

Robert W. Lind
*Human Development
Specialist, Montana State
University—Bozeman*

The Best Way To Lose Your Job. Not many good things can be said for losing one's job, when viewed from the usual perspective. Offering advice on the best way to lose your job must sound like advice of the same quality as that given to President Lincoln: "Why don't you go to the theater tonight?"

In any organization where people are employed, a persistent problem is that too many are inclined to be content just to have a job, and too few aspire to make of their employment a real career or calling. So true is this that we even feel silly or at least a bit uncomfortable in speaking about what we do as a calling—a vocation to which we bring not only our talents and interests, but a moral dedication and commitment.

How unfortunate we've permitted religion to claim almost exclusive ownership of the concept of being called to a life's work. Seldom, if ever, do we hear of someone having been "called" to be a rancher or forest service ranger, a merchant or a mechanic. In this way, secular work is made to seem less noble. This distortion of the truth about the nature of work has serious consequences in terms of morale, attitudes, achievement, and tenure.

Many noble works exist in which people may participate. Enriching human life through education, the ministry of Extension, is a vital, crucial human need we serve. People have a variety of needs: spiritual, physical, social, intellectual, and economic, to name some of the more basic ones—and those needs aren't found in a rank order.

Where the needs of people and your abilities and interests intersect, that's where you're called to serve. Is it likely that you arrived at your present position because you had certain skills, abilities, and interests, plus a desire to render service to others? Through the network of the Extension Service, you've found a vehicle for the expression of your talents and your desire to serve. Because it meets the test for the definition of a calling, why do we call it a job?

Another question: What would happen if, the next time you report to work, you find that you have lost your job, and now have a calling instead? The pay would be the same, the

duties would be the same, working conditions and fringe benefits wouldn't have changed, but your position would have changed completely.

The change would occur because it matters profoundly what we perceive to be the fundamental nature of our employment. If it's only a job, we'll approach it with certain attitudes and expectations. If we regard it as a calling, we'll approach it with quite a different set of attitudes and expectations. People who have jobs tend to be more sensitive to pay scales, working conditions, fringe benefits, and whether everyone else is doing an equal share of the work. Those who have callings are more likely to be caught up in what they're doing, more concerned about doing the best they possibly can, and more dedicated to serving the most people they can.

In the normal course of events, the attitudes of those newly employed will be derived from the attitudes of those with more seniority. Thus, the change will have to occur from the inside. A new staff member may come with high ideals and lofty ambitions, but may soon fall into the habit of just putting in time and collecting the wage, if such an attitude prevails among the senior staff.

Sometimes we speak disparagingly of the enthusiasm and idealism of youth, but those qualities of attitude are all too often in desperately short supply and should be cultivated with the utmost love and care. Youthful enthusiasm and idealism can be retained even past the age of retirement by those who feel a sincere dedication to their work as a calling, and not just as a job.

We can't allow it to be true that to be mature, grownup Extension professionals we must become leaden and cynical. Essential aspects of the "called-to-serve" character, in our first or twenty-fifth year, surely must include a sense of wonder for all of life, genuine love for people, and concern for their welfare. More than any other single quality, it is this mind-set that transforms one's work into a calling.

We're not obligated to wait for an edict from on high that would in one stroke transform the entire organization. But, at any moment, we may choose . . . we can fire ourself from our job and rehire ourself to a calling.