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# Etched in Stone, Engraved on the Heart (Arlington, TX)

C. William Pollard

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**C12's 2006 Leaders Conference**

**Arlington, TX**

**September 29, 2006**

**C. William Pollard**

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

I am delighted to be with you tonight and share some thoughts about the opportunities and challenges we have as leaders to integrate the claims of our faith with the demands of our work, to serve and care for our families and yes, to build great businesses for a greater purpose.

My son, Chip Pollard, who is President of John Brown University, will be joining me tonight and sharing some of his thoughts.

As I reflected upon our subject and considered what might be the age span of our audience and the importance of relating our leadership responsibilities to family as well as to work, I thought it would be helpful to provide a two-generational perspective, and so, we come to you as a father and son team, each with our own views. I understand we will have a time for questions at the conclusion of our remarks. We both look forward to this time of dialog with you. Chip knows in advance that I reserve the right of a father to refer the tough questions to him.

Now as I share with you from some of my experiences, I do not come with all the answers nor do I have a simple formula or five step process for success. However, I may have faced some of the questions you are facing and walked down some of the roads that you may be traveling. In my journey, I have found that identifying the question is often more important than knowing all the answers and that God works and speaks during times of ambiguity and adversity.

As I say this about the importance of questions, I am reminded of a greeting that a friend of mine uses on his voice mail and answering machine. It simply says the following: “Hello. This is not just a voicemail or an answering machine, it is a questioning device. 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.”

What would be our answer to these questions? Who are we and what do we want? Most of us here have leadership responsibilities. Some of us have the title of President or CEO after our name. We often identify who we are by our job or title. But is that who we really are? Where did we come from and where are we going? What do we want out of life – out of our business – from our families – from our faith? What is the relationship between the God we worship on Sunday and the profit we make on Monday? What did Jesus mean when he said, “No man can serve two Masters”? Is there a virtue in profit? How does God fit into our business?

I won't be able to adequately deal with all of these questions tonight, but most of them are discussed in my new book, *Serving Two Masters? Reflections on God and Profit*. I have brought some copies of the book with me for those who are interested.

And, by the way, as we are talking about questions with a group of leaders, what do we say leadership is 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 and sometimes mundane and unromantic. Peter Drucker concludes that its essence is performance and that leadership, in and of itself, is not necessarily good or desirable. He goes on to say that leadership is a only a means and then concludes, to what end is the crucial question.

As we view leadership this way, we can better understand what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples when he washed their feet.

The end of leadership is not about you or about me, it is about the people who follow and the direction we are leading them and the responsibility we assume for their growth and development. 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 turn them off;

to be an example in our private and public life of the Lord we love;

to recognize that every person regardless of the title or position has been created in the image and likeness of God with dignity and worth and their own fingerprint of potential.

The health and welfare of people cannot be understood or measured solely in terms of their economic or physical needs. Nor can it be measured only by their intellectual or educational accomplishments. There also is a spiritual dimension to the human condition. It is this spiritual dimension that influences moral behavior and the development of character and is the genesis of love, not hate; good, not evil. It is this spiritual dimension of people that raises the question of God and His role in both the act of creation and the act of redemption.

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

One of the most interesting books is not by a Christian or a religious authority but instead by an economist, a Nobel Prize winner and a faculty member of 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. As a secular observer, 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 or spiritual resources.

What he affirms for us in this conclusion is that the business firm is not just a place where we make money and create wealth, but it also can become a moral community for the development of human character. A community where it is ok 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 that on average was 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 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 understanding and acceptance. I considered the people of our firm as, in fact, the soul of 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 our 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 my faith and lead in the development of the spiritual as well as the economic side of the firm was to seek to serve as I led. As I did so, I was able to affirm the truth of what I said and believed could be measured by what I did.

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 senior management team, now over 30 years ago and spent the first two months of my role as a Senior Vice President out cleaning floors and doing the maintenance and other work which was part of our service business. In so doing, I was beginning to understand what would be my dependence upon and responsibility to the people I would lead. Little did I realize then that this would ultimately involve over 200,000 people as we grew to serve over 12 million customers.

Later on in my career, as I became CEO of the firm, the faces of our service workers would flash often 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?

Those who want to be involved in their business as a calling from God 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.

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.

In the process, I have sometimes ended up with a broken relationship. In such times, there was a need for admitting my mistake.

Early on in my leadership at ServiceMaster, I was to learn two other important lessons of leadership. The teacher for one was my son Chip and for the other was my friend and advisor Peter Drucker.

After college, Chip's first graduate school experience was Harvard Law School. When he came home after his first year at Harvard, he was asked to share some of his experiences at one of our church services.

Chip explained to the audience that his experience at Harvard had thrust him into an environment where there were people of many different faiths and beliefs. He concluded that if he were to engage and embrace them with the truth of his faith, he would not likely convince them through words of defining or defending his faith. Instead he needed to live and share his faith in a way that it could be examined, considered, and yes, embraced by some. His thoughtful presentation and example provided a model for me to follow as a leader in my business life. It would be wrong for me to use my leadership to impose my faith or treat people differently because they didn't believe the way I did. The example of my life had to tell the story. There would be times when I could share God's love and His way of salvation, but it needed to be done within the context of how people saw me live my faith.

The second lesson involved a discussion I had with Peter Drucker about planning for the future of our firm and setting what I thought was an agenda of priorities. After listening to me, he responded by giving me a history lesson on the use of the word “priority” in the English language. He said that it first came into use in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century in the singular and it wasn’t until the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that it was pluralized. He then emphasized that the issue I was facing in the business was not a question of priorities, but instead of finding the priority and doing it.

That night, in my hotel room, I was reflecting on his advice and also some issues of “priorities” and balance in my own life including some tension I was feeling between time spent with family, time spent with the church and time spent in business. As I read once again from Matthew 25, I realized in a new way there could be only one priority in my life and that was to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness”. That meant, first, if God wasn’t in it, there was no time for it. Second, I could do a better job of disciplining and scheduling my time and third, if God was in it, it was not so much the quantity of time I spent, but instead the quality of time. For me, this issue of balance is and may always be a work in process.

One thing is clear; however, there is no room for a bifurcated life – God on Sunday; work on Monday; and time for my family whenever I can get to it. My business has become a channel of distribution for fulfilling and living my faith. A channel that has reached from a 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. My family has become the joy of my life: my wife of 47 years, and my children and now 15 grandchildren. Judy has been a great helpmate and my kids as adults have become best friends and each in their own way has been good teachers and advisers.

Joshua is one of those Biblical examples of a great leader. As he came to the closing days of his leadership, he called all of the tribes of Israel together 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 and then he 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 and our family can also be a worship to the God we love as we serve and live our faith. The business firm, where we serve customers and make money, and our home and family, where we nurture and are nurtured, can become centers 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.

As I close my part of this time of sharing, I am reminded of the words of C. S. Lewis 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.”

My closing question is simply this, “In this process of life, Who are we becoming – and How are we nurturing the becoming of others?”

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