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How to Be a Leader for the Future

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SUCCESS 2000
DECEMBER 16, 1999
“HOW TO BE A LEADER FOR THE FUTURE”

C. WILLIAM POLLARD
CHARIMAN & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
THE SERVICEMASTER COMPANY

Thank you. I am delighted to be with you this morning and share some thoughts with you about leadership. Now there is a reason why we are all here today. Each of us are interested in learning more about how to achieve and to succeed. I know that if I could sit down and talk to each one of you individually about the subject of achieving and succeeding, we would end up with a discussion about significance. How can I make a difference?

As we came here this morning, there is something that all of us have in common, we had absolutely nothing to do with our beginning. How we came into this world, what family we were born to, whether we were to be tall or short, male or female, rich or poor, high intelligence or just average.

Although we had no choice about our beginning, every one of us has a choice today about what we are doing – about how we will live the life God has given us. None of us are slaves. We have not been conscripted. We have a choice - an opportunity to fail or succeed, to distract and destroy, or to achieve and build. Each one of us has a choice to make or not to make a significant contribution in the lives of others. To do so is to lead.

How we do it, and whether we do it with success and significance depends a lot on what's going on in this mind of ours - this two inch battlefield that is very real and is the place where success and achievement begins.

So what is it that we believe in? Who are we, and what do we want?

As I asked these questions, I am reminded of an experience a friend of mine had with those proverbial answering machines as he was trying to call one of his friends. As the machine responded, it went like this: “Hello, this is not an answering machine, it is a question machine. Who are you, and what do you want? Please give your answer at the tone.” Who are we, and what do we really want? Key questions in life; key questions that need answers as part of reaching for success; as part of leading for the future; as part of leading with a purpose and conviction.

Now, as I reach these conclusions, remember I am not a philosopher or an educator or political or religious leader, but simply a business person. Someone who is seeking to lead a fast, growing, dynamic service company that we call ServiceMaster.

We have experienced rapid growth over the years, doubling in size every three to four years for now over 30 years with system-wide revenues exceeding \$7 billion. We have the privilege of serving over 10 million customers in the United States and forty-three foreign countries.

Yes, I live in one of those pressure cooker environments where revenue and profits must be reported quarter by quarter. For 28 years right up to the second quarter of this year, revenue and profits have been up every quarter in every year. Yes, that’s right. We missed it this year. Some would say a break in such a record was inevitable. Maybe so, but it was still painful. It is at such a time that one’s leadership and belief about the future is important. Our business continues to grow, and I am confident that the results for the overall year will show that the second quarter was a blip, not a trend.

But there is something more to leadership than profits and a bottom line. For me to be successful in leading over 250,000 people to serve and serve with excellence, I must be involved in what I refer to as “soul craft”.

Drucker’s classic definition of management is getting the right things done through others. The leader of the future, however, cannot stop there. He or she must also be concerned about what is happening to the people in the process. Those people, who are producing the profits, also have cares and concerns; emotions and feelings; beliefs and convictions; they can love or they can hate. They can contribute or distract, motivate or be discouraged. They are, in fact, the soul of the business firm. Leadership in the 21st Century must be prepared to serve the people they lead. They must love and care for them. In a fast paced, rapidly changing world, people need hope beyond busyness of life – they need purpose and meaning in their work and life.

Will the real leader please stand up? Not the president or the person with the most distinguished title or the longest tenure, 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 or herself but the promoter of others; not the administrator, but the initiator; not the taker, but the giver; not the talker, but the listener;

Fortune magazine has described the soulless company as suffering from an enemy within and cites a quote from Henry Ford as being descriptive of such a condition. “Why is it”, he said, “I always get a whole person when all I really wanted was a pair of hands?” How many times as leaders have we been guilty of looking at the people we work with as just a pair of hands or simply another producer or the cost of doing business. An economic animal that can be simply motivated by a compensation package or a new incentive plan.

People are the real assets of our business firms, and they walk out of the door every night. They want to trust their leaders. They expect their leaders to walk the talk with a transparency that calls for nothing less than truth and full disclosure. There is an open door of opportunity for leaders who are both performance and value driven, who have thought deeply about who people are, and why they work not just what they do, and how they do it.

When you visit the headquarters of our firm located just 15 miles south of here, you walk into a large, two-story lobby, and on your right is a curving marble wall, **90 feet long** and **18 feet high**. Carved in stone on that wall in letters 8 feet high are four statements that constitute our mission: To Honor God In All We Do, To Help People Develop, To Pursue Excellence, and To Grow Profitably. A mission statement simple enough to be remembered – controversial enough to raise questions requiring a continuous process of explaining and relating - and profound enough to be lasting.

If you were to tour the rest of the building, you would notice that nearly all of the workspaces are moveable. Most of the walls do not reach to the ceiling. Practically everything in the building is changeable and adaptable, just like the marketplace we serve with its changing demands and opportunities.

But the marble wall conveys a permanency that does not change. The principles carved in this stone are lasting. The first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals. As we seek to implement these objectives in the operation of our business, they provide for us a reference point for seeking to do that which is right and avoiding that which is wrong. They remind us that every person has been created in the image of God with dignity and worth and great potential. We do not use our first objective as a basis of exclusion. It is, in fact, the reason for our promotion of diversity, as we recognize that different people are all part of God's mix.

These objectives provide our purpose and meaning. They represent the mission of our firm.

People want to work for a cause, not just a living. When there is alignment between the mission of the firm and the cause of its people, a creative power is unleashed that results in quality service and growth and development of the people serving.

As one leads for the future, one should be ready to be surprised by the potential. (Tell story of earring).

The leader of the future must learn to walk in the shoes of the people they lead and not hang on to a title or position (tell story of my recruitment into ServiceMaster).

As leaders we must learn to provide an environment where people are the subject of work, not the object of work, and where they are nurtured in who they are becoming (tell the story of Olga and Camellia).

In a few days, we will celebrate another new year. No, not just another new year, a new century – a new millennium. One thing for certain, the future will be different from today. But there will be a common link. People - people who will be searching for meaning and purpose in life. For me that purpose – the response to the questions “Who am I?” and “Where am I going?” starts with a belief in God and in the fact that everyone has been created in His image with value and worth and dignity. It is my role and responsibility as a leader to provide an environment where people can grow and develop. As a follower of Jesus Christ, the best way I can live my faith in the marketplace is to do just that.

Live it. To serve and care for the people I work with. This is my standard for success.

My choice is to make a significant contribution in the lives of others – a choice that can be yours as well.