

Surviving the Drought

By Sheila Luck

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I've been watching the stock market for the last six months. I remember thinking that it was low when the Dow dropped below 12,000. Then I thought it had bottomed out when the Dow dropped below 11,000. But then it kept going down, and now it's having trouble holding at 8,000.

How low can it go? There are companies behind each of these stocks. They must have some value. They couldn't have lost over one third of their actual value in just six months.

There are people whose money was once invested in these companies. Where did they put their money? Where did my savings go? Where did my IRA go? Where did our daughters' college funding go? I was counting on that money. It seems to have evaporated.

I had my faith in that money and in that economic system.

Almost fifteen years ago, I was working for a company that began teaching its employees that the employment contract had changed. They said that companies will no longer look out for its employees with a sense of loyalty. They said it was imperative that each employee look out for themselves by managing their own training, by improving their resumes through new experiences, and by relying on themselves for their career success. They advised that it would be a mistake to trust the company to care about your career success.

That was a new message for me at the time. I had always worked under a concept of mutual loyalty. I believed that mutual loyalty enabled employees to focus decisions on the needs of the company without regard to how decisions would impact the employee personally, because employees that enabled the company to succeed would be rewarded and protected.

This training highlighted a change that shattered my faith in the employment system of corporate America. It highlighted a change that would hurt, in my mind, both the success of corporate America and the long term employment stability of the employee. We are now a transient, employment society, with each employee looking out for him or her self, with limited regard to the employer's success. A transient, employment society creates an unstable employment environment in corporate America.

I believed in the importance of mutual loyalty. My faith was misplaced.

A company that I once worked for has recently terminated another 75 office workers. A friend sent me a partial list of the terminated workers. I didn't recognize all of the names, but the list included Bill, Keith, Jill, Kathryn and Dan, among several others. Names of people that I thought had been valued employees, quality employees, employees that any employer would want to employ.

I wonder what these terminated workers think about their new employment situation. Did they trust the company to treat them with loyalty in exchange for their hard work? Did they have faith in their manager, believing that he or she would protect their positions? Do they draw strength from their skills and experiences, creating a continuing hope for a promising future? Did they place their faith in themselves?

Many of us have heard that success in life is a choice. The message goes like this: Get a good education, work hard and continually pursue better opportunities. It is all about you, and you can do it. Put your faith in yourself.

What happens to quality employees when at no fault of their own, they lose their jobs. What happens when the employment circumstances are beyond their control? What happens to their faith in themselves?

Faith placed in man or manmade systems, whether in money, the stock market, an employer, or in self is misplaced. Such faith will ultimately fail. Jeremiah tells us in chapter 17, that the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the LORD. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives." (NIV)

But faith placed in God brings many blessings. Jeremiah, in the same chapter, also tells us, "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." (NIV)

Keep your faith in Him alone and times of drought will not harm you.