

November 13th, 2004

Bridging the Gulf Between Faith and Work (Memphis, TN)

C. William Pollard

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/pollard_papers

 Part of the [Business Commons](#), and the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Pollard, C. William, "Bridging the Gulf Between Faith and Work (Memphis, TN)" (2004). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 30.
https://digitalcommons.spu.edu/pollard_papers/30

This Speech is brought to you for free and open access by the Work and Faith at Digital Commons @ SPU. It has been accepted for inclusion in C. William Pollard Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ SPU.

**Germantown Presbyterian Church Workshop
Memphis TN
November 13, 2004**

“Bridging the Gulf Between Faith and Work”

C. William Pollard

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you today. I have looked forward to this time of being with you.

As I share some thoughts with you today about life and work, I hope to stimulate some questions and we will have a time for questions and dialogue either at the conclusion of my talk or during the balance of the day.

Now, most of us here today are business people. We have or will spend much of our time at work and hopefully make money in the process. Yet we also are people of faith. As Christians, we believe in God and the redeeming work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

We have, for the most part, been conditioned to live within two separate worlds - one labeled secular and the other sacred.

In fact, in the early part of my career, this distinction and division between the two worlds was so strong, I was a bifurcated person. My church and family and friends were one part of my life and my business and profession were a completely separate part of my life. It was a divided world with little common ground. My faith, although nourished and protected, wasn't really making a difference in the area of my life that was demanding most of my waking hours.

In my penchant to define and protect my faith, I was, in reality, circling the wagons around it, encouraging a mentality of withdrawal instead of involvement, of taking and not giving, knowing the truth but not relating it into all areas of my life.

So then, how does a person of faith integrate that faith in a diverse and pluralistic marketplace? As a Christian, my faith, by its very nature, is a defined faith. Definition brings clarity. It allows for order – a systematic way of thinking and learning. Definition, however, also sets boundary lines, determines limits of what is and what is not, what is truth and what is error. It can result in shutting out those who do not fit that definition.

What do I do?

1. Do I try to redefine my faith to make it more inclusive, tolerant, acceptable? Water it down so as to be not so offensive?

2. Do I become more aggressive in proclaiming my faith as defined and use my leadership or influence to propagate and impose my faith?

3. Do I simply forget it, accept the prevailing view of the separation between the sacred and the secular and the premise that religion and business just don't mix?

4. Or can I live and share my faith in such a way that it can be examined, tested by my colleagues and fellow workers and, yes, even embraced by some – all within the context of a community that works together to produce goods and services and generate profits and also cares for the development of people not only in what they are doing but also in who they are becoming?

I have chosen the latter. It has been a growing and developing experience for me. There were lessons that needed to be learned and I am still in the process of learning.

Those lessons have stretched over three separate careers – 10 years as a practicing attorney, 5 years as a college professor, and the past 25 years as a leader in the marketplace with most of that time spent at ServiceMaster.

It has been in my business career that I have learned the most about what it means to integrate the claims of my faith with the demands of my work.

As I have now retired from my leadership responsibilities at ServiceMaster and look back, I can add up the numbers that show growth in profits, customers served, and a return for our shareholders that on average doubled every five years. While these figures are part of a normal business assessment of performance, the conclusion for me cannot be limited to these money or value creation measurements. The real and lasting measurement is whether the results of my leadership can be told in the changed and improved lives of people I have led.

As a business leader, I wanted to excel at generating profits and creating value for shareholders. If I didn't want to play by these rules, I didn't belong in the ballgame. But I also tried to encourage an environment where the work place could be a community to help shape human character - an open community where the question of a person's moral and spiritual development and the existence of God and how one related the claims of his or her faith with their work were issues

of discussion, debate and, yes, even learning and understanding. I considered the people of our firm as, in fact, the soul of the firm.

My experience confirmed Peter Drucker's conclusions: that people work for a cause not just a living and that mission and purpose were important organizing and sustaining principles for the firm. Our corporate objectives at ServiceMaster were simply stated: To honor God in all we do; To help people develop; To pursue excellence; and To grow profitably. Those first two objectives were end goals; the second two were means goals.

We did not use that first objective as a basis for exclusion. It was, in fact, the reason for our promotion of diversity as we recognized that different people with different beliefs were all part of God's mix.

It did not mean that everything was done right. We experienced our share of mistakes. We sometimes failed and did things wrong. But because of a stated standard and a reason for that standard, we could not hide our mistakes. Mistakes were regularly flushed out in the open for correction and, in some cases, for forgiveness and leaders could not protect themselves at the expense of those they were leading.

The process of seeking understanding and application of these objectives at all levels of the organization was a never-ending task. It involved matters of the heart as well as the head and it was not susceptible to standard management techniques of implementation or measurement. While at times it was discouraging, it also was energizing as one realized the continuing potential for creativity, innovation, and growth as there was a focus on the development of the whole person.

Now for me as a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ, this environment provided an opportunity for me to live my faith in such a way so that it was not imposed upon my colleagues and fellow workers, but instead could be examined, tested, understood and, in some cases, embraced by them as they sought not only to do things right but also to do the right thing.

One of the best ways that I found to lead in the development of our firm as a moral community was to seek to serve as I led and to reflect the principle that Jesus taught His disciples as He washed their feet - that no leader was greater or had a self-interest more important than those being led. In seeking to so serve, the

truth of what I said could be measured by what I did. My ethic would become a reality as I was able to serve those I led.

Servant leadership has been a learning experience for me. It has not come naturally. The first thing I had to understand was what it meant to walk in the shoes of those I would lead. This was a lesson that I would learn as I first joined the ServiceMaster team.

My predecessors in the business, Ken Hansen, who was then Chairman of the Company, and Ken Wessner, who was then President and CEO of the Company, were both involved in recruiting me to join the firm. They wanted me to come and initially head up the legal and financial affairs of the Company, reporting directly to Ken Wessner. In the selling of the job, it was suggested that I, along with others, would be considered in the future for the CEO position of the Company.

The interviewing process took several months and as we were coming to what I thought of as the final interview to confirm compensation and starting date, I decided that I needed to know more about what it would take to be CEO of ServiceMaster. As I pressed the point and tried to get some assurance of how I could become CEO, Ken Hansen stood up and told me the interview was over.

Ken Wessner then ushered me to the front door. As I left ServiceMaster that morning, I concluded that it was over. I had blown the opportunity.

A few days later, Ken Hansen called me on the phone and asked me if I wanted to have breakfast with him to discuss what had happened in his office. When we sat down for breakfast, he simply said: Bill, if you want to come to ServiceMaster to contribute and serve, you will have a great future. But if your coming is dependent on a title or position or ultimately the CEO's position, then you will be disappointed. To be successful at ServiceMaster, you will have to learn to put the interest of others ahead of your own.

His point was very simple. Never give a job or a title to a person who can't live without it. Determine at the front end whether the leader's self-interest or the interest of others will come first. Know whether he or she can define reality by being willing to do what they ask of others.

I took the job and Ken in his own way tested my commitment and understanding of what he had told me. I spent the first six weeks of my ServiceMaster career out cleaning floors and doing the maintenance and other work which was part of our service business. There were lessons for me to learn,

the most important of which was my dependence upon and responsibility to the people I would lead.

Later on in my career the faces of our service workers would flash across my mind as I was faced with those inevitable judgment calls between the rights and the wrongs of running a business. The integrity of my actions had to pass their scrutiny. When all the numbers and figures were added up and reported as the results of the firm, they had to do more than just follow the rules or satisfy the changing standards of the accounting profession. They also had to accurately reflect the reality of our combined performance – a result that was real – a result that you could depend upon. A result that would reflect the true value of the firm. Otherwise I was deceiving myself and those that I was committed to serve.

Fortune Magazine has described the soulless company as suffering from an enemy within and cites a quote from Henry Ford as being descriptive of many business leaders when he said: “Why is it that I always get a whole person when all I really wanted was a pair of hands?”

How many times as business leaders have we been guilty of looking at people in our firms or organizations as just a pair of hands or simply another

producer, an economic animal who can be motivated by a compensation package or new incentive plan or stock option program?

Drucker's classic definition of management is getting the right things done through others. But what I am suggesting here today is that a leader of faith cannot stop there. He or she must also be concerned about what is happening to the person in the process. Those people who are producing profits, who are accomplishing the mission of the organization, are also human. They have cares and concerns, emotions and feelings, beliefs and convictions. They can love or they can hate. As the soul of the firm, they can contribute or detract, motivate or discourage. Those who are involved in business as a calling must be involved in what I refer to as soul craft. They must learn to treat people as the subject of work, not just the object of work

Robert Fogel – The Fourth Great Awakening (you put a note here)

One of the current best sellers on business leadership is entitled *Leadership Engine* written by Noel Tichy, a professor at the University of Michigan's Graduate School of Business. In his book he describes companies that build and develop leaders at every level of the organization. One of the companies he studied and reported on was ServiceMaster. At first he was concerned about

whether we would be a valid example because of our objectives and he makes these comments about what he found.

“For many people who don’t know the folks at ServiceMaster, the stated value of ‘To honor God in all we do’ is troubling. Before we went to visit them, one of my colleagues suggested that their religious orientation might make them unsuitable as models for more ‘normal’ organizations. But the truth is that when you get to know the people who work at ServiceMaster, you quickly see that there are no traces of ethereal other-worldliness about them. They are serious business people firmly focused on winning. ‘Profit [to them] is a means in God’s world to be used and invested, not an end to be worshipped. [It] is a standard for determining the effectiveness of [their] combined efforts’.”

He goes on to say: “ServiceMaster has achieved such adherence to its values. . . because everyone from [the top] down works at making them an everyday reality. One of [their] twenty-one leadership principles says (No. 6), ‘If you don’t live it, you don’t believe it.’ And they really mean it. Service permeates all the way to the highest level of the company. And no matter how senior they become, each spends at least one day a year performing front-line service work.”

Tichy is confirming in his own way what many in this room may already know – one of the best ways for a Christian to integrate their faith with their work is to live it and to do so in service to others.

Another lesson I was soon to learn was to accept people for their differences and to be ready to be surprised by their potential. A colleague of mine tells of an experience of his that has been a great reminder of this point. It is often the custom of firms to hand out service pins in recognition of years of service. My friend was involved in such an event. He was surprised by the response of one of the recipients. The young man opened the box, took out the sterling silver tie tack, said thanks and then with a wide grin proudly put the service pin in his ear lobe, not his lapel.

People are different and we should never be too quick to judge potential by appearance or life style. The business firm is a place where diversity should be promoted. The leader's responsibility is to set the tone and to provide an environment where different people can contribute as part of a whole and so to strengthen the group and achieve unity in diversity.

This is not always an easy task. In fact, during the period of my leadership, as I sought to expand opportunities for women and minorities, I set a standard for

the senior officers that for every open position, they should first seek a woman or a minority to fill the position. It was a controversial position to take and not always understood within the organization. It opened up the doors of opportunity at the officer level and other levels of the Company for a group of people that historically had not had those opportunities. On the other hand, it also limited the opportunity for well-qualified white males.

Was I right or wrong in so leading? A question that reminds us that ethical decisions are not always black and white and not always popular. In some situations, there is no one best solution. As we live and work in an imperfect world, there will be moral ambiguities and judgments will have to be made.

Learning how to integrate your faith with your work can sometimes come from a painful mistake of doing what is wrong. Implicit in leadership is the power to make decisions that affect others. You can be right in your intent and decision but be wrong in how you use power to implement that decision. The pain of honestly facing your mistakes and seeking forgiveness is part of the learning process of living your faith.

The mistakes I have made as a leader that hurt the most are those that have resulted in breached relationships with others. In seeking to achieve specific

performance goals, I have at times pressed too hard for results without understanding the subjective factors of fear, insecurity, or risk of failure that were influencing substandard performance of the individual involved. I have learned that people put in a corner must fight or crumble and the rightness of my position can be lost in the defeat of the person.

In the process of winning and imposing what I thought was right, I ended up with a broken relationship. In such times, there is a need for admitting your mistakes, asking for forgiveness, and seeking reconciliation.

As we seek to do that which is right, we should never assume that what we have in position, achievement or success is for ourselves. In God's system of fairness and justice, why should any of us be preferred?

We are reminded in Psalm 24 that God owns the earth and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. We possess our life, not as our own but as stewards and God has given us the choice of how to invest our life. In Matthew 25, Jesus likened this reality to a man who was going on a journey and before he left he called his servants together and entrusted them with his money and then told them to put it to work until he came back.

One servant was given five talents, another two talents, a third one talent. The expectation was for them to invest these resources -- to assume the risk of a return and produce more, not less, than what they were given. Two of them did just that but the third refused to take a risk of a return and buried his talent in the ground. When the owner returned, he chastised this servant for not investing, for not making a difference, and took his money and entrusted it with the one who had been given five talents.

God as our shareholder expects a return. “From everyone who has much, much will be required. And one who has been entrusted with more will be asked for more.” So how do we set our priorities so we can live a productive life? Is there an optimum balance between work, family, and church? Have you ever felt the tension of knowing when and what to put first? Is there ever enough time to do everything you should do? What is the priority of life?

Here tell story from Peter Drucker on priority.

If God wasn't _____, I should do it.

As I have traveled over the years and visited various areas of this world, I realize that I have been given much. Why wasn't I born on the garbage hill of

Cairo, Egypt? Why wasn't I one of the orphans that I _____ **visited?**
with in Africa just a few weeks ago who was suffering the pain caused by AIDS
and the death of two parents? Why wasn't I born in Eastern Europe or Russia, a
culture still shaped by and injected with the evils and corruption of Communism?

As I reflect upon this reality, I have concluded that the only reason I have
something that somebody else doesn't have –whether that something is represented
in money, possessions, education, talent, title, or position – is for me to use, share,
and invest so that it will benefit others and represent the message of love and
redemption of my Lord and Savior.

I can't live a bifurcated life. The business firm has been my channel of
distribution for fulfilling and living my faith – a channel that for me has reached
from the janitor's closet in Saudi Arabia to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing,
China – from sweeping streets in Osaka, Japan to ringing the bell of the New York
Stock Exchange. The marketplace has provided a wonderful opportunity for me to
embrace and engage those who do not believe the way I do, but whom God loves
and who, by my word and action, should see the reality that our Lord and Savior
lived and died for a purpose – that those He created and loved may know Him as
God and Savior.

God has called us to be in the world but not part of it. He has provided us the example of His Son, Jesus Christ, who became like us, dwelt among us, and is the model of the expected scope and intensity of our service and involvement. He has called us to be excellent in what we do whether we call it a job, profession, or ministry.

And when we excel in what we do, whatever that may be, as a lawyer, teacher, minister, or publisher, we live our faith in a way that cannot be ignored or contained. However, when we proclaim our faith and do not live it, we sow seeds of cynicism and rejection.

So for me, business is not just a game of manipulation that accomplishes a series of tasks for a profit, with the gain going to a few, the atrophy of the soul of the person producing the results. People are not just economic animals or non-personal production units - nor can they be simply lumped in categories of Evangelical, Protestant, Catholic, Baptist, or Presbyterian. Every person is created in the image of God, with their own fingerprint of personality and potential. As a leader in the workplace, it is my responsibility to provide an environment that unlocks that potential and, as a Christian, to walk and talk about my faith in a way that invites others to seek and embrace the same Lord I love.