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# Etched in Stone, Engraved on the Heart (Rogers, AR - Long Version)

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**CEO Summit: Purposeful Leadership  
Soderquist Center / Promise Keepers  
Rogers, Arkansas**

**June 9, 2005  
C. William Pollard**

**“Etched in Stone, Engraved on the Heart”**

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I am delighted to be with you tonight and participate in this opening session of the CEO Summit on Leadership. Over the years, Don Soderquist and I have shared a lot of experiences together. He is my brother-in-law and my friend. In the early years, we lived in the same town, went to the same church, and raised our families together. Although I began my career as an attorney, later in life we both found ourselves in leadership roles in public companies, and we share some of the same views about business as a calling and the importance of seeking to integrate the claims of our faith with the demands of our work.

As I share with you tonight from some of my experiences, I have not come with all the answers. However, I may have faced some of the questions you are facing or walked down some of the roads that you may be traveling. In my journey, I have found that understanding the question was often more important than knowing all the answers.

As I say this, I am reminded of a greeting that a friend of mine has on his voice mail and answering machine. It simply says the following: “Hello. This is not an answering machine, it is a questioning machine. There are really only two questions that are relevant: who are you and what do you want? Please give your answer at the tone.” As we come here tonight at the beginning of this summit on purposeful leadership, how would we answer these questions? Who are we and what do we want? All of us here have some leadership responsibilities. Some of us have the initials CEO after our name. We often identify who we are by our job or title. Is that who we really are? What do we want out of this conference – out of the Promise Keeper sessions that will follow – out of our business – from our families – from our faith?

What really is leadership all about? Books and articles on leadership and on the qualities of a good leader abound. They often describe leadership as something that is glamorous and elevated. But you know, I have found it to be hard work that is sometimes mundane, unromantic, and boring. Its essence is performance. Leadership is not by itself good or desirable. Leadership is a means. To what end is the crucial question.

Leadership is not about you or about me, it is about the people who follow and the direction we are leading them. It is about the responsibility we assume for the growth and development of those people. As we look at leadership this way, it

is imperative for us as leaders to know what we believe and why we believe it; to know where we are headed and why it is important for people to follow; to understand who people are and why they work and not just what they do and how they do it; to live and share our faith in a way that will engage people and not use our position to impose our faith; to be an example in our private and public life of the Lord we love.

During the last several years, there have been numerous articles and books written on the subject of a growing interest in spiritual issues in business.

One of those books was written by a Nobel Prize winning economics professor from the University of Chicago. In his book entitled *The Fourth Great Awakening*, Robert Fogel traces, from pre-Revolutionary War days to modern times, the various religious awakenings in America and their impact on our society and economy. He concludes that one of the greatest issues in our society and the world of business today is a lack of a consensus of moral authority and a lack of what he refers to as a distribution of spiritual assets.

Here is an economics professor – a Nobel Prize winner – calling for more channels in the market place for the distribution of spiritual assets.

In light of the events of the last several years raising questions of integrity, character, and ethics in business, the issue before us as **business leaders**, as leaders of faith, is whether the firms we lead can not only make money and create wealth but also be moral communities for the development of human character. Communities where it is okay to raise the question of God.

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 on average of 20% per year. 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 seen 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 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 the demands of 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 of 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 and innovation, as there was a focus on the development of the whole person.

One of the best ways that I found to share and 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, now over 28 years ago.

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 firm, are also human. They have a spiritual dimension as well as a physical and rational dimension. 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

One of those best selling books 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. One of [their] twenty-one leadership principles says, ‘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 or failure. 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 I indicted earlier, the essence of leadership is performance. It is about owning the results and assuming responsibility for the people we lead. We have an indebtedness to them. *Here tell story of stock ownership and executive.*

As we seek to lead, 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?

Psalm 24 reminds us that God owns the earth and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. I possess my life, my gifts, and talents not as my own but as a steward and God has given me the choice of how to invest it.

God as my 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.”

As I have traveled over the years and visited various areas of this world, I realize how much I have been given. Why wasn't I born on the garbage hill of Cairo, Egypt? Why wasn't I one of the orphans of Aids that I visited in Africa just a few months ago? Why wasn't I born in Eastern Europe or Russia, a culture still shaped by and infected 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 – church on Sunday and work on Monday. 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 who God loves and who, by my words and actions, should see the reality of His love.

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, Presbyterian, Jewish, or Muslim. 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.

As I now reflect back to the way God has called me to serve in various roles, I can assure you there have been times of doubt and the path of my life has not always been smooth. There was a drive for success that allowed my law profession to become a jealous mistress in my life, only to be stopped by God’s intervention with a serious healthcare condition. There followed a dramatic



change in my life with the recognition that God, not me, was in control. Then I left the practice of law to serve as an administrator and faculty member of Wheaton College. It was during this phase of my life that God taught me some lessons of knowing and understanding His way. My career took another turn in the fall of 1977 when I joined the management team of ServiceMaster.

The Company was on a fast track, and I was soon asked to assume greater responsibilities and then to become the CEO. Over the next twenty years, the growth and expansion of ServiceMaster would extend to over 12 million customers in the US and 45 foreign countries, with 250,000 people who were either in our employ or managed by us. It became a big business. There was a lot going on every day.

Early in my role as CEO, I realized that this job was more demanding than anything I had ever experienced. I was struggling with issues of balance in my life, conflicts between time for my family, for church, and for the demands of my work. Have you ever had any of these conflicts in your life?

During this same period, I realized that I needed to make some major changes in the business in order to move forward and I sought the advice of an old friend, Peter Drucker. As he listened to me summarize the issues and opportunities of the business, he reminded me that the business decision before me

was not one of sorting out priorities, but instead it really was an issue of determining **THE** priority. He then gave me a history lesson involving the use of the word priority. It came into the English language in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and wasn't pluralized until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. "Bill," he said, "identify the priority and do it."

That night in my hotel room, as I was reflecting on his advice and as I was reading in the book of Matthew, Chapter 6, I came to that verse familiar to many of you: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you." The issue of balance I was facing in my personal life was not a question of priorities, but simply a question of priority. The issue was: Was God in it? For God to be in it, my involvement with my family had to be concentrated on serving their needs, not mine. For God to be in it, my involvement with the church had to focus on worship and serving, not my own agenda. And for God to be in it, my involvement in business required me to live and share my life as an example of the Lord I love. The priority question was: Is God in it? If he was not, there should be no time for it. This transformed the way I looked at my work, my family, and the church.

I am reminded of C. S. Lewis' words when he said: "There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations – they 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."

I close with these lines from T. S. Eliot's *Choruses from a 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.”

Joshua is one of those Biblical examples of a great leader. As he came to the closing days of his leadership, he called together all of the tribes of Israel and reminded them that, with God's help, they had been victorious in battles and were now occupying the Promised Land, living in cities they did not have to build and eating from vineyards they did not have to plant. He then challenged them to fear God and serve Him with faithfulness.

It was a challenge, not a command, for God does not compel anyone to follow or worship Him. In Joshua's conclusion, he emphasized this point when he said, "But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve . . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Now, the Hebrew word that is translated "serve" is Avodah, and can also mean worship or work. Yes, that's right – our work also can be worship to the God we love as we serve and live our faith. The business firm, the place where we work, serve customers, and make money, also can be a place of worship as we bring alive the reality that Jesus lived and died for the purpose that those He created and loved may know Him as God and Savior.

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June 2, 2005