The Gap Between Businesses and Churches

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If you were to look around your local church this Sunday would you see any successful business men and women? Many people in churches in America would say no to this question unless their church is doing something specific to reach this demographic. There is a gap that exists between businesses and churches that will continue to grow unless it is addressed. In the paragraphs to follow I will summarize some of the interviews I had with a business leader and a church leader on this subject. Further I will explore the reasons that this gap exists and what can be done to bridge the gap.

In my first meeting I interviewed a man named Jason who works in the marketing department for a healthcare company in downtown Dallas. I asked Jason first if he believed a gap existed between churches and businesses. He mentioned that he believed that the gap existed for a number of reasons but one of those reasons is that those in the business world can view those who work at a church as second rate. He went on to say that some have a subconscious belief that people work in the church world because they can't cut it in the business world. He shared an example of a friend of his who was in ministry for ten years and was attempting to transition into the business world. He said that many businesses would not consider his ten years in the church world as work experience. The viewpoint some in the business world have is that those in ministry just sit around and pray at work each day so none of it can really translate into the business world. Eventually Jason said that his friend was able to find a job in the business world and had received many promotions over the years because it turned out he really did have some skills that went beyond the church world.

I went on to ask Jason why he believed this viewpoint existed and if there was anything

we could do as the local church to change that. He said that he believed that many business people have had church experiences that have made them think that the church does not produce a quality product. Many of the business leaders are competing with other businesses so they know they have to produce a quality product. When someone is producing a product that isn't that good over and over again this often turns them away and makes them feel that someone is not a high level leader. In my interview with the church leader he mentioned that many churches are not able to produce the quality that other churches do at times because they are serving in a bivocational role. The pastors are working throughout the week because the church is so small that the congregation cannot support the pastor financially. While some are able to handle their bivocational role effectively and are able to help build leaders to help carry the load some struggle because they try to do it alone. Secondly business leaders are expecting more tangible results from the things they invest time, money and energy into. If they go to church and are not seeing results they will begin to see the church as a waste of time, money, and energy. In order to change this mindset the church needs to produce a quality product on a regular basis. Also the pastor needs to find ways to show the business leaders the difference they are making in the community. If the church can produce a quality product and can show business leaders that they are making a difference as a church they have a greater chance of bridging the gap because the business leader will begin to view the church differently.

I asked Jason next if there was any similarities between churches and businesses. He said there are definitely some similarities. He mentioned the 80/20 principle that in my world John Maxwell has made famous where he states that 20% of your activity is responsible for 80% of your results. He went on to say that often times in an organization 20% of the people are responsible for 80% of the results. This seems to be true both in churches and in businesses

either because people are tasked with things that are meant to maintain instead of grow the organization or because there is incompetency. He went on to mention that it is funny that business people can sometimes think that church leaders are second rate and that they don't produce quality work or results. This isn't a church problem this is a people problem. In every business there are people who are producing less than quality work but they have found a way to hide out in the crowd or their team will cover for them because those other individuals on the team would rather cover for someone else's incompetencies than fail. The only difference I think is that when it is found out that this worker isn't pulling their weight they usually get fired pretty quickly. I told Jason that in the church world sometimes it seems like people are known to be incompetent but will remain in their position because they have a good heart or because they have a long term relationship with those that are in charge. While it was refreshing to see that there are people in the business world that don't really pull their weight I think one thing we should learn from the business world is that we should create a culture where we are open to communicate up front that we are always trying to get the best people on staff at the church. This might mean repositioning or letting someone go because they are no longer pulling their weight. Often times we allow someone to stay on staff who is no longer contributing or who is simply unable to contribute. We are not doing that person any favors or doing our church any favors by allowing them to remain on board. We would have more quality organizations that would be more appealing to business people if we held those in our organization to a certain standard of excellence.

In my second meeting I interviewed Pastor Julian who serves as an Associate Pastor at a large church that does a very good job of bridging the gap between the church world and the business world. The community that he pastors in is a very business oriented community that

serves as home for many fortune 500 companies. I asked Julian if he thought a gap existed between churches and businesses. He said that there is a gap that exists overall but that the church should find creative ways to bridge the gap in their communities. When explaining why he thought the gap existed he stated that he believed that business leaders in his community dont like feeling like their time, money and energy is being wasted. If they feel like they are wasting their time, money and energy on something that isn't helping directly with their personal development, marriage, or family. The key to bridging the gap in this area is to preach practically and to find ways to add value to them as parent, spouse and person. If you can give them a big takeaway each week that they can apply that will help them to see the value in church. Also they see it as a waste of time when they feel like they cant contribute or like their contribution isn't helping push the ball forward. In order to bridge this gap you have to cast vision constantly by letting the church know how they made a difference as a church that week. Share pictures of projects that were done, share stories of lives that were changed, and create an atmosphere where all can see that they are making a difference as a church. He said also that the best buy in we have from business leaders is those who have found a way to use their gifts and talents in the church. One of the ways that we do this is having a regular business lunch for men and a separate one for women. They invite the business leaders in our church to invite the business community to come to the church for a lunch where they will hear a speaker speak on a subject that is relevant to business and their personal growth. It isn't overly preachy but at the beginning of the meeting the pastor will stand up to greet everyone, pray over them and introduce the guest speaker. He went on to tell me that oftentimes this provides a bridge moment where the business men and women in the room are intrigued by this meeting. It makes some of them think about trying out an actual service especially when they see how many other business leaders attend the

church. The business men and women in our church have opportunities to speak at this meeting and we allow them to have a lot of buy in to make it successful and they do a great job. It is great to see them come alive when they see that what they are doing is making a difference. Business leaders are doers and if we are just asking them to come sit at our churches on Sunday without giving them a project from time to time they will zone out and march out.

I asked Pastor Julian what he thought about business leaders thinking they were more competent than church leaders. He said that he believed that this was somewhat true because business leaders are always sizing each other up and it's only natural for them to do this with church leaders as well. He said that it is important to prove your your competency to them. I asked him how he was able to do that and he mentioned a few key ways. He said you have to learn how to speak their language. Sometimes it is by reading what they are reading simply so that you'll be able to have a conversation about it. When you are reading what they are reading sometimes illustrations will pop out in your sermons that make things especially relevant to them. Also you learn how to speak their language simply by spending time with business leaders over a long period of time. Invite them over to your home, go out to lunch with them, and when you do make sure you ask them some questions because often times they enjoy sharing their knowledge with others. If you don't have these relationships available I would say start hanging out where business leaders hang out. Julians said that he had been able to meet so many business leaders in the community by going to a city council meeting from time to time to lead the opening prayer. In this meeting he was able to shake hands with some of the biggest movers and shakers in the community and over time he has gained their respect to the point that many of them will come and ask him for advice and a prayer. Some of those business leaders have even started coming to his church as a result.

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For my last question I asked Julian if there was any similarities between business and churches. He said that nowadays the megachurch model has forced the church to operate more business like but when it comes to the church as a whole there are still some similarities. He talked about how businesses are often trying to market a product well so that they can stay in business or get that money. The church is trying to market a “product” so that people can be reached for Jesus. The only problem that I see is that sometimes I see more urgency when it comes to people who are in business than I see from church leaders. Church leaders are dealing with people's souls and eternity so there should be an urgency there that cannot be reproduced in the business world but sadly they are more urgent sometimes because they are trying to make more money.

As you can see from the interviews bridging the gap between businesses and churches is possible. It begins by tearing down the stigma that business people sometimes believe that church leaders only pray and read the bible at work. When they begin to view church leaders as more competent they will gain more respect. We do this by creating a great product as leaders and by building a team of people who can help us do this. We do this by replacing church leaders who are not producing and helping to make a quality product. We do this by showing business leaders that we can speak their language and by going out of our way to start relationships with people in the business world without them coming to us first. We do this by engaging the business leaders we do have in our churches so that they will begin to use their gifts and talents to shine and bring other business leaders along with them. This is possible but we just need to be more strategic.