

October 26th, 1994

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Pollard, C. William, "Leadership with a Purpose (Boston)" (1994). *C. William Pollard Papers*. 228.
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LEADERSHIP WITH A PURPOSE

GORDON COLLEGE
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1994

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

Thank you for the opportunity for sharing some thoughts with you tonight about leadership and life. As I left Chicago this afternoon, I talked with one of our candidates for state office in Illinois, and I was reminded that another November election is almost upon us. Once again we have an opportunity to go to the polls and vote for those who will represent us in government.

The freedoms we have as citizens of this country are truly remarkable. Never before in history have citizens of any one country been given the liberty that we have today. Yet the mood of our land is pessimistic. Not many Americans are excited about the opportunity of tomorrow. We don't seem to trust those who represent us in government. We know we are going to have to pay higher taxes but we are not sure about the benefit. The enormity of the deficit means one thing for certain: the dollar bill in our hand today will be worth less, not more, in the future. Laws and regulations continue to multiply in complexity, and we are bombarded on every side by news of variant human behavior patterns, some of which we are encouraged to accept although we have been taught since our youth that they are wrong, and others by their publicity seem to be more prevalent today than they were in the past.

It is a world of accelerated change and choice. The only thing certain about tomorrow is that it will be different from today.

Peter Drucker refers to this time as the Post-Capitalist Society where knowledge and information will be the key resources for future economic development. The globalization of national economies will create uncharted and many times unpredictable results. Charles Handy refers to it as the Age of Unreason which requires what he refers to as the need for upside-down thinking. Some of those in our institutions of higher

learning discuss our period of time in terms of Post-Modernism and Deconstructionism where everything is relative, even the meaning of words. Hunter, the sociologist from the University of Virginia, in his recent book on conflicts in our society calls it a time of cultural wars where the most fundamental ideas about who we are and how to order our lives individually and together are now at odds. His conclusion is that the nub of the disagreement can be traced to a matter of ultimate moral authority. How are we to determine whether something is good or bad, right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable? The division or gap in our society, he concludes, is growing. People living and working in the same community are, in fact, worlds apart.

Last year Judy and I spent two weeks in Eastern Europe and Russia. I had the opportunity to work with young business people from Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Poland, who are entrepreneurs in the true sense of the word and who are learning the joys and pains of growing their businesses, selling their products, and developing their markets. I was also able to review the progress of our ServiceMaster businesses in the City of Prague where in twelve short months we have established a beachhead and now are providing our management services to seven hospitals, with an excited team of Czech managers. I also spent time lecturing and listening to students in three of the major universities in Moscow and saw their excitement and desire to learn, but was depressed with the conditions of runaway inflation, confiscatory taxation, crime and deceit, which is much of their daily environment. It is as close to anarchy as I care to come and it is a society that seems void of responsibility. In response to a question regarding their hope for the future, one student responded with a simple request: to live in a society where truth and disclosure was more common than lies, deceits, and coverups.

There has never been a greater opportunity for the free market system to work. There should be little doubt in anyone's mind that this system, which has been at the heart of the growth and development of our nation, is the most effective way for the production of goods and services and the allocation of resources. It provides the opportunity and the freedom for people to make a choice, participate in satisfying their needs and wants, with a potential for reward commensurate with the task. It is based upon a fundamental truth that people are born to be free. It is free people that innovate, create, and produce, all of which are essential to a growing economy. But people also have the freedom to fail -

make bad choices - and in some cases, do wrong things.

The free market system as we know it, is morally neutral. It is indifferent to moral choices. It is blind to good and evil. It is materialistic, impersonal, and non-human. It can produce great human misery as well as great blessing. It needs a moral reference point beyond the system itself and within which to operate. Otherwise, I suggest, it has the potential to bankrupt the human soul. History has taught us that not even government can exercise judgment in the absence of a moral authority without eventually reverting to coercion, discrimination, and persecution of the powerless. The market place is no different.

As we come together tonight, we do so with some common interest. The market place is our work place. For most of us, it is the environment where we are spending most of our waking hours. We have an interest in Christian higher education, specifically Gordon College, and believe in the importance and contribution that institutions like Gordon can make for society, yes even in this market place where we spend most of our time. But as we identify those common interests, who are we, and what do we want?

Several months ago I called a friend of mine and got the following response from his answering machine: "Hello. This is not an answering machine. It is a questioning machine. There are really only two questions in life that are relevant: who are you and what do you want? Please give your answer at the tone."

These are the fundamental, important questions of life, and I'd like to suggest that in the crucible of uncertainty and a world and marketplace filled with accelerated change and choice, there is great opportunity for positive direction provided those of us who have been trained to think, to think Christianly, lead, and lead with a conviction of purpose.

Will the leader please stand up? Not the president or the person with the most distinguished title, but the role model. Not the highest-paid person in the group, but the risk-taker. Not the person with the largest car or the biggest home, but the servant. Not the person who promotes himself, but the promoter of others. Not the administrator, but the initiator. Not the taker, but the giver. Not the talker, but the listener.

As I come to these fundamental questions about leadership in the future, I do so not as a philosopher, educator, or minister of the gospel, but simply as a businessman. A Christian businessman, who is seeking to lead with my partner, Carlos Cantu, a fast-growing and dynamic service company that we call ServiceMaster. Masters of service, serving the Master. The best way for me to share with you what we're all about is this brief video.

SHOW VIDEO

There is much about our business that may be classified as routine or mundane. We are often dealing with people at entry-level positions, unskilled, and many times, uneducated. And more often than not, unnoticed. We do such things as clean toilets and floors, maintain boilers and air handling units, kill bugs, provide maid service, and maintain and repair home appliances. But we also care for children and the elderly, requiring highly skilled professionals.

The task before us is to train, motivate and develop people so that they will do a more effective job, be more productive in their work and, yes, even be better people. This is both a management and a leadership challenge. For us in ServiceMaster, it is more than a job or means to earn a living. It is, in fact, a mission--a way of life. Our company objectives are simply stated: *To Honor God In All We Do--To Help People Develop--To Pursue Excellence*, and *--To Grow Profitably*. These first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. As we seek to implement these objectives in the operations of our business, they provide for us a reference point for what we do and how we determine that which is right and seek to avoid that which is wrong. They, in effect, define our missions.

They do not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes, but because of a stated standard and reason for the standard, we can't hide our mistakes. They are fleshed out in the open for correction and, in some cases, for forgiveness, nor is it a standard that should be used as a reason for our financial success. Do not try to apply it like some mathematical formula. It does, however, provide a foundation and a reference point for action. It is a living set of principles that allows one to confront the difficulties and failures that are all part of life and with reassurance that

the starting point never changes and provides a reason and hope above it all. The ultimate test is measured in the changed lives of people. We are not a Christian company, yet we include a Bible verse in our annual report and many of us will pray before business meetings and as part of important decisions. We have an open commitment to sharing and living our faith. We are involved in issues of work and family. Although many of our officers are Christians, we also have officers who are Muslim, Jewish and of no professed faith. We are sometimes criticized for mixing God and profit, but seldom for our performance. These objectives force those of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ to live our faith--to integrate our faith with our work. It provides a wonderful opportunity for a Christian to lead--to lead by example and service.

It has been an environment that, for me, is a constant reminder of who owns me, and that my mission and my purpose in life extends beyond myself. As you reflect upon what I have said, I encourage you to listen carefully, in closing, to this poem, written by a friend of mine, describing what some call as "the mid-life crisis", and others simply, the story of midnight games.

Midnight Games

Last night at a late hour
two men, unknown to each other,
sat brooding over fifty-five years of life.
There are those moments
when the proper ingredients of mood--
time, silence, fatigue, accomplishment
of failure---
cause minds to gaze
across the sweep of existence,
playing a strange and ruthless game called
"What it's all about?"
Such ingredients being at the critical stage
forced my two acquaintances
so to begin play.

One man sat at his desk
amongst paneled royalty
in his private den
surrounded by quadrophonic noise.
In such opulence, he thought.

The other rested callous hands
on a scratched kitchen table.
No sound afoot except
for the deep breathing of sleeping children
in the next room
and a humming wife,
preparing for bed.

"Tally the card,"
that part of man's being
which searches for accomplishment
said.
"Count the score," it cried; "make a report
you two men,
separated by railroad tracks,
square footage, horsepower, and clout."
And so the first of the two began.

For openers, I own a home, he said,
with three garages, each filled with imported cars.
(I might as well say it)
the spread is lavish
nothing spared to make it the best
all around.
I own it all; it's paid for.
You could say that it's an estate.

I own a business, and
I own three hundred persons who work for me.
(I might as well own them)
I tell them when they must come to work;
I tell them when to eat,
How much they'll earn
How hard they'll strive
They call me "Mr.;" some call me "Sir;"
Yes, you could say that I own them.

I own a wife
(I might as well say it).
I've capped her teeth,
imported Paris' finest,
paid for weight reduction,
exercise lessons, club memberships.
I've purchased her cosmetic beauty.
Yes, you could say that I own her.

I own my kids
(I might as well say it)
I've paid for the college,
the car, the orthodontist,
their doctor.
I've set them in motion
with trust funds,
European vacations
and front page weddings.
Yes, you could say that I own them.

I guess I own just about everything.

Why then am I so empty of spirit

as I play this midnight game?

Why do I sit here

wondering:

why my wife is not here

why my children choose other things to do

if my company will survive

if my reputation is secure

if anyone likes me.

Why must I wonder

when I own it all?

Second half of match;

please leave that impressive scene;

cross the tracks

count the score,

tally the card

of a second man

who plays the game.

My house is old; my car rusting out,

and I wonder, he thinks,

if the furnace will last the winter.

But (I might as well admit it)

This place owns me.

It calls me to itself each evening

As I walk three blocks

from the bus stop.

It beckons with memories

of Christmases, crisis,

giggles and prayers.

I am gladly owned by its warmth.

My job...is a job, humbling;
 its income modest
 But (I might as well admit it)
 It kind of owns me--
 its opportunities to serve others,
 to fix things,
 make them go and click
 to make something
 with these hands of mine
 some sense of accomplishment
 producing finished things from raw
 You could say I like what I'm doing.

My wife, listen to her hum off key,
 was not a cheer leader,
 and Wellesley is not her background.
 But (I might as well admit it)
 she owns me; I belong to her.
 so compelling her affection
 so deep her insight
 so broad her perspective
 so eternal her values
 so compassionate her caring.
 I gladly give myself to her
 You could say that I am possessed,
 nothing held back.

My children; hear them toss in troubled sleep,
 average students,
 reasonable competitors.
 They (I might as well be frank about it)
 own me.
 I cannot withhold my time from them,
 my unrestrained enjoyment as
 they discover life and allow me
 to join them as both
 player and spectator.
 The birth certificates say they are mine
 But my heart says they own me.

Tally the card; count the score
 the souls of two men cry out.
 One owns, the other is owned.
 Who is winner?
 Are you as confused as I,
 As we watch two men
 extinguish the lights
 and go to bed?
 One face is smiling,
 and humming off key.
 The other is frightened,
 listening to silence.

Perhaps we counted wrongly?
 Perhaps we didn't know soon enough,
 it was a different game
 with different rules
 and a different judge,
 mounting to different and
 very high stakes.

By Gordon MacDonald

Who are you, and what do you want? As you think of this poignant story about two people, don't get lost in the fact that one was money-rich and one was not, or that it involved the voice of the male gender. It could have been written in any context. The issue is, "Who owns us, what is our purpose, and what will we do?" With the excellence of an education at an institution like Gordon, and the challenge to integrate our faith with our action, we can resolve the tension between "knowing" and "doing". There is no scarcity of feet to wash. Towels are always available. The only limitation involved is the ability of each of us to be on our hands and knees, to compromise our pride, to be involved and have compassion for others, to be willing to serve, to be owned by the Lord we love, to act upon what we know. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though He was rich, yet for your sakes, he became poor, so that you through His poverty, might become rich. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. It is the Lord Jesus that you are serving.

* * * *

10/25/94