

The words “supply chain” are suddenly on many lips! So, we’ve been looking into the astonishing effectiveness of supply chains—especially in the 21st century—which can and do become vital drivers of the economic betterment of literally billions of people across the economic spectrum in many nations.

Earlier, we delved into the *essential need for smooth and efficient cooperation* for a fantastic supply chain to actually *be* fantastic—in delivering a low-cost, high-value path to consumers. And that cooperation relies on free market competition that helps to ensure a person or company delivers the best stewardship.

But you know there can be a real stumbling block within the realities of competition—you see, *sometimes competition just doesn’t work in your workplace’s favor when you’re hiring or retaining workers core to your effort*. That’s due to a “law” of economics...the law of supply and demand! I know you’ve heard *that* phrase before. And you’ve experienced it a whole lot, like when the sold-out concert tickets by a popular artist originally sold for \$50 per seat, but if you want to go buy what’s available from the few sellers willing to sell their ticket, you find yourself facing a price of \$100 or \$200 or maybe a whole lot more! And, yes, prices for hot events can get really crazy—the all-time record for a Super Bowl is over \$70,000 for a ticket!

So, what does everyone say when you tell them your tale of woe about not being able to get a more reasonably-priced ticket to a concert? Well, much to your irritation, your perky little sister or your workplace colleague cheerfully says, “Hey, that’s just supply and demand!” Of course, that common phrase means that there’s a lot more demand or desire for a ticket to the event than there are people willing to supply that cherished ticket. Yep, your sister is right: *that’s just supply and demand!*

And guess what, at the time of the crafting of this episode, there’s real disruption in the price and basic availability of *labor* for many jobs in America. For a relatively long time, the market for hourly labor was generally stable, adjusting rather incrementally—your workplace notified your usual, reliable sources that workers were needed, and voilà, that worker would be easily signed up! But then Covid happened. And government paid workers to stay home. And many workers saved some or all of that money. And many workers discovered other options for their time and efforts. Some wanted to work more from home...or work *totally* from home. Some wanted to work multiple opportunities at once. Work-life balance issues became disruptive, especially when a pandemic was a key factor. In short, labor supply chains *mutated!*

The upshot is that many workplaces in the U.S. faced difficult, hard-to-predict, ever-harder-to-manage shortages of labor, from hourly workers who can earn overtime pay to salaried workers. New challenges abounded and often have continued. So, do specific workplaces need to pay for better benefits to compete? How might specific workplaces need to adjust work schedules to obtain the services of needed workers? Hey, for many workplaces, the labor landscape has radically changed! Gone are the days where the big labor story of the year was swimming pools looking for a couple of lifeguards for the summer.

And all those labor shortages have disrupted many supply chains. Can a major retailer who relies on hundreds or thousands of suppliers keep a complete offering of expected products on its shelves? Can that same retailer secure and retain the necessary stockers and cashiers and assistant managers? Can the delivery companies—often the heart of getting products from point A to point B—retain and keep qualified people? Can top service organizations attract and retain the most competent service providers?

Hey, right now, just drive by the nearest strip mall or watch the headlines. From Dollar Tree to Fedex to all kinds of restaurants, these types of issues plague the best of executives during widespread labor shortages. And few workplaces are structured for a totally-digital supply chain delivery system—the ones closest to that are firms like Facebook and Google where almost all user interaction is via software. But even then, those companies need software and support professionals undergirding the service offering.

Even when Covid-induced difficulties may fade, labor is in some flux that poses problems. Economies are cyclical, and the recessions that inevitably come disrupt labor. Will people getting laid off in a future

recession solve your issues? Don't count on it. No matter where the U.S. economy might be, the demand for a computer programmer is different than demand for a plumber, waitstaff, or housekeeper. And local markets are each different, even for the same work: how about Atlanta, Georgia versus Colby, Kansas?

And so it goes. As Adam Smith, the guy known as the Father of Economics, might tell us, *welcome to the world of labor economics, the world of its supply and demand!* And just who is that Adam Smith? Well, he's a guy from Scotland in the late 1700s who wrote what's considered the pioneering work for modern economics. But there's Someone who knows a whole lot more about labor issues—yes, the head of a long-lasting worldwide enterprise—Someone who wrote about real-world labor and labor shortages long ago:

“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” (Matthew 9:35-38 ESV) Yeah, now we're talking about the *real* expert, the One with the fullest understanding of labor! And don't miss this very powerful truth derived from His teaching: once believers help harvest the souls of those “harassed and helpless sheep,” then those newly-shepherded sheep will themselves personally add significantly to the labor pool!

That's what's so crazy good! You might think God's only focused on full-blown missionaries and pastors with seminary degrees. But that's not true! The supply chain for witnessing for Christ is actually *designed* to include the access and labor of *every believer*. Indeed, as the Head of our Kingdom enterprise, the risen Jesus said this as His very last words before His Ascension: “...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Jesus has appointed his laborers, and *they are us!*

But here's the thorny issue that always looms. Economics is considered a “social” science, not a “pure” science like physics. That means that people make decisions that don't always fit with the boss's perfect plan. And we know that God's plan includes *every believer* to witness as part of God's harvest of souls! But believers often don't fully do what He commands!

Wait, you might say, you don't *really* mean *me*, right? Surely I won't have to do something radical like move abroad! Well, that's not *inherently* vital—we're to minister in our workplaces *wherever* we work, regardless of where we live. When we are students or teachers, we minister in our colleges, regardless of where we live. Yes, in every role, in every context, we can witness! But it's way beyond that, too!

Why? Well, the world has shrunk dramatically the last few decades. International travel and career opportunities in many countries are quite common for many millions. Billions of people are instantly accessible via the internet, which opened up instant communication from one-on-one dialogue to blogs, podcasts, websites, and the like. Broadcasting via radio, TV, and YouTube videos are legion. Nowadays, we're participating in a much more sophisticated, intricate supply chain for effective witness of Christ!

But finding believers willing to fill these God-directed roles blanketing the earth is *apparently* as elusive as ever! We know that because there are billions who have not heard the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. So, in that context, Jesus's statement remains true: “the laborers are few.” Do we need more laborers touching people? Well, we have billions who need to hear the Gospel. And we have connected nearness!

Yes, the last words of Jesus recorded before He ascended were about our witness everywhere! (Acts 1:8) And God's rewards for fruitful believers are great! (See 1 Corinthians 3:9-16) Look, you and I can't possibly “fix” the big picture of labor shortages. And we can't even easily fix local labor shortages and issues. But we can do something that sounds strange at first—we can do our part in working to *not* be evidence of what Jesus said, that “the workers are few.” The closest, very accessible opportunity of fixing the Kingdom's labor shortage is with us!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Does your workplace have a highly successful strategy to handle labor shortages? If so, share what you have done. If not, what approach are you taking to solve those issues, now and for the long-term?

2. The “laborers are few” in Jesus’s saying could be hugely impacted by about a billion Christians engaging unbelievers they work with and interact with daily. But that’s often largely missing or at least deficient. Why isn’t this approach routine for individual believers and local churches? Be specific about your thinking.

3. How about giving your personal status report for touching people’s lives in your daily routine? Be detailed and specific about how they know Jesus is involved.