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Management as a Liberal Art (Chattanooga, TN)

C. William Pollard

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Management as a Liberal Art

Lecture at Covenant College (Afternoon Session)

January 29, 2007

C. William Pollard

My thoughts on this subject come reflect my friendship with Peter Drucker and being exposed to his writings, teachings, advice and counsel over a 25 year period and also the experience I've had as a leader at ServiceMaster over the same period seeking to implement what I was learning.

I will start with a story to illustrate this point (here tell the story of Peter Drucker's meeting with our Board and asking the question "What is your Business?").

In this dialog with our Board of Directors, Peter was reminding us that as we were seeking to plan for the future in a rapid growth environment, that was doubling in size every 3-4 years, people were our most important assets. The management of people involved more than getting the right things done through others. Management was also about what was happening to the

people in the process. Who were they becoming? Management was a liberal art in that it dealt with the values of people: their moral and spiritual concerns; their basic nature that reflected both good and evil.

Management involves the understanding of how one acquires and uses knowledge and how one learns and develops wisdom and judgment. It is an art, as it involves the practice and application of these insights in the understanding of human behavior in accomplishing an organized and group effort. It draws upon the social sciences of psychology, philosophy, economics, history and ethics. In its execution, it requires the focus of this learning on achieving results; or manufacturing or selling a product; delivering a service which satisfies the needs of a customer; teaching a student; serving the needs of a community in healing the sick or providing housing and support for those in need.

It's about people and who they are and why they work, not just about what they do and how they do it. (Here tell Henry Ford's story).

People should be treated as the subject of work, not just the object of work. (Here tell story of Olga and James Smith).

People work for a cause, not just a living. Mission and purpose are important organizing principles for the firm or for any organization that is dependent on the combined efforts of others. When there is alignment, of the values of the firm with the values of the people of the firm, there is a basis for community and the benefits of improved results from a combined effort.

Leadership in such an environment is viewed only as a means to a purposeful end of providing meaningful and useful work that will contribute to the development of the worker and bring value to those who are the recipients of the work product. Leadership, as so defined, is not so much about the title, position, or authority of the leader, but more about the people who follow and the direction they are being led. The leader assumes a posture of indebtedness to those being led, with the responsibility to put the interests of others ahead of their own interests.

In putting people first, and understanding management as a liberal art, the leader recognizes that the health and welfare of people cannot be understood or measured only in terms of their economic or physical needs, nor can it be measured solely by their intellectual or educational

accomplishments. There is also a spiritual dimension to the human condition. It is the spiritual dimension that influences moral behavior and the development of character and is the genesis of love, not hate; good, not evil. It is the spiritual dimension of people that raises the question of God and His role in both the act of creation and the act of redemption. The business firm need not be just a place where we make money and create wealth, but it can also become a moral community for the development of human character, a community where it is ok to talk about God as a source for moral authority. (Here give story about Harvard case study).

There is ample room and opportunity in the marketplace for students graduating from Christian colleges to be used by God to make a difference in the lives of people, those special people who have been created in God's image and who are in the process of becoming someone as they work and head for eternity.

As those of us involved in Christian higher education prepare students to do so, I suggest that we may need nothing less than a radical reformation of the way we think, the way we act, and the language we use. We need a renewed focus on the development and shaping of conscience and character.

A better understanding of what Jesus meant when He said no man can serve two masters. And a way of understanding and relating the God we worship on Sunday with the profit that should be made on Monday. We must not only teach our students to know what is right and to articulate truth claims, but also to be an example of how one can share and live their faith in a way that will engage, not condemn, those who do not believe the same way we do. We must help them to learn how to be in the world, but not part of it, confirming the truth of God's way and the inclusiveness of His love. We also must continue to seek ways of improving our teaching of what leadership is all about, including emphasizing the leader's posture of indebtedness to those who follow and the role of a leader as a servant of those who follow.

The marketplace is not interested in our promotion of a religion or in our boasting of knowing the truth. It will listen if we take the time to introduce people to Jesus, a person who lived and walked in their shoes, who gave His life that they might know and be accepted by a loving God.

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