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## Values as a Power Factor (Short Version)

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**St. Gallen – ISC Symposium  
“Values as a Power Factor”**

**May 17, 2001**

**C. William Pollard  
The ServiceMaster Company**

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We live in a world of accelerated change and choice. These forces of are affecting the way we live, the decisions we make, and the function and operation of the organizations that provide order and structure to our societies. In such an environment of rapid change, people are searching for meaning and purpose in life and in work. When everything else is moving, they need an anchor they can hold on to.

As we seek to understand these forces of change, we are exercising the art of being human. In so doing, we should also recognize that our humanity is not only physical and rational, but is also spiritual. It is this spiritual side of our humanity that influences our character, our ability to determine right or wrong, to recognize good or evil, to make moral judgements and to love or hate.

In the past, there have been moral and religious standards that have guided the behavior of people as they relate to each other, and have provided some balance for the exercise of power and authority. Are these moral standards of the past applicable to the future? In a fast-paced changing world, involving

advancements in technology, is there room for the development of the spiritual side of the person?

In his classic work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber concluded that the Protestant Reformation was one of the driving forces for the growth of capitalism. He also observed, however, that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the growing bureaucracy of large business organizations had assumed control over the worker. The worker was part of a machine of production trapped in what Weber described as the “iron cage” without hope of relating the specifics of a work task to the process of human development or glorifying God.

The worker no longer had a choice to be “called.” Work had become just a matter of survival.

So now, almost 100 years later and after the failure of the grand experiment of Marx and Lenin and their followers, and in light of the reality that the free market system is alive and functioning in most parts of the world, how are we to view the role of the business organization or the corporation or the role of work as we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

In the past several years in my country, there have been a number of articles on the role God and spirituality in the workplace. The *Wall Street Journal* had an

article about how business people were searching for God again but were timid about talking about their search or about their relationship at work. *Newsweek* had a recent article about how our minds have been wired for spirituality. *USA Today* recently interviewed nine CEOs of high-tech companies and found out that most of them had thought a lot about the big question of God, especially as they pushed the limits of technology and science and saw the order in creation.

Fogel, an economist from the University of Chicago and a 1993 Nobel Prize winner, recently authored a book tracing the history of religious faith in America from pre-Revolutionary War time to the present. He analyzes the effect of religion upon issues in our society and in our economy. He concludes that the biggest issue today in the US culture is not the lack of employment opportunities or the distribution of economic resources, nor is it the lack of diversity or equal opportunity. In his opinion, it is the lack of distribution of what he refers to as spiritual resources or spiritual assets. There is, he says, a void in the development of the character of people and their spiritual dimension.

In his new book *The Death of Character*, James Hunter, a noted sociologist from the University of Virginia, concludes that while Americans are innately as capable of developing character as they ever were in the past, there are now few cultural or institutional guidelines in our society that call for its cultivation or

maintenance. The reason, he suggests, is because there is no consensus of moral authority.

Now there is general agreement among most economists that the wealth creation formula of the future will be more dependent upon human capital than on the availability of land or reproducible material assets. This human capital factor is estimated to have a value twice as great as any physical resources.

So, if human capital is so important to our future and if there is a void in the development of character and a lack of consensus for a moral authority, how do we then lead in the nurturing and development of human character and moral behavior? How do people feel a sense of purpose, develop a strong family ethic, a sense of community in relationship to others, an ethic of benevolence, a willingness to engage diversity, a sense of right and wrong, good and evil, a capacity to risk the lure of hedonism, a sense of discipline, a capacity for education and to learn, a thirst for knowledge and appreciation of quality, a willingness to love instead of hate?

History has taught us that there is a definite association between the individual character of the leaders of a society and the collective well-being of those being led. Plato suggested that if leaders were not people of character, there would be a social disintegration. If a business organization was responsible for

dehumanizing the worker as part of a machine of production at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, can it play a more positive role as we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Can the business firm be a moral community for the development of human character and behavior? Do God and profit mix?

Now, as I raise these questions, I do so not as a philosopher, educator, political or religious leader, but simply as a business person -- someone who has been participating in the leadership of 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 to 3 ½ years during this period, serving primarily in the United States, but also in 40 foreign countries, with customer level revenues this year exceeding \$8 billion. We are managing and employing over 250,000 people, providing a variety of services to over 12 million customers and, yes, we have experienced change. Over 85% of what we are doing today in the services we deliver, we were not doing just ten years ago.

As a business firm, we want to excel at generating profits, creating value for our shareholders. If we don't want to play by these rules, we don't belong in the ballgame. But we also believe that we can be a community to help shape human character and behavior -- an open community where the questions of a person's spiritual development, the existence of God and how we one relates his or

her faith with their work, are issues for discussion, debate and, yes, even learning and understanding. The people of our firm are, in fact, the soul of our firm.

When you visit the headquarters of ServiceMaster, located west of the city of Chicago, you will walk into a large two-story lobby. On your right on a curving marble wall, 90 feet long and 18 feet high, carved in stone letters, are the four statements that constitute our company objectives – To honor God in all we do, To help people develop, To pursue excellence, To grow profitably.

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

But the marble wall conveys a permanency that does not change. 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. They have the potential to do good or evil. Their work is contributing to the process of the development of their character and their moral behavior is part of the business community's

responsibility. They become the basis for a single-minded focus on people as individuals, not just part of a protected group or classification.

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 into the open for correction and, in some cases, for forgiveness.

Peter Drucker's classic definition of management is getting the right things done through others, but what I am suggesting is that the business firm of the future and its leadership cannot stop there. They must be concerned about what is happening to the person in the process. The people who are producing the profits are also human. In societies where there are growing voids and vacuums in the development of human character, the business leader must assume a responsibility for such development and for fostering moral behavior.

They must view people as the subject of work, not just the object of work. They must understand and determine the basis for their own moral authority and actions and the role, if any, of God in their life. They cannot just lead a profit machine. They also must be thought leaders. They must be leaders of a



community – a moral community – committed to the development of human character and behavior.

As such, they must be involved in what I refer to as soulcraft, responding to the basic question of who people are and why they work and not just what they do and how they do it.

I conclude my remarks with these lines from T. S. Eliot written over 50 years ago, but still very applicable to today and the future.

“What life have you if you not have life together?  
There is no life that is not in community.  
And no community not lived in praise of God.  
And now you live dispersed on ribbon roads.  
And no man knows or cares who is his neighbor,  
Unless his neighbor makes too much disturbance.  
And the wind shall say, here were decent Godless people.  
Their only monument the asphalt road,  
And a thousand lost golf balls.  
Can you keep the city that the Lord keeps not with you?  
A thousand policemen directing the traffic,  
And not tell you why you come, or where you go.

When the stranger says: “What is the meaning of this city?”  
Do you huddle close together because you love each other?  
What will you answer? We all dwell together,  
To make money from each other? Is this a community?  
And the stranger will depart and return to the desert.  
Oh my soul be prepared for the coming of the stranger.  
Be prepared for him who knows how to ask questions.”

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Revised 5/28/01

Shortened version

- leaders who know what the believers stand  
for & why they believe - leader who can articulate the

- understand people

- serve as leader

- feel the pain & joy of others

- walk the talk

- how would you believe & be inspired  
to live it - to walk it -