

May 20, 2019

By Jim Mathis

The Power of Improving Your Craft

In our hyper-competitive business and professional world, we would all like to be the one to discover the latest and greatest innovation, the idea no one has thought of before, that would put us on the fast track to success. But here is a better suggestion: Simply work at becoming better at what you do best.

It has been said that if you are self-employed, or working on your own in some freelance capacity, you need to spend at least half of your time honing your craft, learning new things, or improving your product. We often see products in stores labeled “New and Improved.” Would it not be good to be able to say the same about ourselves and the work we do?

I have always spent a significant portion of my time reading, experimenting, watching tutorials, taking classes, or attending seminars, workshops, and trade shows. For 23 years my wife and I were in the photography business, developing and printing black-and-white film. Now, of course, that is an obsolete craft. They don’t even make black-and-white film any more. But it did not present a problem for me because I was an early adopter of digital imaging, which revolutionized photography. When I realized 20 years ago that I was not going to spend the rest of my life developing film, I embraced the change and began responding to the new world of digital imaging. I tried to learn everything I could about digital cameras and the use of computer technology for enhancing photos.

However, this advice about spending half of your time learning should not be limited to self-employed people. Some employers offer ongoing training for

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their employees, but many do not – and when they do, it is often very limited and specific to the current job. For this reason, I often encounter people left behind by changes in the workplace or new technology. Some simply come to the shocking realization that their professions have become obsolete.

This brings to mind a verse in the Bible's Old Testament, describing a group of leaders in ancient Israel. These were the *"men of Issachar, men who had understanding of the times, to know what [they] should do"* (1 Chronicles 12:32). The passage does not explain specifically what changes or factors these leaders needed to consider, but clearly it indicates they recognized the need to adapt to what was happening.

One of the many benefits of faith in God is knowing that although we may not know what lies in the future, in His omniscience, He does. So as we strive to do *"work as for the Lord, rather than for men"* (Colossians 3:23), we can pray and seek wisdom from the Lord for understanding how we too can adapt, how we can improve our craft – honing our skills and adapting to the changing work environment.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9 it says, *"For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building."* As such, we should be eager to respond to the world around us that is changing at an ever-increasing pace. Rather than resisting change, we can embrace the fact that technology and better tools do not cost jobs; they allow us to do more and better work. They offer unique opportunities for improving our craft.

How about setting a goal – for the remainder of this year – to spend more time learning, not only to advance your career, but also to become a more interesting, more highly skilled person?

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© 2019. Jim Mathis is the owner of a photography studio in Overland Park, Kansas, specializing in executive, commercial and theatrical portraits, and operates a school of photography. He formerly was a coffee shop manager and executive director of CBMC in Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri.

Reflection/Discussion Question

1. How do you typically respond to the changing work environment around you? Do you resist change, or do you try to find ways for effectively addressing those changes and become better at what you do?
2. Have you consciously considered ways, as Mr. Mathis suggests, for improving your craft or making significant adjustments in your career in response to changes you see occurring or anticipate coming? If so, how have you been doing that? If not, what impact do you expect the changing environment might have for you vocationally?
3. In what ways can we seek to be like the biblical “men of Issachar,” being able to understand the times in which we live and know what we should do in response?
4. The Bible teaches that one of God’s many attributes is His omniscience – being all-knowing. Do you believe this? If you do, how can you draw on that truth for help in becoming a more productive, better adapting worker and leader in the future?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Proverbs 14:1,8, 16:21; Isaiah 41:8-10; Jeremiah 29:11-13; Ephesians 5:15-17

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