



Phil Jump is Chair of Industrial Christian Fellowship and Regional Minister of the North Western Baptist Association. He entered Christian Ministry after a career in marine engineering and is married to Janice. They live in north Liverpool and have three children.

It is sobering to recognise how much of our world view these days is shaped by the television, which means of course that an emerging generation's definition of business success is more likely to be based on the latest series of the Apprentice, than more constructive appreciations and applications of management practice. The increasingly popular TV show promotes a world of unreality, where Alpha males can declare "you're fired" at will (exempt it seems from any prevailing employment legislation), and the façade of team is consistently undermined by individual ambition, vested interest and selfish rivalry.

This is an approach to business that might fuel TV ratings, but is one that more informed managers left behind years ago. Yet given the influence which prime-time television is able to wield, one cannot help but wonder how such programmes might eventually influence the beliefs and values of the next generation of business leaders.

Even the term "apprentice" seems to have undergone something of a re-definition. To serve an apprenticeship is to be trained, mentored and equipped with the skills of a more experienced generation – the aim of the mentor is not to declare "you're fired" but to foster achievement, develop talent and encourage success. Yet in the world of the TV series, it seems to largely be a matter of being abandoned to an unrealistic task, fighting and competing with colleagues to transmit blame for failure to anyone but yourself. Then it's into the boardroom to be bullied, bawled out and humiliated for the entertainment of a watching public.

It is in the light of such trends that the significance of reclaiming a faith-based understanding of work reveals its true importance. Work is neither a spectator sport nor simply a necessity for economic survival

You're Fired!

■ by Phil Jump

– it is an expression of our common humanity which in turn is a consequence of being made in the image of God. It is no accident that the traditional word used to describe a business enterprise is "company" – a coherent group of human beings seeking to work in mutual co-operation and pursuit of a shared ideal or outcome. It is a context in which individualism gives way to common endeavour. From the very outset of our existence, the interdependence and interrelationship of human beings is depicted as an essential part of who we are; an expression of that Divine nature which we were made to reflect. Work has the potential and capacity to express and nurture that common humanity, yet it can so easily become hijacked by envy, rivalry and competition, becoming that dehumanising and oppressive entity that is a lamentable reality in too many contemporary situations. When decency and dignity has to be sacrificed in the name of popular entertainment, work has indeed become something God never intended it to be.

In another era and context, the word "apprentice" might well be expressed "disciple". By placing these two terms alongside each other, we perhaps recognise what apprenticeship has the potential to be, and indeed the true cost to our humanity when it is hijacked by other agendas. To nurture and develop another human being is a truly sacred task, whether it is rooted in a community of faith or the shared endeavours of the workplace. We should resist any tendency for it to descend into anything less.

One of ICF's recent initiatives has been to partner with the Salt of the Earth network and Mission in the Economy to work with business consultant Steve Glowinski to highlight and champion more wholesome management models. It might not make for great television, but is likely to foster a far more positive workplace experience for some. ■