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Timess Values in a New Millennium or Timeless Values in Changing, Turbulent Times

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Windsor Conference
“Timeless Values In a New Millennium or
In Changing Turbulent Times”

May 19, 2001

C. William Pollard
The ServiceMaster Company

We live in a world of accelerated change and choice. There is much about what is occurring around us that is exciting and is pregnant with opportunity. There are also challenges, conflicts, violence and a disintegration of some of the institutions, order and structure in our societies.

Where do we go for an anchor in such a sea of change and choice? Are there timeless values that we can rely upon as we navigate through the tension of opposite currents of thoughts and action? How shall we then live? How shall we then lead?

Some of the more remarkable changes in our world have been caused by advances in technology. The availability of information has brought about a new transparency and openness that is affecting the way we conduct our lives and understand each other. Closed societies are relics of the past. The ability to contain or control information as part of exercising power is no longer the tool of manipulation that it once was. Today, candor is the best way for a leader to earn credibility.

E-mail, e-commerce, the Internet were not even part of our vocabulary ten years ago. Today, I can hold in the palm of my hand a computer that gives me instant access to information sources all over the world, and allows me to

communicate with business associates and others at any time with recorded messages and appropriate documentation, eliminating the necessity for paper, postage and delivery. In fact, the post office and the mailman may soon be relics of the past.

In America, this rapid expansion of information technology has also allowed us to turn our homes into offices, entertainment, educational and purchasing centers. One can sit at home before their computer and purchase everything from groceries to automobiles, plan their next vacation, access libraries and, with a link to one's TV or stereo system, order up the latest in entertainment. In this environment, people can become consumed in the fantasy of a virtual world without feeling the pain and the consequences of the real world.

This mobility and flexibility of access to information also is changing how we look at work and where work can be accomplished, including the future purpose and function of the office or production facility. We are now able to move work to where the worker is instead of always requiring the worker to come to work.

As leaders in government, business or other organizations, we now have the opportunity to process and analyze information in a way that should help in decision making, provided we learn to use the computer to resolve the repetitive and routine aspects of problem solving. This added or artificial intelligence component will provide the decision maker more options and choices, which should improve his or her ability to make the best choices – the right choices. But as leaders, how will we make these expanded judgment calls? What will be the timeless values that we can call upon as the basis for such judgments?

Technology is not only affecting the way we communicate, but it also is affecting our physiology. The developments in modern day medicine, genetics and understanding of healthy diets has already improved the longevity of our lives, increasing our body size and expanding the efficiency and durability of our vital organs. At the same time, in many of our cultures, we do not seem to have answers for the growing problems resulting from what is often referred to as the subjective diseases, such as depression, substance abuse and eating disorders. All of these “medical disorders” affect a person’s well being and ability to function.

As one examines the dynamics of some of these medical trends going forward, it obviously raises pressing public policy issues as to population growth, including dramatic changes in the aging of the population, growing pension costs, health care costs, and care for the mental and spiritual dimension of people. Are there timeless values that speak to the issue of a person’s well-being?

The forces of change also are having a profound effect upon the economies of every nation. There is a growing interdependence between and among our economies that is definitely global in nature, with the nation state becoming less and less relevant. At the same time, there is a growing disparity in the distribution of income between the wealthy nations and the underdeveloped nations.

The impact of technology and the growing importance of information may well have a compounding effect upon this disparity. The reason is simply that the wealth creation formula of the future will be dependent more upon human capital than the availability of land or reproducible material assets. This human capital factor is estimated by most economists to have a value that is twice as great as any physical or financial resource. The importance of the role of training and education and keeping up with the explosion of knowledge and information is

obvious. In many developing nations and economies, the infrastructure to accelerate the process of learning is not in place.

Are there timeless values that speak to the issue of economics and equality?
Is it a question of quality of income or quality of opportunity?

But let me pause for a moment and remind us as we think of the importance of the development of human capital as part of income distribution and/or equality of opportunity, we should not forget who people are and why they exist - not just focus on what they produce and how much income they have.

There are lessons to be learned from my culture in this regard. While there still are many economic inequities in the American society, during the last 100 years there has been improvement in the measure of inequality and income distribution, with a significant increase in the average real income per capita. But as we have made gains in life expectancy, health, education and real income, we have failed to develop anything comparable in the area of growth in moral behavior or relationships among individuals.

We have proceeded under the assumption that issues of injustice, violence and moral behavior could be improved by raising income. The problems of drug addiction, alcoholism, birth rates among unmarried teenage girls, rape, battery of women and children, broken families, violent teenage death and other crimes are generally more severe than they were 100 years ago.

Many of these crises in our culture have, in fact, accelerated in the last 30 years. For example, births to single women have now grown and the proportion of children living in one-parent households has now doubled. (In fact, America today may be one of the most challenging societies in which to be conceived. It is

currently estimated that 35% of all conceptions will be terminated prior to birth as a result of abortion and of the total births, 30% will be to unwed mothers. Of the remaining 70%, more than half will experience a single-parent home before they reach their maturity, all as a result of divorce.) Alcohol consumption continues to grow at an alarming rate. The media, including now the many undisciplined productions over the Internet, promote sex, heavy drinking, smoking and gambling. In fact, the messages of constraint and the exercise of responsible behavior with corresponding accountability, are few and far between.

The family unit is under siege and parental involvement in the development of character and moral behavior is lessening. This burden is increasingly being placed upon schools, even though they can not replace the role of parents. Moral vices are increasingly being defined as illnesses, with the hope that more therapists will have the answer. The concept of sin or evil is not often discussed or considered outside the walls of the church or synagogue. Equivocation on what were established values and virtues in our society have left us with spiritual and moral vacuums.

The lesson to be learned from the American society is simple, but yet profound. People cannot be understood or measured solely in terms of economic or physical needs nor can they be measured solely by their intellectual or educational accomplishments. They also have a spiritual dimension that needs to be nurtured and developed – a spiritual dimension that influences behavior and that is the genesis of love and hate and good and evil.

It was Alexander Solzhenitsyn in his classic work *Gulag Archipelago* who said “gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes nor between political parties, but right through every human heart. Inside us, it oscillates. Even within hearts

overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained; and even in the best of hearts, there remains a small corner of evil. It is impossible to expel evil from the world in its entirety, but it is possible to constrict it within each person.”

Where does this constriction or restraint come from? I suggest that it may be found within the well-ordered and developed spiritual side of a person. As we reflect upon timeless truths in changing and turbulent times, how do we then develop this spiritual side - this character of people - this character of a society or a nation?

How do people find a sense of purpose, develop a strong family ethic, a sense of community in relationship to others, an ethic of right and wrong, a capacity to resist the lure of hedonism, a sense of discipline, a capacity for education and learning and a thirst for knowledge, an appreciation of quality and goodness and a willingness to love and control hatred.

Now as I raise these questions, you know I do so not as a philosopher, educator, political or religious leader, but simply as a business person. Someone who is seeking to lead a fast growing and dynamic service company that we call ServiceMaster - a company that has experienced rapid growth over the last 25 years, doubling in size every 3 – 3 ½ years during this period, serving primarily in the United States, but also in 44 foreign countries, with customer level revenues exceeding over \$8 billion this year. We are managing or employing over 250,000 people, serving 12 million customers.

I also am, however, a person of faith and my starting point for understanding the spiritual side of my being begins with my relationship with God. I am a Christian – a follower of Jesus Christ. My faith, by its very nature, is a defined faith. Definition brings clarity. It allows for order – a systematic way of

thinking and learning. Definition, however, also sets boundary lines, determines limits of what is and what is not. It can be exclusive by shutting out those who do not believe the same way I do or fit my definition.

How, then, do I relate my faith to a diverse and pluralistic marketplace? As a leader in business, as a leader in a large public company, how do I integrate my faith with my work? How do I touch the spiritual side of people within my community?

Do I redefine my faith to be more inclusive, tolerant and acceptable? Water it down so as not to be offensive? Do I maintain that old separation between the sacred and the secular? Simply accept the premise that religion and business and politics just don't mix? Do I use my leadership to try to impose my faith?

Or do I seek to simply live and share my faith in such a way that it can be examined and tested by my colleagues and fellow workers and, yes, even embraced by some, all within the context of the community that works together to produce goods and services for a profit and also a community that seeks to develop the human character and moral behavior of people .

Our company objectives are simply stated: To honor God in all we do, To help people develop, To pursue excellence and To grow profitably.

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, regardless of faith, choice or label, has been created in the image of God with dignity and worth and with the potential to do good or do evil. Their character and moral behavior is being

affected by their work environment and they are in the process of becoming (becoming what? There was not a word following “becoming”). They each have their own fingerprint of potential. They are, in fact, the reason for our single-minded focus on people as individuals not just part of a protected group or classification.

Now 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. And it does not mean that everything will be done right. We experience our share of mistakes. But because of a stated standard and reason for that standard, we cannot hide our mistakes. They are flushed out in the open for correction and, in some cases, forgiveness.

Nor is it a standard that should be used as a simplistic reason for our financial success. It cannot be applied like some mathematical formula. It does, however, provide a foundation and a reference point for action. It becomes a living set of principles that allows us to confront life’s difficulties and failures with the assurance that the starting point never changes. It causes us to think and re-think about who we are – why we work and what is the purpose and meaning of it all.

Now I have shared with you this background so that you will have some context for understanding what I consider to be some of those timeless values that have, in fact, survived the test of time.

As you might well expect, the first such value for me is the value of a person - every person being special, created in the image and likeness of God, with their own fingerprint of potential - every person with dignity and worth, regardless of rank, title or position, regardless of gender, race or ethnic background,

regardless of skills, talents, level of education, regardless of whether they like me, love me or are my competitors or enemies. This requires a high standard of civility, a care and concern for the needs of others, a responsibility of a leader for the development and growth of the person not only as a unit of production but also as a whole person.

Here quote Henry Ford's comment. Also give three examples: James Smith, Rich Kehl and Breck Swanquist.

Two, the value of pain, difficulty and failure and the power of good, success and victory. Here describe the story of the student who felt Jesus' life was a failure because He died and obviously didn't understand what the Resurrection was all about. Also tell the story of Dr. Brand and some of my pains and difficulties.

Three, the value of serving as you lead – the example of Jesus. Never ask someone to do something you wouldn't do yourself. Also the story of the WeServe day at ServiceMaster as well as my being recruited into the firm.

Four, the value of truth without compromise – small but big word – involves omission as well as commission - disclosure as well as failure to disclose. What is objective truth? It is in the eye of the beholder. What is truth? Pilate's question to Jesus and Jesus' statement of truth: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life" focus not only on what we serve but what we do. The person is the messenger of truth and is the essence of objective truth. M. T. White comment about his response to academics who asked the question: Do you really believe Jesus is God? And his response: I don't know enough about God to say that Jesus is God but I know enough about Jesus to say that God is Jesus.

The value of investing. This involves not investment in money terms but investing ourselves in the lives of others. The story of the leader will be told in the changed lives of others. To do so, we must go where the fish are. Story of Matthew 5. Boats are safe in the harbor, but that is not what boats are built for. When one understands fully the value of investing themselves, they realize their responsibilities. They own nothing. The only reason they have something that someone else doesn't have is because of the requirement of stewardship. This is the stewardship principle, which is also a value. Nothing we have, skills or talents, is there for our own use, but is there to be invested. In a sense, we don't own anything.

Here tell stories of what's it all about. This is not an exhaustive list of the timeless values, but for me these are some of the guideposts – the reality of my faith lived into the life of seeking to lead and serve others – the reality as we talk about timeless values and seek to understand that we are in the process of beginning to understand what eternity is all about. Here quote from C. S. Lewis:

“Things that are not eternal are already out of date.” Also quote from C. S. Lewis: “We have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations, these are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is the immortals who we joke with, work with, marry, snub and exploit.”

Another quote: Romans 12-1: This is the version called The Message. “So here is what I want you to do –helping you take your everyday ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going to work and walking around life and place it before God as an offering.”

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revised 5/30/01