
Professionalism is Deserving of Praise, But Not at the Cost of One's Principles

What is the worth of a human life? Of a person's career? Someone's time? It is hard to answer such questions with no context, but when the result of one's work is closely intertwined with the answers, then a logic devoid of empathy begins to take over. This is not necessarily a bad quality. It is simply professionalism. Jon DeAngelo, a McDonald's manager interviewed by Barbara Garson in "McDonald's – We Do It All For You", is a prime example of a man who tries to maintain a balance between empathy and professionalism. Yet this trait is not without its dark side. Bruno Bettelheim discusses the professional pride of Nazi officials despite the atrocities they committed in "The Ignored Lesson of Anne Frank". Good and evil are concepts relative to circumstance and guided by perspective. What may be an unspeakable horror to one person may not be an unreasonable decision to another. Imagine there is a line in the spectrum of morality where the "Good" of common virtues blur into the "Good" of a job well done. Indeed, a hard working person is valued by any community, whether that community is McDonald's or Nazi Germany. The more a person is willing to sacrifice, both in terms of personal status and moral boundaries, to their employer, the more that person will be rewarded. Little by little, that person's personality and boundaries becomes molded into that of the ideal worker. It is not until one stands up for what is fair and just that one's freedom and individuality can be allowed to breathe. Professionalism in one's work is deserving of pride and praise, but not at the cost of one's principles and personality.

It would be easy to assume that the examples of a McDonald's manager and a Nazi official are no where close to being comparable as far as extreme acts go, but it is important to consider the similarities between the basic structures in each situation. Jon DeAngelo, being a McDonald's Operating Company store manager is subject to the corporate hierarchy in which "McOpCo stores, including some of the busiest units, are managed via a chain of command including regional supervisors, store managers and first and second assistants who can be moved from unit to unit" (261 Garson). This is not unlike the military structure of the Nazi SS officials who ran and worked in concentration camps. It is the very nature of such rigid hierarchal systems to enforce maximum work efficiency, which often leads to forcing its workers to sacrifice their personal boundaries and convictions for a greater professional reward. Indeed, after being questioned about McDonald's high turnover rate, Jon DeAngelo explains that "As a manager I am judged by the statistical reports which come off the computer. Which basically means my crew labor productivity" (263 Garson). DeAngelo's position as a manager was not given nor maintained based on attributes commonly seen in an ideal leadership role, but is instead dependent on the simple economic efficiency required by his supervisors. Yet he has

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found a comfortable medium in which he is able to raise productivity while making his worker's shifts more enjoyable: "I try to make it fun...I know that people like to work on my shifts. I have the highest crew labor productivity in the area" (264 Garson). At that point DeAngelo could be considered sitting directly on that line where being a "Good" person merges with being a "Good" manager.

Dr. Mengele and Dr. Nyiszli, both Nazi SS physicians, certainly demonstrated their professionalism even as they were complicit in horrifying acts of mass genocide. Bettelheim references Olga Lengyel's experiences in Auschwitz as she describes Dr. Mengele as

"A typical example of the 'business as usual' attitude...How Dr. Mengele took all correct medical precautions during childbirth, rigorously observing all aseptic principles, cutting the umbilical cord with greatest care, etc. But only half an hour later he sent mother and infant to be burned in the crematorium" (86-87).

What twisted series of events and factors must have occurred to bring not just this one, but many thousands of people to actively work towards the purpose of what is undoubtedly evil? "It came as a severe shock that supposedly civilized nations could stoop to such inhuman acts" (77 Bettelheim). The fascist Nazi government stoked and ignited the flames of Germany's worst fears and hatreds, using Jews, homosexuals, and many others as scapegoats. Pre-existing bias and discrimination, stemming from the darker side of Germany's collective personality, was used to great effect, making the transition to employing the use of death camps. Yet Nazi officials such as Dr. Nyiszli, "...didn't alter the fact that he...was a participant in the crimes of the SS" (87 Bettelheim). These men took pride in their professional work without any regard to morality. They have crossed that fault in the moral spectrum, where the quality of their work eclipsed the virtue of their actions.

So what can be done to prevent such terrible actions in the name of professionalism? Or even the malpractices that occur in a McDonald's store? The best one can do is to stick to one's morals and to stand up for oneself. In DeAngelo's case, he decided to turn in his resignation as manager. It is understandable considering his statement that says, "...you can't talk to a happy McDonald's manager because 98 percent are miserable", implying that he was deeply unsatisfied with his job (267 Garson). The systematic manipulation of workers by hierarchal institutions may not be able to be stopped by one person, but if there are enough people willing to stand up against unjust and unfair actions, then gradually a change will occur. Bettelheim supports this point with the following:

"If today, Negroes in Africa march against the guns of a police that defends apartheid – even if hundreds of dissenters are shot down and tens of thousands rounded up in camps – their fight will sooner or later assure them of a chance for liberty and equality" (88).

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As entire ethnic groups stand up against their oppressors, so too do unions of workers stand up to their corporate employers for what is right. For it is the responsibility of us all to build a world for future generations that is better than the one we grew up in, and that means not putting misguided professionalism before our morals and convictions. DeAngelo, though an effective and efficient manager at McDonald's, decided to resign, giving up his "professionalism" and standing up to the company's dehumanizing conditions. A far cry from the Nazi SS officials who prided themselves on their professionalism even as their humanity was eaten away. Though the strive for professionalism is still a top priority amongst many people in the modern world, one must keep an eye out for those that would seek to take advantage of oneself or others for its benefit. This is a fight that has raged on ever since humans recognized right and wrong and is not likely to end anytime soon, but with the rise of the internet and mass communication, more people can stand together and show solidarity against the terrible things of the world. The good guys slowly winning, but there's a long way to go. Let's just do our best and stay above that line.

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