

SGI President Ikeda's Essay
Setting a Standard at Work
By HO GOKU

A person filled with hope shines with a special light. The blue sky of infinite possibility unfolds before such a person.

Young people in workplaces all over Japan are now making a brand-new departure as they begin their adult working lives. In Japan, we refer to those just starting out on their careers as freshers, and to all freshers, I say: "Congratulations! The future is in your hands!"



On June 3, 1949, when I was 21 years old and had been working at Mr. Toda's publishing company for just five months, I wrote in my diary: "Every day is so busy. But I am determined to give my all to every task assigned me. If I can do that, I know my work will be fulfilling. It may be tough, but it will be enjoyable. I want to make Mr. Toda's company the best in Japan. We must create the best magazine in all Japan."

No matter what your position may be, the first step in any job is having a personal commitment to making your company or organization a success through your efforts. You can never be happy if you take a passive role. The joy of work and the ambition to succeed are born from a positive spirit, from taking an active role.



I have made it a practice since my youth to start the day off right.

I would get to the office about 30 minutes early every day to clean and straighten things up. No one asked me to. I decided to do it on my own, so everyone would have a pleasant workplace. And I always greeted my superiors cheerfully each morning.

There were all different kinds of people at work: Some who always did their best. Others who did what they were told but no more. And others who were very slack and tried to get away with whatever they could.

Some young people attach themselves to superiors who are not good role models. They allow themselves to be influenced by their shallow thoughts and ideas with extremely detrimental consequences for their future — all because they lack goals and a solid personal philosophy.

Does the environment control us, or do we control it? This is a challenge with which all of us must grapple. When I started working for Mr. Toda, I decided to be a model for others, to set a standard. And I was overjoyed when, eventually, the atmosphere of the company noticeably changed.



Whatever company or organization you may join, you will find that you may not always be doing the work that you like best. You may also discover once you actually start working that the job is not what you'd imagined it to be and grow disappointed and discouraged.

I experienced something like this. When Mr. Toda's company fell on hard times, we were forced to stop the magazine. I was transferred from editorial work to finance — the

kind of work I disliked most.

But I was determined to make the most of this development. “It’s make or break,” I thought. “I will do my best. It’s a chance to learn, to acquire new abilities!”

Despite suffering ill health, I gave it my all. I visited our clients from early in the morning until late at night, responding to their requests and concerns with utmost sincerity. I am proud that as a result, Mr. Toda’s enterprise took a turn for the better, and we survived the crisis.



Before working for Mr. Toda, I had worked at a printing company while attending night school. I used to pull a large cart filled with printed materials, delivering them to publishers in the Ginza and Kanda districts of Tokyo. It was mindless, back-breaking labor. I remember the disdainful looks I got from full-time university students the same age as me.

But I was cheerful and unconcerned. I knew that suffering and hard work are the greatest treasures life has to give. I was confident that every experience would eventually be of use. And so, I made every effort to be the best delivery person possible, to do my work more carefully and quickly than anyone else.

That experience did, in fact, become a wonderful asset, a precious resource, that I am deeply grateful to have.



Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 270). Mr. Toda taught me: “Always do your share in faith. And in work do the work of three!” To succeed at work, to become an exemplary asset to your workplace, is proof of the power of your faith.

To work only for your salary is to be a slave to money. Your place of work is your place of practice. It’s the place where you forge and polish your character and humanity.

That’s a way of saying a person is ready for a challenge, a person is dedicated to self-improvement.

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SGI President Ikeda on Work

■ Companies once considered prestigious no longer guarantee security, while educational background alone no longer assures a good job.... So what, then, is important? The answer is true capability. It is vital to develop all kinds of strengths and abilities — such as an inquisitive mind, specialist skills, mental strength and flexibility. (March 28, 1997, *World Tribune*)

■ Dr. David Norton, late professor of philosophy of the University of Delaware, once said something like: “Many students are caught up in the notion that the only purpose of employment is to earn money, that happiness means having money to gratify their desires. But since there is no limit to those desires, they can never truly be satisfied. Real happiness is found in working. Through work, one can develop and fulfill oneself and bring forth the unique value that lies within — and share that value with society. Work exists for the joy of creating value.” (March 28, 1997, *World Tribune*)

Title: Setting a Standard at Work

Subject: World Tribune 05/08/98 n.3190 p.12 WT980508p12

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: Daily Essays Feature Guidance Human Ikeda January June Life President Revolution Series
Setting Standard Tribune Work World

■ There may be times when life seems gloomy and dull, when we feel stuck in some situation or other, when we are negative toward everything, when we feel lost and bewildered, not sure which way to turn — at such times we must transform our passive mind-set and determine: “I will persevere along this path.” “I will pursue my mission today.” When we do that, a genuine springtime arrives in our hearts, and flowers start to blossom. (Nov. 24, 1995, *World Tribune*)

■ President Toda said that the most important thing is to first become an indispensable person wherever you are. Instead of moaning that a job differs from what you’d like to be doing, he said, become a first-class individual at that job. This will open the path leading to the next phase in your life.... And then, when you look back later, you will see how all of your past efforts have become precious assets in your ideal field. You will realize that none of your efforts and hardships have been wasted. (March 28, 1997, *World Tribune*)

■ Once you have decided on a job, I hope you will not be the kind of person who quits at the drop of a hat and is always insecure and complaining. Nevertheless, if, after you’ve given it your all, you decide that your job isn’t right for you and you move on, that’s perfectly all right, too. My concern is that you don’t forget you are responsible for your environment when you make your decision. (March 28, 1997, *World Tribune*)

■ I hope that each of you will realize success in your respective fields of endeavor, remembering that success does not mean giving up halfway but resolutely pursuing the path you have chosen. To this end, it is also important that you realize the place you work is a place for forging your character and growing as a human being — and by extension, it is a place for your Buddhist practice. It is a place for practicing and deepening your faith. When you view things this way, all your complaints will disappear. No one is more pathetic than someone who constantly complains. (March 28, 1997, *World Tribune*)

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