

MONDAY MANNA

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THE 'PYGMALION EFFECT'

By Jim Langley

While working in human resources during the mid-1970s I was introduced to the "Pygmalion Effect," a concept that emphasized the importance of "expecting the best" from your employees. It was based on a 1971 study by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson, also known as the Rosenthal Effect, which simply states that higher expectations of people can often lead to improved performance.

This psychological phenomenon was named for the Greek mythological character, Pygmalion, who according to the story fell in love with an ivory statue he had carved that later came to life. George Bernard Shaw took the idea a step further in his stage play, "Pygmalion," followed by film versions of "My Fair Lady," and a musical by Lerner and Loewe. Inspired by this idea, for the past 40 years I have displayed a small sign in my office that says, "Expect the Best." Even in the years I did not know Jesus Christ, I believed it was helpful being reminded a positive attitude can make a powerful difference in the lives of others. Today, as a follower of Jesus, I can see even greater value in this philosophy.

Our expectations for ourselves and others are lower than God's expectations for us. With so much negativity in this world, we can easily become discouraged from reaching our true potential. Expecting the best has been more natural for me, since I have always been an optimist, one of those people that prefer to see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty! But even for the most positive thinkers, it is still difficult at times.

In my insurance sales career, I focused on making appointments since I knew my closing ratio would allow me to be successful if I simply saw enough people every week. I quickly learned to expect the best and then I picked up a great encourager for my team: Jesus Christ came into my life about eight months into my new career, and He has made an immeasurable difference for me and the people working with me.

I have never been impressed by so-called "prosperity theology," but have come to understand in reading the Bible that God expects the best out of each of us in whatever we do. This is why I wholeheartedly endorse the apostle Paul's words in Colossians 3:23-24, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward."*

The Bible also teaches that diligence and devotion to doing our best will be recognized: *"Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings; he will not stand before unknown men"* (Proverbs 22:29).

Since 1998, I have adopted the motto, "Here to Serve," and end most of my written correspondence with that phrase. For me it serves as a continual reminder that God expects me to give my best to Him and to my clients. I am here foremost to serve Him, but also to be of service to my clients. Having the right attitude and focus has made a tremendous difference in my career, and after 32 years I enjoy my profession even more than I did during the early years.

Knowing God expects and desires our best, I think it is important to ask ourselves some difficult questions: Are we giving our best in our professional lives? Are we giving our best to our families and loved ones? Are we giving our best in all we do and in all we are? Are we giving our best to God?

How do we succeed in expecting the best? I think we do this by focusing on the best. As Philippians 4:8 instructs us, *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."*

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever heard of the “Pygmalion Effect,” or seen the stage play “Pygmalion” or the theatrical film or musical, “My Fair Lady”? What are your thoughts about always striving to expect the best from others?
2. What does it mean for you to know God expects the best from you, whether in the workplace, in the home, or in your other personal pursuits?
3. How can we go about effectively expecting the best from others, and communicating this to them in a positive, affirming way?
4. Mr. Langley asks some difficult questions at the end of this “Monday Manna.” How would you respond – are you doing your best, giving your best to God, your family and loved ones, or to yourself? Why or why not?

Note:

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following passages:

- Proverbs 10:5,
- Proverbs 27:23-27,
- Proverbs 28:12;
- Galatians 6:9-10;
- Philippians 3:12-14;
- 1 Peter 5:2-4