

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1664 Who is Exploiting Who? – Part 1

Yesterday, I asked the question, “Do you feel that you are being exploited?” We talked about a small business owner who felt he had put out for employees as the company was growing, sacrificing frequently, but that the workers didn’t reciprocate. He felt he had been exploited, and he was angry about it. I’m Jerry Roberts, and today we view things from the employee side, next on the Extra Point.

How do workers feel that managers and organizations are exploiting them? I’m going to give you a list of grievances that are heard frequently, and then we’ll break it down.

The big complaints are unfair compensation, inadequate benefits, then excessive workloads. In other words, getting too little for doing too much.

After that: Little or no recognition, poor work-life balance, inflexibility, job insecurity, lack of career opportunities, micromanagement, no authority, changing company policies, and toxic work environment. There’s more, but those represent the complaints of a lot of people.

On the surface, you can make a case that everything in that pile of issues is potentially problematic. The question is how much of it is actually a matter of exploitation.

Let’s dig into the the term. Exploitation, at it’s core, returns this definition from the Cambridge Dictionary: *The use of something in order to get an advantage from it.*

This applies to resources of every kind, and that includes human resources. Let’s take a look at that list of complaints again, this time measured by that definition — “the use of something in order to get an advantage from it.”

Little or no recognition, poor work-life balance, inflexibility, job insecurity, lack of career opportunities, micromanagement, no authority, changing company policies, and toxic work

environment. Poor work-life balance and inflexibility could be seen as exploitative, but in my opinion the rest do not.

Like I said, they can be problems and irritants to be sure, but is the employer using these things as tactics to treat you unfairly? I don’t see it.

My two biggest work influences were my mom and Big Ed, my first boss. Both said roughly the same thing, that accepting a job is making a deal with the employer. You agree to swap X-number of hours of your time to do certain tasks to the best of your ability; and the employer agrees to pay you an agreed upon wage and perhaps benefits.

One more thing they both told me was that there would be times I’d be needed to do more because somebody doesn’t come in or there was a problem. I shouldn’t complain because this was a chance to step up and shine. They were right, there were plenty of those times.

Were these my opportunities to shine, or simply times when I was being exploited? Maybe I was too dumb to know. Maybe I thought I was shining and I was actually being shafted. I suppose it’s possible, but that never crossed my mind.

The only areas where employee exploitation comes into focus is unfair compensation, inadequate benefits, and excessive workloads. However, real exploitation requires an element of pressure to be used as a weapon against us. In example, if your boss knows you are in desperate need of your paycheck to handle your responsibilities, and he/she uses that to squeeze you into doing more for less.

More and more work gets piled on and you keep taking it, because you’re afraid what will happen if you refuse. There’s the pressure, the fear, the exploitation.

(Con’t.)

True exploitation might need one more element, the fact that the employer could easily pay you fairly, but chooses not to because you'll accept less in order to hang onto the job.

These things sadly do happen, but it's not what most people experience. What I hear a lot about is having to take on extra work to make up for another person who does less — and both get paid the same. Does that sound familiar?

If you feel “exploited”, whether or not you buy the definition we've given today, the best thing to do is discuss it with your supervisor, HR manager, or the business owner. They may have solid reasons for the decisions they've made and the requests they've made of you.

Remember, in difficult times and when things need to get done, managers will rely upon people they can trust. You, for example. The problem is when it's always you, and when little or nothing extra comes your way for your effort.

Let them know that you're willing to give extra effort in times of need, but that you feel things are out of whack and need rebalancing. Then give them adequate time to address your issue.

If they blow you off, maybe that's not the best place for your talents.

In closing, exploitation does happen. To make sure it doesn't happen to you, communicate well with your managers; and when the job tosses you a little more than you want, maybe you can see it as your time to shine.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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