Business as Mission

Adapted from a presentation given by Jason Schrock at an AF business seminar

We often think of early Anabaptists as spiritual giants who bravely stood up for what they believed despite persecution. We may not think about the fact that they were as human as you and me. They had physical needs. They needed food and shelter. They needed to make a living.

Claus-Peter Clasen listed early Anabaptist occupations in *Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525-1618*, as baker, hatmaker, city clerk, weaver, miller, cooper, tailor, cabinet maker, bottle maker, shoemaker, barber surgeon, harness maker, schoolmaster, printer, professor, and stone mason.[1] Were our spiritual forefathers less spiritual because they owned businesses and made a living? Does it make us less spiritual to operate businesses?

Making a living is essential and important. It's also important that our businesses function as a mission, testifying of God and His truth to customers, employees, and vendors, as well as to neighbors, passersby, government workers, salespeople, community organizations, and employees' families.

Mission = our responsibility to convey God's message to humanity.

Over forty years ago my employer at the time asked if I would be interested in acquiring his business when he retired. I was interested, but I saw the business more as a way to earn a living for my young family. It wasn't until later that I understood more fully how our way of doing business affects others and can be used to glorify God.

What Is Mission?

I use the word "mission" in this article to describe our responsibility to convey God's message to humanity—who He is, our sinful condition before Him, and how He reaches out in mercy to restore our fellowship with Him. Christian businesspeople have the privilege and opportunity to partner in God's mission. God's message is for everyone, not just for us and our benefit.

The good news of the Gospel. At the beginning of time, God assigned Adam to dress and keep the Garden of Eden. It would be interesting to know more about Adam's job description. I don't think he necessarily needed to work to make sure he had food and shelter in the Garden. Regardless, God wanted him busy and working.

Because of sin, however, the earth became cursed, and Adam was consigned to work in a fallen creation. Ever

[1] Clasen, Claus-Peter. Essay. In *Anabaptism; a Social History, 1525–1618: Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany*, 432–36. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972.

since, man has needed to work to survive, leading to the development of many different trades, such as agriculture, forestry, mining, metalworking, carpentry, fishing, and transportation. All of these industries are geared to meet man's physical needs.

But God didn't create man just to work. He wanted to have fellowship. At first, Adam and Eve enjoyed a special fellowship with God, but because of sin, that relationship was broken. God then sent His Son to restore the fellowship that was lost through man's sin. This is the good news of the Gospel. As Christians, our primary mission is to share that good news, and our businesses are a tool to help us do that.

Jesus' mission. Though Jesus' mission on earth was primarily spiritual, He worked in Joseph's carpenter shop. Jesus and the apostles often spoke about the right use of material things, but Jesus' overriding message addressed our spiritual condition. Even in the material, God expects His children to bring the message of restoration to all.

Jesus isn't here today walking down the streets of local towns, but He has instructed His followers to live and interact in a way that points all people toward Him. God wants us to be His heart, His face, His hands, His feet, and His voice in meeting both the physical and spiritual needs of our fellow man. An occupation is one method God uses to fulfil that purpose of restoring the fallen race.

God wants to use our businesses as lighthouses that show people there is a God who loves them and wants fellowship with them.

God wants to use our businesses as lighthouses that show people there is a God who loves them and wants fellowship with them.

Purpose of Business

Three purposes of business are to provide for our own, to meet the needs of others, and to be good stewards of the resources God has given.

To provide for our own. Businesses help meet our basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter. God expects us to work to meet our physical needs. The Apostle Paul stated emphatically that if one does not work, neither should he eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

As business owners, it is not wrong to be thankful for God's provision through business income just as God provides for others through employment. Family businesses can also provide a beneficial environment for children to learn, grow, and develop unique gifts and capabilities.

To meet the needs of others. In addition to meeting our families' needs, we are also to provide for the poor and those unable to provide for themselves.[2] The Apostle Paul instructed the church in Ephesians to work with their hands so that they would have—lots of money in their pockets? No. He says, *that they would have to give to those in need*.[3] God instituted the blessing of giving to counteract our tendency towards selfish accumulation. We can give both to local needs within our congregations and communities and to needs all around the world.

Beyond material needs, every person also has spiritual needs. Remain watchful for opportunities to meet those needs in people who interact with your business. This might include assisting an employee with relationship struggles, incorporating discipleship helps into the workplace, or acknowledging God and His guidance in an interview with the local newspaper. Providing a physically and spiritually safe environment for people to work in is another way to bless others.

To be good stewards of the resources God has given. Jesus told the story of a master who gave ten talents (units of money) to one servant, five to another, and one talent to another. The servant who did not put his one talent to work was condemned.

A fine line runs between using God-given resources for His glory and placing too much emphasis on personal or monetary gain. Our Anabaptist culture teaches us to be industrious, frugal, and resourceful, which often leads to business success and wealth. However, God gives us

[2] Mark 14:7 "For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always."

[3] Ephesians 4:28 "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."

many opportunities to share that abundance to extend His kingdom. Thinking of our business as a mission helps us seize those opportunities.

A Christian Business Is Not . . .

Solely wealth oriented. Much of Christian business advice projects a health-and-wealth gospel rather than a sacrificial life for the cause of the true Gospel. The business world has a ruthless dog-eat-dog mentality. For several years we posted this verse in our office as a reminder: "He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye, and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him" (Proverbs 28:22). I once read a quote that went something like this, "No business is a success which must ruin men to make money." Making money at the expense of others is not a successful business.

More important than church or family. Businesspeople can become workaholics, addicted to the driving force of getting things done. While success in business does require disciplined use of our time, we must not neglect time for God's kingdom. I have found that my family and my church are more important than going to the office. If I have a sermon to prepare for Sunday, I have to say, "I can't go to the office this morning. I need to meditate on the Word of God because that's more important right now."

A method to hoard for oneself. God expects us to use the resources He has given for our own sustenance, but businesspeople with a call to advance God's kingdom will invest their resources and time in His causes, both locally and internationally.

Primarily focused on personal advantage. A Christian in business isn't primarily focused on personal advantage. He has a much larger vision of benefitting family, employees, community, and church.

Making money at the expense of others is not a successful business.

A Christian Business Is . . .

An opportunity to show God's care for all people. Businesspeople may feel corporate pressure to produce, but production should not come at the expense of care and concern for people. That includes accommodating the needs (though not necessarily all the wants) of our workers as much as possible. I have often said there is much more to life than working for Smith Seed, so if an employee makes a legitimate request for a few days off, I grant the request. Employees are people, not commodities.

Under the lordship of God's Son and His Spirit. In business with mission, people endeavor to portray Christ in all their words and actions. Of course, this should be a Christian's normal mode of life that naturally carries over into business. We don't hold ourselves to different standards for business than in our personal spiritual lives.

Be sensitive to the nudging of God's Spirit. You are not knowledgeable enough to always know what's best. Sit back and allow God's Spirit to give direction.

Adheres to the principles of God's Word. God's Word includes many principles, but two we have been challenged on in our business are *consistent observance of the Lord's Day* and *Biblical modesty*.[4]

We have felt a lot of pressure to receive grass seed on Sunday, especially during harvest. People need to get the crop in, and they expect us to take their seed anytime. However, we have made it a policy that we will not do business on Sunday, our day of rest and worship.

Biblical modesty is another area where the laws of the land allow us to practice our beliefs. We have the freedom to create policies for how we would like our workers to dress. Christian businesspeople are responsible to provide a workplace environment that encourages pure thoughts and moral living.

Unethical practices abound in business. Some may say that cheating in business is the only way we can make ends meet, or that if everyone else is operating this way, why shouldn't

[4] Hebrews 10:25 "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." By having a policy of not working on Sunday, no one is expected to miss assembling with others for worship services either to work in the company or do business with the company. This has been a long-held practice among conservative Anabaptist churches.

1 Corinthians 12:23 "And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely [unpresentable] parts have more abundant comeliness [modesty]."

we? However, God's way is always superior, although it may not be what the consultants, bankers, and lawyers would say. I have a lot of respect for those professions, but ultimately we need to pattern our businesses according to God's Word.

Characteristics of Business as Mission

The Golden Rule should be the standard in all business relationships.[5] When a question arises about how to handle a situation, ask yourself, "How would I like to be treated?" The following principles can help a business maintain a Christian testimony:

Fairness. Business owners can be tempted to play favorites with employees who are family members, close friends, or fellow church members. To other employees, these favorites may seem untouchable. When issues arise, be slow to take sides. Fairness dictates that everyone is dealt with if they are causing difficulty or performing poorly. You might even need to let someone go. These are difficult decisions, but fairness raises the morale of the rest of the workers.

Compassion. Business owners must show empathy toward employees and business associates. They are souls that need God's love, and God's love is shown through His followers. It means something to employees and business associates when you remember specifics about them. Ask an employee how his mother is doing with her heart issue or how his family is doing if they have recently gone through a difficult time. Taking a personal interest draws people to you and to the God you follow.

A few years ago, one of my employees shared, "My wife and I are having some real difficulties. We wondered if you would be willing to counsel with us." He knew I was a minister. For several weeks, we met once a week in a conference room at the office and went over principles of marriage. Even if you can't offer marriage counseling, be willing and eager to be involved in your employees' lives outside the workplace.

Generosity. Jesus said, "Give and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."[6] That sounds like a pretty good business principle, doesn't it? It sounds like we should give all we can so we can get more in return! However, giving for our own benefit should not be a motivating factor for generosity. Rather, we give to meet needs as part of our Christian walk. The principle of stewardship says that the more God blesses us, the more we can share with others.

It is easy to say that God owns our businesses, but would an onlooker conclude that this is true? Are you using business in God's service to advance His kingdom? Have you purposefully given your business to God? How generous you are is one way to define who owns your business. [7]

Profit sharing can be one form of generosity. Profit sharing can boost morale and give employees the opportunity and incentive to perform in ways that benefit everyone.

Honesty. Honesty is not just a good business practice; it's a requirement for a Christian. But honesty needs to go deeper than requirement. A red flag goes up in my mind when people tout their honesty. Talk isn't enough. We must show our honesty by the way we do business.

Most of the Quakers who moved to the New World from Europe were from lower levels of society. After arriving in Pennsylvania, they became wealthy. In fact, one hundred years after arriving, eight of the wealthiest seventeen people in Philadelphia were Quakers. Quakers were known to be scrupulously honest, and customers flocked to do business with them.

People appreciate honesty, and our honesty makes us enjoyable to do business with. Resist masking defects and trying to slip in something of substandard quality. Keep agreements, even if they are unwritten.

Speech. Business as mission disallows swearing and dirty talk. Others will notice that the speech in our businesses is different. I've done business with many people who begin to curse or swear and then stop themselves and say, "Oh, pardon my French." They recognize our Christian testimony and understand that ungodly speech doesn't fit in our culture.

[5] Luke 6:31 "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

[6] Luke 6:38

[7] 2 Corinthians 4:7 "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

A businessman from Baltimore once sat in our conference room to discuss an issue. He had a hard time expressing himself and finally burst out, "The problem with dealing with you folks is that it limits my vocabulary eighty percent!"

Integrity. Businesses who operate as mission rise to a high level of integrity. Integrity includes respecting laws, copyrights, and patents. It means adhering to traffic laws and building codes. Nothing should be done in a shady or slipshod way. You don't have to deceive people to make money. We are to show God's character to a lost world. Your personal testimony and the church's witness will be hindered if integrity is not the standard for all your business transactions.

Non-alliance with unbelievers. As God's representatives in the business world, we cannot change men's hearts by legislation. Though I may be sympathetic with those fighting for a cause, political involvement is a detriment to our Anabaptist testimony of being in the world without being of the world.

Alliance can also happen in advertising. For example, our business is sometimes asked to sponsor an advertisement for the Veteran's Day parade. As much as I acknowledge veterans' sacrifices for the kingdom of this world, advertising associated with a military parade would be contrary to the Anabaptist position of nonmilitary involvement.

Non-retaliation. A business owner with business as mission does not try to get even with others. That doesn't mean you continue doing business with someone who takes advantage of you, but neither does it mean bad-mouthing that person. Trying to even the score is futile, and it hinders your witness as a follower of Jesus. That includes initiating lawsuits. The courts have their place, and I appreciate lawyers and judges who help us understand legalities. However, using the court system to rectify what we feel is wrong or unjust goes against Jesus' teachings of turning the other cheek and suffering loss rather than fighting for our rights.

Willingness to take loss. Employees sometimes cause losses through honest mistakes. I remember some of my mistakes as an employee. Not once did my employer make me pay for something, although he sometimes reprimanded me and encouraged me to do better next time. People with whom we have a contract might not always keep their word. Losses are frustrating, but those with business as mission are willing to take those losses. They will find a way instead to make up for the losses.

Everyone we come in contact with should sense that their lives have a deeper purpose than dollars and cents.

Hindrances to Business as Mission

Many of the things that hinder business as mission have to do with anger, greed, or a lack of self-control. An employee who often irritated me was once doing something he knew he shouldn't. I flew off the handle, confronting him angrily. Later I had to go back and make that right. That kind of behavior does not portray business as God's mission.

Another hindrance to business as mission is placing profit ahead of spiritual values. For example, you might have a hard time letting go of a key employee who is called to serve elsewhere. If a church, mission, or God's leading calls your employee to fill a position in the Lord's work, don't stand in the way. God often fills the vacancy when the employee leaves, and He can make a vacancy again if and when that person returns from a time of service.

Beneficiaries of Business as Mission

When a business operates as mission, its employees, suppliers, customers, family, and local community gain value. Most importantly, a business with mission benefits the kingdom of God and helps build His church. Everyone we come in contact with should sense that their lives have a deeper purpose than dollars and cents.

The Anabaptists of the sixteenth century left a legacy that still influences our lives today. What kind of a legacy are we leaving? If the world stands, what kind of a legacy will your business have one hundred years from now?

JASON SCHROCK *is from Halsey, Oregon, and a co-owner of Smith Seed Services. Jason has been a minister at the Tangent/ Halsey Mennonite Church for 46 years.*

More business articles are available in our business and employee booklets. Order online or call or write us at:
Anabaptist Financial 55 Whisper Creek Drive, Lewisburg, PA 17837 | Phone: 1-800-653-9817 | Web: afweb.org