

Although this article was written for Christians in the workplace, its implications for those interested in spiritual growth, mentoring and life story work is immense.

Cycles of Works or Cycles of Grace by Sharon Swing

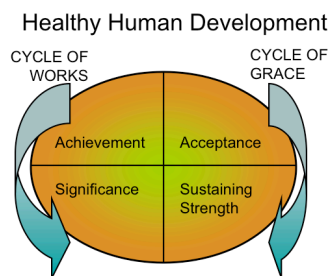
Developing people gives a deeper dimension to our work as leaders and managers. While we accomplish tasks, we have the opportunity to help people to grow and learn professionally and personally.

In healthy human development, we start with accepting people so that they can sustain strength, leading to a clear understanding of their significance, then they can contribute through their achievement. That's the way God does it. He accepts us first, with a clear understanding of our feebleness and all that we lack. Then, when we choose to stay connected to Him in relationship, he bears fruit through us. He entrusts us with more along the way.

In most of life, we usually start with expectations of achievement, and when people achieve they are treated as if they are significant. "Significant" people sustain strength, then feel acceptance. We withhold acceptance until someone performs, then reward them with it only when and if they do achieve.

Dr. Frank Lake described these as "cycles of works" and "cycles of grace."

From Dr. Frank Lake's
Clinical Theology



Imagine a workplace, church or family where people are accepted *before* they perform. I admit, it is hard to do! That is just not how most of the world works. Somehow we've bought into the idea that a person gains *should* gain acceptance through performance.

But, as a Christian, I am challenged to accept people and see the immense potential that God sees in each human being. We are helpless to do this on our own. We can only see people as God sees them when we stay close to Him.

What about how we see ourselves? Do we believe that I have to *achieve* to *earn* God's acceptance? As one reflects on their life story, a person may see clear patterns of living in a cycle of works. Sometimes, a person can identify the root experiences that cause a drive to achieve so that they will be accepted.

Knowing that God's acceptance and love is unshakable before I *do* anything, can prompt a response that is generated out of a heart of love and gratitude - without attempts at manipulating God or others to gain acceptance.

When there are performance problems in a workplace, in a family, or in any organization including the church, we can deal with people in a way that always maintains the respect due an image-bearer of God. There may be training needs, issues of maturity, mismatches of skills to the job, or even attitude problems, but we can still show acceptance of the person even if their performance fails to measure up.

I have encountered situations where I knew I needed to perform to be accepted. Unfortunately, I have gotten sucked into behaving like I have something to prove, which is neither useful nor attractive. I am responsible for my own response in those situations. My

only choice is to go back to the One who loves me unconditionally. My Father is the one who accepts me. When I can draw from His love, then I am able to serve to meet the needs of the people around me, instead of performing out of an ego-driven motive.

Eddie Gibbs, a professor at Fuller Theological Seminary commented, "We ought to treat people like Christians until they become one." Will you ask God to allow you to see the people in your life through His eyes; with unlimited potential, with acceptance and grace that has the power to transform their lives? This might be the most outrageously loving action we can take. I get excited to think about how amazingly attractive Christianity would be to a watching world if we lived in a cycle of grace, and extended that same grace to others.

I'd like to know what you think. Please write me at Sharon@oneLifemaps.com.