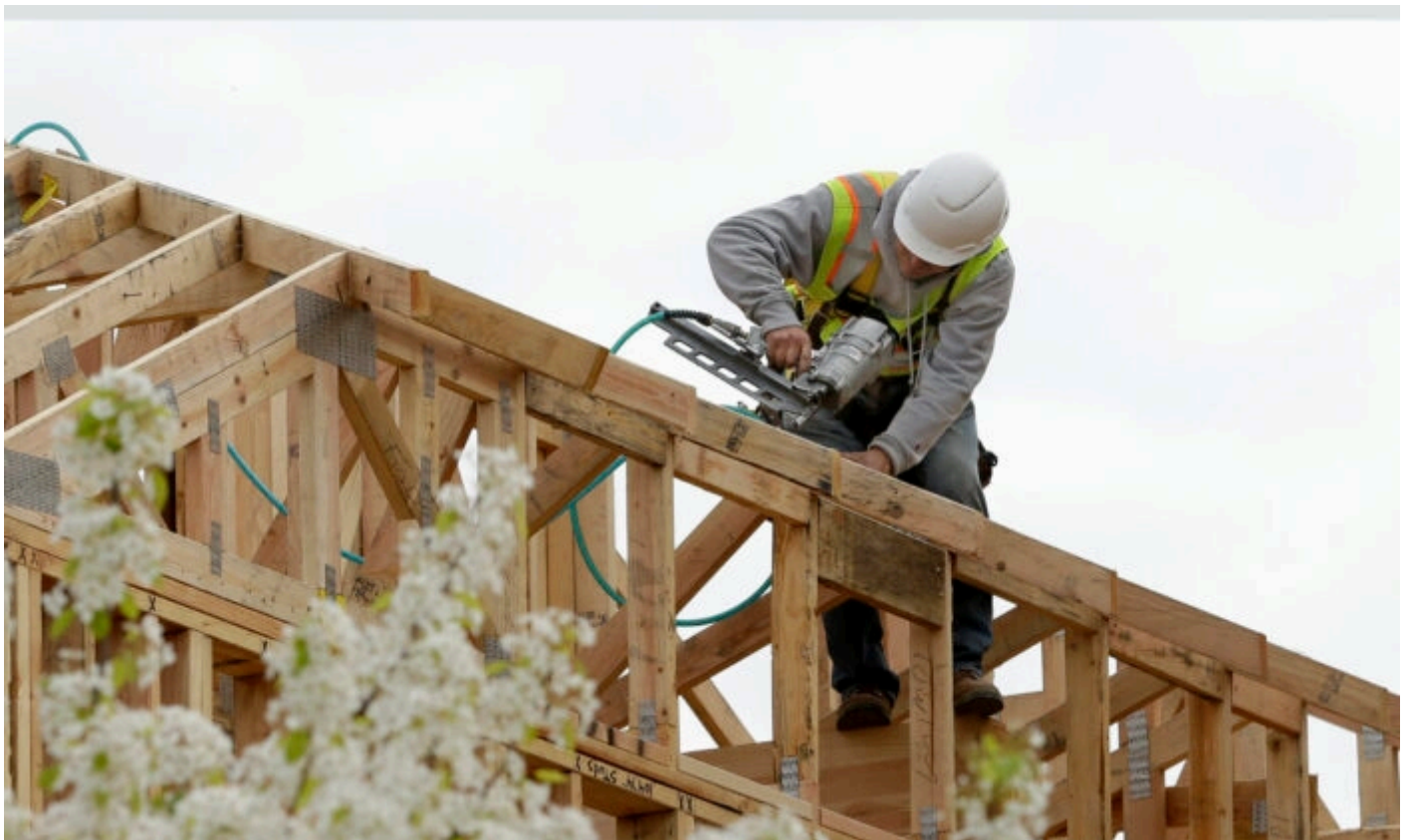


The Disappearing Company Man

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Work is done on an apartment building under construction in Sacramento, Calif., in a file photo. Rich Pedroncelli, File/AP Photo



By Timothy S. Goeglein
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Commentary

Sixty years ago, one of the compliments often bestowed on an American male was that he was a “good company man.”

What did that mean exactly? In most cases, it was a man who valued hard work, loyalty, and providing for his family as an important responsibility. He was a man of purpose.

Now, 60 years later, many are asking, as Nicholas Eberstadt of the American Enterprise Institute [does](#): “Where Did All the Men Go?”

Just before Christmas, the Center for Immigration Studies released a new [study](#) documenting that the share of working-age men between the ages of 16 and 64 who are not participating the workforce has risen dramatically since the 1960s, from 11.3 percent not working or looking for work to 22.1 percent as of April 2024.

So why are men choosing not to work—not to be “good company men”? Why are they becoming increasingly detached and isolated as they no longer live a life of purpose beyond themselves?

There are many reasons for this sad phenomenon. Eberstadt, in his [book](#) “Men Without Work,” cites several, including 1) the rise of women in the workforce who have assumed what had been traditionally male jobs; and 2) men raised without fathers who modeled and taught them the value of work.

Now, please do not get me wrong. It is wonderful that women now have opportunities that were not available to them 60 years ago. The cultural shift that occurred was not necessarily that women were entering the workforce and having access to equal opportunities. Instead, the cultural shift was that the role of men to be a provider and protector for their families was diminished and sometimes mocked in our culture.

This is particularly true as one looks at the demographics of the men who are not in the workforce or choosing not to work at all: American-born men with a high school education or less, who are unmarried, without children, or African American.

This leads to one area that I think is a major contributing factor: the failure of our current educational system to prepare men to enter the workforce. Sixty years ago, a high school education provided enough

training and knowledge to obtain a blue-collar, labor-intensive job. Shop classes, for instance, were filled with young men who learned basic skills to become functional members of society.

Now, many of these foundational classes have disappeared. In addition, the alarmingly low [rates](#) of literacy, especially in our inner cities, show that many men do not possess even the most basic form of education needed to secure and hold a job.

And the ramifications, not only for American men but for our society, are huge.

Men who do not work, as Eberstadt has pointed out, are more likely to receive some form of public assistance.

Meanwhile, the number of boys and men who are doing very, very poorly continues to rise, while the number of those who are doing very, very well seemingly is not. As a society, we are seeing increasing numbers of boys and young men “fail to launch” into adulthood, seem directionless and unwilling to accept personal responsibility, engage in violent acts, and fall into increasing despair, resulting in major societal problems such as the current opioid crisis.

All of these are symptoms of a great problem whose root cause is the loss of male identity.

We also need to examine the messages our society is sending to men. Instead of telling them to live a life where “you do you” and seek only self-pleasure, we need to help them understand the importance of making a lifelong contribution to family and society and what their ultimate purpose in life is besides self-gratification.

When young men find their purpose in life, they become disciplined and focused. They realize their lives are not their own. They come to model self-sacrifice and unconditional love to those around them. That is how they become “good company men,” whether their work is blue-collar or white-collar.

So, how do we restore men to the American workforce? First, we must tell them that their role is valued and their work is important and provide them with the tools to succeed through our educational system. Second, rather than looking down on those men choosing not to work, we need to come alongside them and provide them with encouragement and purpose.

By doing so, their anger will be replaced with joy, confusion with direction, and despair with hope. We can break the current cycle of men dropping out of the workforce and return them to their roles as providers to their families and society as a whole. We can once again become a society that values the “good company man.”

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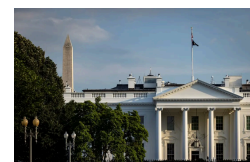
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