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# Leadership in a World of Change

C. William Pollard

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**CHRISTIAN MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION**  
**Grace Church, Edina MN**  
**Wednesday, September 24, 1997**

**“Leadership in a World of Change”**

**C. William Pollard, Chairman**  
**The ServiceMaster Company**  
**Downers Grove, Illinois**

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A number of years ago, I was asked to participate in Peter Drucker’s 80th birthday party. My assignment was to speak about the characteristics of an effective executive for the 90’s. My task seemed larger in life, especially in view of the distinguished audience and my respect for the wisdom of my friend and counselor, Peter Drucker. My talk centered on the importance of the people being led, the convictions and beliefs of the leader, and the need for a leader with a servants heart.

I was reminded then, as I am now, that we live in a world of accelerated change and choice. The only certain about tomorrow is that it will be different than today. Rapid change has resulted in a discontinuity and dislocation for many people.

For example, the job is no longer as secure as it once was. We use words in the market place like down-sizing, right-sizing and restructuring to mask the reality that people lose their jobs for reasons other than performance. In fact, some have suggested that we live in a **post job world**. Serious issues are being raised about what is the social contract between an employer and an employee. And we know that this acceleration of change and choice is not simply limited to the work environment.

Hunter, a sociologist from the University of Virginia, has called it a time of cultural wars, where people living and working in the same communities are in basic

disagreement about who they are, where they have come from, and what is right and wrong in how they conduct their lives. Arthur Schlesinger, the historian from Harvard, has concluded that our current penchant for identifying and promoting ethnic, cultural, and racial differences is contributing what he calls the disuniting of America.

We speak about being global in our thinking. In fact, our economy is increasingly being affected by global forces vs internal forces - yet everywhere we look - in our own society and throughout the world - **tribalism** is rampant - with growing divisions and conflict among ethnic, religious and economic groups.

The rapid expansion of technology has allowed us to turn our homes into offices; entertainment, educational, and purchasing centers. You can now sit before your home computer and purchase everything from groceries to automobiles, plan your next vacation, access libraries all over the world; and with a link to your TV or stereo system, order up the latest in entertainment or attend church through cyber space.

In business, some of us have concluded that because of all these changes, we really can't plan for the future; the best we can do is plan for change. Our choices and the choices of our customers are now multiplying at exponential rates.

So in this fast-paced, changing world, what is on the mind of the average American - worker and consumer? As some of you may know, a portion of our business involves providing services ranging from lawn care, pest control, maid service, and appliance maintenance and repair to over 6 million home owners. Recently we commissioned a study to find out just what the average American was thinking about.

In general, they were concerned and confused about the present, uncertain about the future, and skeptical about solutions to either. Specifically, over 70 percent had

money concerns relating mostly to their credit card debt. 52 percent worried about their jobs in an environment of down-sizing and re-engineering. 41 percent were stressed out over family matters relating to marriage or children.

There was confusion and frustration about roles. Males are no longer the sole breadwinner, a role historically identified with masculinity. It is now a woman's job too. Women are frustrated over the breadth of their responsibilities. They are a wage earner, but also mom, wife, the CEO of the household, and for many, still expected to clean up after everyone else.

83 percent of those interviewed have concluded that young people can no longer take it for granted that they will be better off than their parents. 64 percent believe that their wealth is limited and they are not likely to be better off than they are now.

Listening to music, reading or watching television--not exercising--got the highest ratings for relieving stress.

People feel like they are time poor and they want to streamline their lives, make them more simple.

Children are increasingly influencing the buying pattern of parents. They are tuned into social issues such as the environment, racial discrimination, and their exposure to violence and sex at an early age is an accepted fact. Their value systems seem to be influenced more by outside forces than parents or the family.

Now, as you step back from this broad view of the changes in the world and in the life of the average American, what should be our conclusions as business people - as

fathers or mothers - as leaders in our communities? What should we do - as Christians seeking to serve the Lord we love - how shall we then live?

As Christians, God has called us to be in the world, although not part of it; and He has provided us the example of the Incarnation of His Son as a model of the expected intensity and scope of such involvement. He has called us to be excellent in what we do, whatever the task, job, profession, or ministry

When we excel in what we do, whatever that may be, as a doctor, lawyer, teacher, minister, parent, or spouse, we live our faith in a way that cannot be ignored or contained. When we proclaim our faith and do not live it, we sow the seeds of cynicism and rejection.

In this time of rapid change, we all need to be encouraged to walk the talk -- and as we celebrate together God's great gift of salvation -- to reach out to a lost and needy world.

But as we seek to do a better job of relating to the world around us, we should also expect what Stephen Carter has referred to as a "culture of disbelief", where the subject of God or faith in God is not something you talk about openly and is considered by most intelligent adults as a relic of the past.

God has used change as a way to mold and develop me. After graduating from college, I went to Northwestern Law School and then practiced law for eight years, specializing in corporate and tax law. As a young lawyer, I was seeking to achieve excellence in my profession, but it was coming at the expense of my family and my church. It was, in fact, becoming a jealous mistress in my life, and it took a serious illness to stop me in my tracks. During my time of recovery, I was visited regularly by the

President of my alma mater, and he encouraged me in my faith and my desire to seek balance in my life. He also encouraged me to join him at Wheaton and serve there in the administration and faculty. It would be a big change, reduced income, and giving up my role as a partner in the law firm. But God seemed to be pushing me through that open door. It was what He wanted me to do. I spent five years at Wheaton; and when my specific assignment was over, I was ready to go back to the practice of law. But it was at that point that I was recruited to join the leadership team of ServiceMaster 20 years ago.

We are a company that has grown very rapidly, doubling in size every three to three-and-a-half years. We are more than 25 times larger than we were when I first joined the firm in 1977. We are a public company listed on the New York Stock Exchange, with customer level revenues now in excess of \$5 billion. Our services are provided in the United States, Canada, and 34 foreign countries. Many changes have occurred during this period of time and over 2/3 of what we are doing today represent new business lines that we were not doing 10 years ago.

Yes, I live in one of those pressure-cooker environments where our performance, revenue and profits must be reported quarter by quarter and where revenue and profits have always been up every quarter for the past 26 years, and now we have added one more year. The shareholders that my partner Carlos Cantu and I are responsible to as leaders vote every day on our leadership. They have a choice to buy, hold, or sell.

But what I am suggesting here today is that the measure of my success as a leader as a Christian cannot be limited to the calculation of a total return on the value of our shares or the profit we produce. The answer must come from the soul of the business firm that is the people I work with.

When you visit the headquarters of our firm, you will find a low, long, tan-colored building, located west of the city of Chicago. When you walk into the large, two-story lobby, on your right is a curving marble wall, 90 feet long and 18 feet high. Carved in stone on that wall in letters 8 feet high are four statements that constitute our objectives: To Honor God In All We Do, To Help People Develop, To Pursue Excellence, and To Grow Profitably.

If you were to tour the rest of the building, you would notice that nearly all of the work spaces are moveable. Most of the walls do not reach to the ceiling. Practically everything in the building is changeable and adaptable, just like the marketplace we serve with its changing demands and opportunities.

But the marble wall conveys a permanency that does not change. The principles carved in this stone are lasting. The first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. As we seek to implement these objectives in the operation of our business, they provide for us a reference point for seeking to do that which is right and avoiding that which is wrong. They remind us that every person has been created in the image of God with dignity and worth and great potential. They become the basis for our single-minded focus on people as individuals, not just part of a protected group or a particular classification.

It does not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes. But because of a stated standard and reason for that standard, we cannot hide our mistakes. They are flushed out in the open for correction and, in some cases, for forgiveness.

It is not a standard that can be used as a simplistic reason for financial success. It cannot be applied like some mathematical formula. It does, however, provide a

foundation, a reference point for action. It is a living set of principles that allow us to confront the difficulties and failures that are all part of running a business, with the assurance that our common starting point never changes.

In a diverse and pluralistic society, some may question whether our first objective belongs as part of a public company's purpose statement. But regardless of where one is with regard to this objective, the principle that can be embraced by all is where it leads us, and that is to the dignity and worth and potential of every person. For us, this is fundamental to understanding the purpose of the firm. For me as a Christian and one who has put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ, it provides a wonderful opportunity not only to talk about my faith, but to live my faith.

With these objectives, we are shouting to the world that God does have a relevance to the work environment where not everyone has the same religious faith. We are proclaiming that God does have a relevance to a work environment where people are earning money and making a profit. We are affirming that God does have a relevance to a work environment where performance and results are the accepted standard of accountability.

So what is there in common between God and profit.

The link, I believe, is people. Not just Christians, but all people created in God's image. We have people in our company who are Christian, but we also have people who are Muslim, Jewish, or of no professed faith. As those of us who are Christian we are able to integrate our faith with our learning, but to integrate our faith with what we do, with our actions as we work with others and serve our customers. Let me share with you a recent example.



Several months ago, I attended a memorial service for one my colleagues in ServiceMaster. Bob Brondyke had come to that point of life where the question of what's it all about was a reality. At a relatively young age of 44, he learned he had terminal cancer. He died six months later. Bob was an officer of ServiceMaster responsible for a five-state region. He spent a good bit of his time during the week on the road away supporting our services to customers. He had a wife and two lovely children, Rob 20, a sophomore in college, and Matt 18, a senior in high school. The memorial service was unique. It was conducted primarily by his friends in ServiceMaster. They not only talked about Bob's faith in God, but also how that affected the way he treated people and influenced them. Bob's young son also participated in the memorial service and made a very significant statement when he said that as he looked back at his father's life for the past 20 years, there was nothing more he could ask of his father than what his father had given him. Bob had worked hard in his job and achieved excellence as a manager and a leader. But he had also developed his faith and influenced others including the nurturing and care for his family. He had involved his faith in all walks of life.

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 as Protestants, Catholics, Baptists, Presbyterians or Nazarenes. Every person is created in the image of God, with their own fingerprint of personality and potential. As a leader in business, it is my responsibility to provide an environment that unlocks that potential and as a Christian to so walk the talk and share my faith so that they will seek the same Savior I love. I can't live a bifurcated life. God is with me and I am His representative in the pew or Sunday School class on Sunday - and the business deal, investment meeting or difficult personal situation on Monday.

Can the business firm make money and also be a moral community for the development of human character? This is the grand experiment of ServiceMaster. It can be duplicated with committed leadership. It was C.S. Lewis who said, "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit." What is a business without people created in God's image?

What is a world without God? I conclude my remarks today with some lines from T. S. Eliot's Choruses from the "Rock."

"What life have you if you not have life together?  
 There is no life that is not in community.  
 And no community not lived in praise of God.  
 And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads.  
 And no man knows or cares who is his neighbor,  
 Unless his neighbor makes too much disturbance.  
 And the wind shall say, here were decent Godless people.  
 Their only monument the asphalt road,  
 And a thousand lost golf balls.  
 Can you keep the city that the Lord keeps not with you?  
 A thousand policemen directing the traffic,  
 And not tell you why you come, or where you go.  
 When the stranger says: "What is the meaning of this city?"  
 Do you huddle close together because you love each other?  
 What will you answer? We all dwell together,  
 To make money from each other? Is this a community?  
 And the stranger will depart and return to the desert.

Oh my soul be prepared for the coming of the stranger.

Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.

As you seek to lead in an environment of change, I encourage you to:

1. Remember the importance of a mission and purpose that does not change;
2. Set a target with a bullseye big enough to hit yet small enough to know when you have missed;
3. Nurture leadership that is committed to serve and can be trusted;
4. Have patience in the ambiguity of the unknown and be prepared for organized abandonment of those things that are no longer relevant;
5. Acknowledge and celebrate each increment of success; and
6. Trust the Lord you love.

I wish you well.

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7/18/17