How Our Values Impact Business Decisions

By Nolan Bechtel

All business owners feel the pressures of the daily decisions that are part of running a business. We are conscious of those decisions and intentional about making them. In contrast, we aren't always conscious of or intentional about our values. Yet it is our values that lead us in one direction or another as we make decisions. Values shape our goals, and our goals shape the direction we go.

In this article we will examine seven values that are imperative for the Christian businessperson.

Our values are what shape us, setting our feet on a particular course, and bringing us to a specific end!

1. Kingdom Building

A kingdom business is an enterprise directed by the Holy Spirit and managed by a godly leader that uses its time, talent, and money to meet the spiritual and/or physical needs of the community around them to advance God's purpose.[1]

Business dare not become an isolated compartment of our lives untouched by the values we claim to hold. We need a source of control in our business ventures. Business decisions are not "just business." They should be a matter of prayer. A desire to please God helps us maintain Biblical business practices and make choices that are consistent with God's character.

The value of kingdom building must prevail over one's desire for personal wealth. The drive to get rich cannot be the reason for a Christian business, because it's not a Christian motive. In His teaching on wealth and worldliness, Jesus says, in effect, "If My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants build earthly kingdoms. But since My servants are building the kingdom of God, they don't encumber themselves with earthly kingdoms!" (See John 18:36, Matthew 6:19–21).

Putting God's kingdom first isn't natural to our humanity. Cultivating a heart desire to build God's kingdom is a guard against our natural, base desire to build personal empires for ourselves. Kingdom building is not a value we can achieve or change with personal effort—it requires surrender to God and a regenerated heart.

2. A Godly Testimony

I would rather be known as a Christian than as a merchant. (James Cash Penney, founder of JCPenney)

Preserving a Christian testimony in business requires a certain amount of detachment due to our status as

[1] Courtney Rountree Mills, The BAM Review, https://businessasmission.com/7-markers-for-a-kingdom-business-a-framework-for-entrepreneurs-top-5/ (accessed on September 14, 2020).

strangers and pilgrims. We are in the world but not of the world.[2] Because we rub shoulders with worldly people in business dealings, we must make a conscious effort to remember our heavenly citizenship.

We all care about the image of our businesses, and we face pressure to conform to business practices around us. However, this value of being a godly testimony calls us to consistently portray Christ in our businesses. Our desire to maintain a godly testimony makes a difference in the types of people we hire for positions that prominently represent our companies. This value also prevents us from hiring unbelievers to accomplish things in our businesses that are contrary to Biblical principles. From collection practices to fair negotiation to paying bills, all facets of business are subject to the test of a consistent testimony.

This value urges us to do more than just what we know as "good business": performing quality work, providing good service, and keeping our promises. Advertising is an opportunity to reach out and present Christ. Advertisements, hold music, free literature racks, email signatures, pens, and calendars provide opportunities for phrases or verses that remind our customers of eternal values and principles.

I typically don't advertise at sports events, but I did have the opportunity to display an 8' x 16' billboard on the ball diamond fence at our local public school. I nabbed it as a good way to challenge the Estacada high school students to think beyond their sports. Our business slogan, "Live Every Day for Jesus," was printed boldly across the bottom of the banner.

Leaving a Christian testimony is most effective when it becomes part of our company culture. Our Christian employees should understand that this value allows them time to witness to and listen to seeking and hurting customers. Not all our employees may be believers, but they should understand that they must operate within the scope of acceptable testimony as they represent the business.

[2] John 17:15–16 "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

3. Relationships

You add value to people when you value them. (John Maxwell)

A secular business may view employees and customers only from a financial perspective. For a Christian business, they are much more than just numbers and dollar signs. They are people who need affirmation, encouragement, or a listening ear. Interaction with them becomes an opportunity to help them grow. Have you ever hung on to an employee who, in a business sense, would have been smarter to let go, but you wanted to help them in some way? That's what it's like to value relationships in business decisions.

Valuing relationships brings stability to a company.

Valuing relationships brings stability to a company. Employees tend to stay with a company that cares for them. Customers love a company that takes time for relationships. Company policies and agendas matter, but prioritizing relationships brings more value to a company than either of these.

Relationships require an investment of time and patience. With the pressure of a crowded schedule, we sometimes resist taking time for employees' or customers' personal problems, especially when we think the issues are simple enough, they should just get over it!

Time is sometimes our most difficult sacrifice as employers: time to talk with the employee who lacks self-confidence and feels the world is against him or time to talk to the contractor who is going through a divorce. I remember needing to apologize to a customer for being abrupt and not taking time for him. He was a big talker, and I thought I knew where he was going with the conversation. I had been in the middle of time-sensitive work and had cut him off.

Never be too busy to take time to care. It's easy to be short in conversation when under pressure and to give the sense that it's time to end the conversation.

4. Life

10 fingers, 10 toes, 2 eyes, and 1 nose . . . safety counts! (a safety slogan)

Valuing life must prevail over an emphasis on efficiency. As plain people, we are known more for our ingenuity and efficiency than for our safe work environments. Valuing life means we won't disable safety

features to enable higher efficiency.

Valuing life requires sacrifice and expense. Safety guards, lock-out/tag-out procedures, seat belts, hands-free communication while driving, and limited driving hours all cost money, time, and efficiency. But if we value our employees' safety, we will follow the laws governing safety procedures.

God's Law emphasized personal accountability in safety issues. Exodus 21:28–29 says, "If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death."

Being a business owner brings a sense of real accomplishment, but the believer realizes that it all comes from God and is ultimately for His glory.

We sometimes think of safety laws as foolish and unnecessary, and sometimes they are unnecessary for the careful individual. But obeying OSHA laws is not only about avoiding liability—it's about caring for people's welfare. Whether it's marking zones that customers cannot enter, packaging materials safely for transport, or considering consumer safety in our products, valuing life should be a priority.

In general, we as Anabaptist people place a low emphasis on insurance. We also don't take others to law, and we avoid using the law defensively when faced with lawsuits and worker's compensation claims. Therefore, Anabaptist businesses hiring mostly Anabaptist people can be tempted to be careless regarding safety issues because we aren't worried about lawsuits. The opposite should be true, and because we highly value each person's life, we ought to have the safest workplaces out there.

5. Honesty

No legacy is so rich as honesty. (William Shakespeare)

Businesses must make a profit to survive, but as a matter of principle, honesty must always prevail over profit. Honesty isn't the easy road, and if it isn't rooted deeply in our hearts, it will be lost to compromise. When honesty is a way of living, it takes a lot of the pressure out of decision-making in difficult situations because this factor is settled: we *will* be honest!

Honesty shapes our goals in maintaining our business reputation. There is the lie that's told to maintain a reputation, and then there's a reputation that's maintained because we won't tell a lie—we must live by the latter. Mistakes are inevitable, but more crucial than the mistakes is how we handle them. Our approach with our customers should be "If we made a mistake, we'll correct it," rather than a default insistence that "we did it right."

Honesty always pays, even when it costs; for example, the $20,000 project 150 miles away where we rolled a 2" mechanical seam panel with striations like we typically do. Before our driver got back to the shop, we got the call everyone dreads: the panel was supposed to be flat pan. We had a trail of paperwork confirming it was our fault, and the next day we were rolling it all over again.

Misrepresenting product and product capability are probably the most frequent areas of dishonesty in business. Warranties that don't give a fair representation are also on the list. In addition, we should be honest in how we represent our company's policies and benefits to employees.

6. Stewardship

Who then is a faithful and wise servant . . . ? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. (Matthew 24:45–46)

The Christian businessman's sense of stewardship will prevail over his right to ownership. Our world admires successful business owners. Being a business owner brings a sense of real accomplishment, but the believer realizes that it all comes from God and is ultimately for His glory.

Seeing yourself as a steward requires an attitude of humility and servanthood. It's easy to lose this part of the stewardship principle and live as though we deserve to be served, especially because we hire people to work for us.

Abuse of the ownership perspective leads to pride. The greater our emphasis on *mine*, the more reactionary we tend to be when *mine* is wasted, damaged, abused, or lost. This does not bring glory to God.

Stewards manage business with goals that bring profit

to others. Stewardship transforms the stingy, clutching hand into a caring, open hand. This value works to profit employees, to bless the local church, and to contribute to needs of organizations reaching the world.

A "God as owner of all" perspective motivates all decisions for His glory. This value helps us sort through decisions of growth, equipment purchases, and other company spending. Knowing that we are stewards of God's things influences decisions about equipment maintenance and business processes to aid in efficiency and profitability.

7. Quality

And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. (Colossians 3:23)

Minimizing loss is crucial to any profitable business. There is a ditch on both sides of this road. One side is so focused on loss prevention that we go to market with substandard product rather than assume the loss of the mistake. The other side is being so quality-focused that we produce an unaffordable product or need to sell at a loss to move it.

A business that follows the Golden Rule will find it natural to value quality in service and product. It goes back to the principle Jesus declared to treat others the way you would like to be treated. Following are some ways you can give others the quality and service that you'd expect to receive if you were in their shoes.

Implement processes that bring added value to customers, such as checks and balances for quality control. Reliable and consistent processes are invaluable and will help build any business's reputation.

Empower employees to always treat the customer fairly. Employees need to understand company policy and expectation regarding their own performance. They should also be empowered to make decisions to keep the customer happy as much of the time as possible.

Go the second mile to achieve customer satisfaction. This teaching of Jesus is not always easy to do. Doing so, however, will tend to draw attention to Himself, and as we acknowledge Him it clearly identifies who we are following!

Conclusion

I believe no amount of business school training or work experience can teach what is ultimately a matter of personal character. Businesses are not dishonest or greedy, people are. Thus, a business, successful or not, is merely a reflection of the character of its leadership. (S. Truett Cathy, founder of Chick-fil-A)

Consider your business values. Do you see areas in your business that need change? Any mountains your business needs to climb? Change in business is often a difficult terrain. Our habits keep our businesses in the same old ruts, and our weaknesses lead to predictable failures.

Progress demands change. Applying our values requires change. I challenge you to climb the mountain before you. It may be rugged and intimidating, but it beckons you to conquer it and see what lies beyond. As you climb this mountain of change, the views allow you to see your path from a different and higher perspective.

Embrace the pain and answer the call: old dogs *can* learn new tricks, and old ruts can lead to new, untrodden territory! After you get past the pain of the initial work of those changes, you will wonder why it took so long to conquer your resistance!

AF Stewardship Resources

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