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Leadership (Estes Park, CO)

C. William Pollard

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LEADERSHIP

DECADE OF PROMISE
ESTES PARK, COLORADO
MAY 16, 1994

C. WILLIAM POLLARD, CHAIRMAN
THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY
DOWNERS GROVE, ILLINOIS

Thank you for the opportunity of sharing with you some thoughts about leadership. I would like to begin our time together reading from John 13.

Does this describe the leader of today--is servant leadership at the core of our subject today? There is no scarcity of feet to wash. Towels are always available. The limitation, if there is one, is our ability to be on our hands and knees, to compromise our pride--be involved and have compassion for those we serve.

A friend of mine recently had an interesting experience with one of those telephone answering machines. [Here tell the story of "Who are you and what do you want?"]

Who are we and what do we want? I would hope that we would all agree that as followers of Jesus Christ we are seeking to be more effective in our witness and ministry in a world that desperately needs our involvement and leadership.

It is a world of accelerated change and choice. The changes in the politics and economies of what was the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and what is emerging in China have affected the lives of millions of people.

Yes, there is more freedom in the world today and certainly more choice and definitely more confusion. The restraints that suppressed the age-old conflicts of some people groups are no longer there. Both religious and cultural hatreds have come to the surface.

The infrastructures we have developed in the West to help guide the freedom of choice cannot be easily duplicated in societies that have grown up under central planning and control. Nor can these societies assimilate the inevitable excesses of freedom that we have allowed in the West, whether they be sexual liberties, drugs, violence, failures or poverty.

(Insert Jody's and my experience--last 12 months.)

The mood of our land is pessimistic. Not many Americans are excited about the opportunity of tomorrow. In addition to the issues of uncertainty in employment ???? ?????. We don't seem to trust those who represent us in government. We know that we are going to have to pay higher taxes, but we are not sure about the benefit. We want universal access to health care,

but nobody knows the costs or how we are going to finance this right. The enormity of the deficit means one thing for certain: the dollar bill in my 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 the sheer volume of publicity given them, seem to be more prevalent today than they were in the past. We live in a society where people have moral pluralism, and where people question whether there are any absolutes. What are the guidelines?

Some discuss our period of time in terms of Post-Modernism and Deconstructionism where everything is relative, even the meaning of words.

They advocate that the university should no longer be a place for the pursuit of knowledge. In Post Modern thought it becomes a place to pursue pleasure and desire. It should be more erotic than cerebral. 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. Arthur Schlesinger describes it as a time of the disuniting of America. Where group rights have overtaken individual liberties and the principle of *e pluribus unum* is fading.

But however you view or label this rapidity of change and choice and lack of predictability in the events that swirl around us, I would like to suggest that in this crucible of uncertainty there is great opportunity for positive direction, provided those of us who have been trained to think, lead--and lead with conviction of purpose--lead as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Will the leader please stand? Not the full-time worker, but the full-time servant. Not the theologian, but the lover of people. Not the preacher, but the listener. Not the teacher, but the learner. Not the administrator, but the initiator. Not the successful businessman, but the steward. Not the taker, but the giver.

Now as I ask these fundamental questions about leadership and seek some solutions, I do so not as a politician, educator, or minister of the gospel, but simply as a businessman--a businessman who is seeking to lead a fast-growing, dynamic service company that we call ServiceMaster--masters of service, serving the Master. Our revenues today are in excess of \$4 billion. We provide management services in over 1300 health care institutions, 500 hundred colleges and public schools, and 100 major industrial facilities. We are also providing a variety of specialty services to over 4.5 million homeowners.

We are a company that has experienced rapid growth, doubling in size every three years for the past twenty years. We are a public company, and our shares are listed and traded on the New York Stock Exchange. For the last 11 years, my performance can be measured by whether the

price of our stock is up or down. Yes, I live in one of those pressure cooker environments, where earnings and profits must be reported quarter by quarter and where earnings and profits have always been up every quarter for the past twenty-three years. The shareholders to whom I am responsible as a leader vote every day on my leadership. They buy, hold, or sell their share of ownership.

The majority of our business is in the United States, although we now compete in the global economy with operations located in 22 foreign countries stretching from Karachi, Pakistan to Tokyo, Japan. Our future and survival are simply dependent upon over 200,000 people, most of them located in our customer's environment and possessing many different skills and talents, doing what is right in providing a quality service.

There is much about our business that may be classified as routine or mundane. We are often dealing with people in 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. 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 mission.

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 regularly pray before business meetings and include a Bible verse in our annual report. 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 purpose. 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. [Story of Marion Wade]

Is there anything we can learn together about leadership and effectiveness from our experiences? When you hear the word diversity, do you shudder or are you ready to listen and grow and accept change and difference.

How are you dealing with the tensions between work and family? Do you draw lines between the sacred and the secular or can you integrate your faith with your work--your faith with your community? Can you be an instrument of civility in a world of violence? Are we citizens of this nation--this world, or are we only citizens of Heaven?

Let me suggest that to follow Jesus Christ and to get at the core of the leadership challenge before us, we must have more:

1. Compromise
2. Involvement
3. Compassion
4. Conviction

A leader never has enough time, resources or people to get the job done. There is always the need for time, resources, and people. If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing poorly, i.e. doing something just to get started. A leader must compromise to be effective--I am not suggesting compromise of the essentials, but I am saying be careful about what you put in the category.

As Evangelicals, we keep defining and redefining our faith, with lines that split, divide and exclude. I think the message of Jesus Christ is clear: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me. For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved. For God so loved the world [not just the Evangelicals or the Brethren] that whosoever [no race or gender qualification here] believes on me shall be saved." As Evangelicals, we have developed our own subculture with our own language and customs. We try to label each other and determine who fits and who should be excluded. We keep redefining God's word by our own statements of faith. We want all the answers, when God has said, "You need to live with some ambiguity." Several weeks ago a group of my friends from a Christian college came to our office seeking financial support from either our company or a group of our officers for a Christian hospital in Africa. Can we be more inclusive? Where do we compromise (not our faith but our culture) on the nonessentials so that we can reach out and touch and care? [Story of half a loaf and half a baby].

There are a lot of crazy things going on in this world around us, and there is reason for us to withdraw--send our kids to Christian schools or home school--limit most of our social activities and friendships to our local church, but the world needs our involvement, not our withdrawal. Our salt and light are desperately needed. There is much of what we hear from the Christian publications or Christian radio that would encourage us to circle the wagons in defense of the faith, but I am suggesting an offense of involvement. Billy Graham has chosen a life of involvement for the unsaved. I am suggesting that Christians identify what they have in common, not how they are different, and unite in the common effort of sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

(Story of Billy Graham -- Nixon & Hillary)

Christ was a leader of compassion--compassion for the lost, for the poor and needy, for the leper, for the non-Jew, for the pagan. He preached unity among the believers, not division--acceptance, not assimilation--witness by example, not just talk or performance.

A message of compromise, involvement and compassion may result in nothing more than a statement of good intentions-- a wish list for the social do-gooder--unless we are leaders with a conviction of what the essentials of our faith are and a compassion to carry those essentials to a world of need.

The authority of the Word of God and the deity of Jesus Christ--there can be no compromise on these truths, and as we seek to understand them, they will drive us to the world God so loved.

The world, not just our Christian friends, not just the denomination of our roots, not just that illusive constituency that provides our support, needs the Christian leadership. This is a time for each of us to review and refine our "belief," focusing on the essentials, disregarding the non-essentials. The world needs committed Christian leaders who know what they believe and what they would die for, who are committed to apply and live their belief where they are planted, who recognize and support the sanctity of life and the dignity and worth of every individual created in God's image and who maintain a quest of inquiry, knowing that all truth is God's truth and that learning is a lifelong experience.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . . and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Jesus cared enough to compromise His disposition with the Father, to be involved in becoming a man, and to have the compassion of the need to take the form of a servant, so that His followers could do likewise.

We must reach out to include more, tolerate more, and serve more.

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