses, nonprofits, universities, and schools in America are deploying hateful new -isms...supposedly to address hateful old -isms.
- Second, regardless of that, the Bible foundationally instructs believers to love the sinner and hate the sin. No exceptions. Love the sinner, hate the sin—come heaven or high water! And that includes how we handle our workplace issues!

Well, now, if that isn’t enough to cause us to continually challenge whether we’re following Jesus well, today we’re looking at another axiom for Christians at work. Here it is: *love the people, fix the dysfunction*.

If you’ve spent any kind of time in a typical American workplace, it’s highly likely that you chuckled a bit right there. Why? Because you know that many businesses and many nonprofits have a real and ongoing problem with dysfunction. Frankly, if your enterprise is very sizable at all and you don’t think that it has some real dysfunction, you might go and ask your colleagues. And, hey, ask your customers, too!

Here’s the overriding directive for serious followers of Jesus. In our workplace enterprises, God’s entire design for us is to be great stewards for everyone we’re responsible for, whether we serve on the front lines like greeters and cashiers and phone support or we serve as senior executives for the organization.

And here’s the expectation of each of us: be highly effective, highly impactful, highly functional in serving others in our workplaces, whether that’s customers, fellow coworkers, supply chain partners, or any mix of those. That’s right, embedded in there were the words “*be highly functional*.” I could give you a dictionary definition of “functional”...but you already know what it means at the street level. Yep, we can corral the word *functional* with several other words: helpful...useful...efficient...productive...fruitful...results. Hey, do those truly describe your workplace enterprise...or do they truly describe your church?

If not, the first step to take is to identify some key sources of organizational dysfunction. Yes, key sources of organizational dysfunction. So here we go, here’s a working list, starting with...

1. *Lack of a stated definition of stewardship success*. Quick, tell me, what is your business workplace’s stated definition of success? Is it long-term profits? Is it top customer service? Is it high employee compensation? And just what is your church’s definition of stewardship success? Is it the number of members? Is it new allegiances to Christ? There’s an old saying that’s relevant here: “If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time!” OK. You absolutely *must* define your enterprise’s targeted stewardship success! If not, you’ve actually created dysfunction at the core.
2. *Lack of measurement of targeted stewardship success*. Now, is your business or nonprofit truly *measuring* stewardship success—weekly, monthly, annually? Quick, quote last week’s results. And how about your church? How many unbelievers committed to Christ this past year? Yes, your targeted stewardship success *must* be measured...or the target is meaningless. Dysfunction!
3. *Lack of reward for high productivity that’s linked to stewardship success*. Does every individual understand, align with, and actually receive rewards for their personal productivity, their actions that are aligned with enterprise success? You know, like Jesus rewards fruitful believers at the judgment seat? Hey, if you’re not rewarding productivity, that neglect is fostering dysfunction!
4. *Aversion to and avoidance of technological change*. Do you routinely allow workers, especially long-time executives, to avoid crucially needed technological change? That’s dysfunction!
5. *Accepting or actually embracing stifling bureaucracy*. Has your enterprise created and grown wasteful bureaucracy, often in the name of government compliance? That’s dysfunctional.

6. *Accepting or actually encouraging unaligned personal entitlements.* Does your organization foster entitlement behavior serving something other than enterprise stewardship? Dysfunctional.
7. *Individual discouragement of top performers.* Go back to the previous six items. Any one of these can and will cause great performers to depart. Dysfunction.

The issue is not *whether* any of these seven items happen. Rest assured, any one of the seven very likely *will* happen—*yes, in your organization!* The real problem is allowing any one of them to fester. And any one of these seven festering is bad enough. When more than one is allowed to fester, the honest truth is that you are already in the process of failing at stewardship success.

Hey, Americans are infatuated with being leaders. OK, right on. But as we've said before, leadership exists solely to serve stewardship. So, the foundational truth remains: when you are tolerating these areas of corrosive dysfunction, you are failing as a stewardship-focused leader. And don't just fight fires! Preventative measures are a key strategy for the astute steward! So...what's the overarching framework? We return to the beginning of this episode. Remember *love the sinner, hate the sin?* Well, the task of the top enterprise—your organization and mine—is quite simple: *love the people, fix the dysfunction.*

Here's the thinking on that, all linked up. First, we know that every person in our enterprise will fall short of perfection. However, many people will rise to the occasion of being part of a truly great enterprise—and great enterprises embrace the opportunity to continually identify and relentlessly remove these common dysfunctions. Truth is, falling short on this creates huge competitive vulnerability.

All the while, we are to seriously *love the people* in our enterprise. That means we avoid blaming people for long-entrenched dysfunction in the organization. In fact, we best treat them as engaged co-stewards, inviting them to become constructive in solving dysfunction, working together. Many will be grateful.

But here's a reality check. There will be a certain number of people who harbor a deep affinity for being part of a dysfunctional organization. The task *then* is to work to redeem the mindsets and the actions of those particular people. And, after you have tried diligently to create a fresh, redemptive alignment with those folks—and when that alignment hasn't worked—well, then, the next step is to *love those unteachable people right out of your enterprise!* That's what great stewardship for the enterprise requires. And not to worry. God is bigger than your workplace—He can redeem those folks at *another* workplace!

“Wait,” you say, “you just don't understand the level of entrenched dysfunction in my workplace. I've already tried, really tried to fix the dysfunction—the brokenness—of my department, my division, my specific nook in the nonprofit or business I'm a part of. And I have even succeeded quite a bit. But the overall enterprise is still a mess!”

OK, I get it. But it's just like everything else in the Christian life: be faithful, continue to do what you can in your sphere of influence to the fullest extent possible. The difference you're making is the essence of Christian witness! In due time, if God calls you elsewhere...go!

And remember, you have been and remain a part of the greatest enterprise ever—the Kingdom of God! And, yeah, sometimes you get to be part of a great workplace, too! But sometimes you don't...you know, like the Old Testament stories of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther, each one serving in a dysfunctional kingdom.

Still, God has directed your steps—no less than He directed those three—and your task is simple: wherever you're at, *love the people, fix the dysfunction.* Simple but not easy. Just like Joseph, Daniel, Esther...and, yeah, Jesus Christ Himself! But hey, *you are the intended blessing from God* wherever you're appointed...now and every other place down the line! That is the core mindset of the fruitful believer!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Go through the seven dysfunctions listed above. Which ones are prevalent at your workplace enterprise? Without impugning particular individuals, give examples.
2. Every workplace has a measure of dysfunction...and sometimes a great measure! Share your strategy for creating and distinguishing your *highly functional* Christian stewardship as well as keeping a great attitude in the midst of it all. Be specific.
3. Churches often have differing perspectives of stewardship definitions, targets, and measurement—if they bother at all. What do you believe the Bible says about what our churches are to be steward of? And what do you believe the Bible says how we should measure that stewardship? Be specific about Bible verse citations.