

CHAPTER FIVE

The Product of the Family Business Is Service

“The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called ‘Benefactors.’ But not so with you, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table, or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.”

Luke 22:25-27

MASTER PRINCIPLE #5

**Service is the
foundation of all
lasting growth.**

It is my goal to help you not only to become a fruitful partner in ALMIGHTY & SONS yourself, but also to help you multiply yourself by *helping others* to become fruitful partners as well. What will it take for you to do that?

You'll have to become a more effective servant. Our goal must be God's goal and that is to be involved in enabling others to become proprietors. Servant leaders produce a spirit of proprietorial ownership in others.

This is the heart of the difference between someone (Christian or non-Christian) who builds his business on Christian principles, and someone who doesn't. The latter is satisfied to get employees who make him rich. The former is satisfied only if he can produce *new proprietors who become partners in the business and prosper in it themselves*. In other words, Christian leaders are committed to making others wealthy, not rich.

True Leaders Produce Fellow Workers

I continue to stress that our goal is not to make a profit or gain employees; the goal is to make partners and proprietors. This is the pattern God sets for us. Multiplying proprietors is the focus; profit is the by-product. When people are born again, they become

“children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”¹

God's aim is not that we should remain mere employees for eternity, but that we should become members of the family and partners in His business. We're junior partners, to be sure, but partners all the same. That is why Christ said this to His disciples in John 15:15-16: “No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit...” It is also why He challenged His disciples with this question in Luke 16:12: “...if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own?”

Anybody can find an employee who will work for him, as long as he offers a high enough wage. That employer is merely buying his employee's work. But employees are not what the Christian business vision is all about. It is about partners, associates, and proprietors. It is about people who have a stake in the business that goes beyond their weekly paycheck. It is about transforming people from employees to co-owners, from orphans to heirs.

One businessman who exemplifies this vision was Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart Stores. Wal-Mart grew in thirty years from an obscure five-and-dime store in Bentonville, Arkansas, to America's largest discount retail chain, with nearly two thousand stores and \$44 billion in sales by the end of 1991. “Mr. Sam,” as he encouraged everyone in the company to call him, became the country's richest man, not only by insisting that his stores always give shoppers low prices on all items, but also by ensuring that all his workers had a direct personal stake in the company's performance. He didn't call them employees; he called them *associates*.

In addition to cash wages and insurance benefits, every Wal-Mart associate also receives stock in the company. As a result, even though most earn less in hourly pay or annual salary than workers

¹ Rom. 8:16-17 (KJV)

with similar jobs at other companies, they are fiercely loyal to the company, knowing that its success promises them considerable wealth in the long-run as a reward for their sacrifices in the short-run. When Walton died, *The Wall Street Journal* reported:

Although Wal-Mart executives typically earn less salary than their peers at other big retailers, and work longer hours, the stock plan created by Mr. Walton has made many of them rich. [Chief Executive Officer] David Glass, for example, had a fiscal 1990 salary of \$630,000. That's under the earnings of the chief executives of two smaller retailers: the \$898,928 for Joseph Antonini of Kmart and the \$1.4 million for Kenneth Macke of Dayton Hudson [Target Store parent company]. But Mr. Glass leaves them behind when stock option and employee-stock-ownership plans are included. His Wal-Mart stock, obtained largely through options, is worth nearly \$80 million.

And the stock plans don't benefit only top executives. Many rank and file workers have done well on Wal-Mart stock. After nearly 25 years at the company, Shirley Cox, a cashier, still earned barely \$7 an hour. But she retired in her 40's on \$250,000 of company stock...

"The stock is a prevailing theme for everyone at Wal-Mart," says the 25-year-old assistant manager of a store in the Kansas City area who works more than 50 hours a week but earns less than \$25,000 a year. "There's sort of a promise that if you hang around long enough, you can make a fortune on the stock."²

Walton's vision for giving every worker a stake in the company is part of the reason why, after the founder's death, most analysts remained confident that the company would continue its phenomenal

²*The Wall Street Journal*, April 6, 1992, pp. A1, A6

20 percent annual growth for years to come. It could be pointed out, however, that Wal-Mart might have been even more effectively structured had it franchised its leveraged position and promoted individual ownership rather than collective ownership .

We dwell on Walton's story because it so clearly illustrates three fundamental principles about the Christian vision of business leadership. First, "Mr. Sam" considered himself his workers' servant. He didn't lord his authority over them. On any given day, he might show up unannounced at any store and throw himself into any task, from greeting customers at the door to gathering carts in the parking lot. Second, he understood that advancement must follow on faithfulness, that whoever is faithful in little will be faithful in much. For that reason, very few Wal-Mart managers or executives are ever imported from outside the company; almost all rise through the ranks. Third, he ensured that faithful workers became part owners of the company, thus tying their rewards to their performance.

A short-term, profit-oriented vision can be satisfied merely by gaining employees. A long-term, servant-oriented vision strives instead to facilitate other people becoming proprietors themselves. The best way to make a business profitable is to have as many proprietors and as few employees as possible, because proprietors generate maximum profit. Why? Because they work harder, longer, and smarter out of a sense of ownership and involvement. That's why profit sharing works. To put it simply, people naturally care more about what belongs to them than they do about what belongs to someone else. Here's the real question: How are you going to implement these truths with those you lead or influence?

What Is a True Servant Leader?

Most Christians are familiar with Christ's saying that whoever wants to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven must learn to be the servant of all. Few, however, have a biblical understanding of what real servant leadership is. All too common is the notion that servant leaders do everything for everybody. But doing everything for someone would merely make that person lazy and dependent. Real servant leaders

follow Christ's example. He serves His people by enabling them to fulfill their own destiny in God's plan.

This is true at the fundamental level of salvation and sanctification. We contribute nothing to our regeneration. God finds us "dead in... trespasses and sins" and unilaterally makes "us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."³ Then God continues His good work in us, transforming us into fruitful children. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." God sanctifies us and empowers us to do these good works as Paul made clear when he wrote, "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."⁴ And what is His pleasure in us? Paul made that clear, too, when he wrote this:

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Rom. 8:28-30

God has planned a destiny for every one of His children, and He works in us to achieve that destiny.

The Bible speaks of our destiny, the purpose for which God made us, not only in terms of eternity and Heaven, salvation, sanctification, and glorification, but also in terms of time and this world. God gives everyone gifts suitable for particular service, whether in the Church,⁵

³ Eph. 2:1,5

⁴ Phil. 2:12-13

⁵ Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:6-11

or in the world, for it is God who put wisdom even in the hearts of all the gifted artisans.⁶ He gives people gifts, not to serve themselves, but to serve others.⁷

The single greatest motivator people can have is to see that God handcrafted them and therefore they have a design. Parents, business leaders, pastors, and all who lead must help people to discover their design and fulfill their destiny in God. The godly servant leader has one primary goal: to draw others into their full potential in God. That, friend, is the work and definition of a true servant leader.

Good Leaders Gradually Share More and More Responsibility

If we are to build strong families, strong churches, or strong businesses, then we, like our Heavenly Father, must share authority and responsibility incrementally with those we lead. We must draw them into partnership with us, giving them increasing amounts of responsibility according to their calling, ability, and faithfulness. Your primary job in your business is to help those who work with you to discover what they are supposed to do in your business, and to draw their skills out so they can do their work better and more effectively.

This implies an ethic for business that is not profit driven but servant driven. But it is precisely this sort of business that will also, in the long-run, be most profitable. When all the people in an organization are doing what they are designed to do, they will be not only happy and fulfilled, but also very productive. We are not to seek the profit as an end in itself; we are to seek to serve those with whom we work. Profit is a fruit, not a goal. Whoever serves best will also accumulate an eternal wealth of character.

The converse is also true. If people are not supposed to be in your business, you need to steer them out of it. Never let a false sense of compassion drive you to retain a worker whom God has not called

⁶Ex. 31:6

⁷Eph. 4:11-16

and gifted for your business. If the work is contrary to his or her motivation and skills, the kindest thing you can do is to help them find a job where they do fit. Nothing can prosper in the long-run by operating against its inherent design. You can force people into situations for utilitarian purposes in the short-run, but in the long-run anybody operating against their design will lose money, cause problems to the organization, and promote sin, because whatever is out of order is not of God and cannot prosper.

Do you want to be involved evangelistically in the business community? Try concentrating less on giving workers gospel tracts and more on helping them to discover and develop the design and potential God wrought in them. It's tough work. It requires time and close attention. As Solomon put it in Proverbs 20:5 (KJV), "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out." Chances are they've never had a father who did that. Some may have never even had a pastor who did that. They've never known anyone who helped them discover their design. But that is what Christian business leaders and professionals are to do, and when we do it we'll find workers not only grateful that someone truly shows an interest in them, but also excited about what God can do in and through them. Openness to the gospel follows true service. What better place to express this than in the marketplace!

Sacrifice Is the Source of Expansion

In Matthew 10:39, Jesus invites us to come to Him and die. Seldom is this message preached in places preoccupied with popularity and growth. This is not a "user friendly" church sermon: "He who has found his life shall lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake shall find it." Oh joy! I get to die. Some heartwarming message. The problem is, it's true. It is in dying to my own agenda and taking on God's agenda that I become fruitful and multiply. It is a principle of God's Cosmos that selfishness begets death, isolation, and poverty, whereas spending our lives on others is the source of life, fellowship, and multiplication.

Again the Master Economist and Manager said it perfectly: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Growth is fueled by sacrifice.

So does God expect us to become self-flagellating monks who work tirelessly with no breaks, giving all we have to the poor? No. The sacrifice we're dealing with here is a sacrifice of another kind.

Understanding the Hidden Life of the Leader

Paul exhorts us in Colossians 3:23, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men.” In Matthew 6:1-18, Christ spends significant time reiterating the same principle. If we live and act to be seen of men, then our reward is paid by men, not by God. God Himself openly rewards those who live *before Him* rather than those who are living before men and who are motivated by men's approval. Psalm 127:1 says, “Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.” The point is this: If we're in our right minds, we want God to do the building and to be the Senior Partner in what is being built, not us. And in order to do that, we must learn to hide. Hiding means getting underneath people and pushing them up.

Why Are We after Owners Rather Than Employees?

Let me give a good working example which comes out of my own experience as a business owner and a manager for many years. There is a clear difference between an employee and an owner. The employee comes to work at 7:59 and 59 seconds. He punches the time clock and heads toward his work station. A catastrophe might be taking place somewhere else in the plant, but since he doesn't get paid to deal with that problem, the employee proceeds directly to his own work station. You have his body and his mind in the same place until about 9:45, but then his mind begins to leave his body in anticipation of the upcoming work break. After the break, his mind and body

reconverge until about 11:40, when they separate once again in mental anticipation of the lunch break. The same thing happens just prior to the afternoon break and then finally, about one-half hour before he's off, the employee's mind leaves permanently. Punching the time clock at 5:00 sharp, he is "out of there," having done what he's paid to do, and secure that the boss didn't take advantage of any of "his rights." He has no further thought of his job; it doesn't exist until the next morning. Why should it? He is an employee. While this may be an exaggeration to many, it makes the point.

The owner or manager comes to work when the work load requires, but virtually always before the employee arrives, and he's there long after the employee. The owner picks up trash when he sees it, helps where he can, and has the opposite problem of the employee: He can't get his mind off his work, even when he's at home, problematic as this is.

What are the differences between the employee and the owner or manager? There are at least three: (1) Employees tend to focus on their rights whereas leaders focus on their responsibilities, (2) Leaders have a "piece of the action" in some proportional way, and (3) You don't make profit on employees; at best they help you break even. Profit is generated by the people with a proprietorial spirit.

To further illustrate where I am going with this, let me tell another story. Several years ago I attended a private gathering for high-powered Christian business leaders and chief executive officers. During the course of the conference, several Fortune 500 executives began to share what a tough year it had been for them personally. Their salaries were still high, into six figures, and their health and families well. The problem was that one of the C.E.O.'s had to lay off 18,000 employees, another 11,000, and yet another 6,000. The pain and anguish I heard in them was deep and life changing. Carrying that kind of responsibility for others takes its toll and should be properly, but not exorbitantly, rewarded.

If the blood of the martyrs is the growth of the Church, then the welfare of the people in the leader's heart is the engine of growth for a

business or trade. "...Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone."⁸ Solitariness and non-growth is the result of the grain of wheat's refusal to die to its own life. It is still holding to its "rights." People and nations whose economic values are centered in rights, rather than in a sense of responsibility, are destined to mediocrity and stagnation. The pain of growth is in the inner death of the leaders, and no amount of prestige, salary, or perks can take away that cross if it is truly there. It is the leader's point of fellowship with Christ. Life and growth require death and sacrifice. This is a master law of economic increase, and it is every bit as real and operable as the law of supply and demand. It's voluntarily shouldered by servant-hearted leaders.

Let's Stop Playing the Political Left/Right Game

Recognizing that we've hardly touched this subject, permit me to make one last comment before we move on. We, as Christians, are not called by God to justify the world system's economic order. I am not an apologist for either capitalism or socialism. The downfall of secular capitalism is this: It uses evolution as its philosophical base, justifying the "survival of the fittest." It tends to turn people into objects of production and pawns of salesmanship and consumption. Socialism's downside is altogether as bad: It is paternalistic and creates a bureaucratic civil structure that "cares for the people" as poor unenlightened children who need to be led to understand their true place in the dialectic of history. It promotes indolence, dependency, envy, and ultimately theft and misappropriation through confiscatory taxes.

My commitment is not to capitalism or socialism—but rather to the Kingdom of God and an economic order built upon scripture. That order rests on what Christ called the "greatest of the commandments." Hear them afresh:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all
your heart, and with all your soul, and with

⁸John 12:24

all your mind.” This is the great and foremost commandment. And a second is like it, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets. *Matt. 22:37-40*

The summation of our economic order is found herein. It will only work if it is led by servants whose hearts are set on seeing that people are released into their destiny and that none are enslaved to either the oppression of the tyrant, or the tyranny of the lazy and indolent. For Christians the left/right game is a sucker’s game we shouldn’t even consider. We’re offering a third choice: the economics of the Kingdom of God.

True Economic Service Is Based on Obedience to God

Service is more than giving people what they want; it also involves *not* giving them what God does not want them to have. Giving people goods or services that support or cater to their fallen nature is not serving them, and people or companies who do so will be among the first to go under in tough times. If you really love me, tell me “no” sometimes.

The heart of what we could share here goes beyond this study. What needs to be said here is this: If you’re really serving me and mine, you won’t offer goods or services that will cause me to stumble.⁹ In tough economic times, people who are offering true value in their goods and services are the ones who will really prosper.

Businesses or services that cater to people’s greed, vanity, lusts, and the like are on the top of God’s list for unemployment lines in the coming economic crisis. While it is obvious that some people will misuse or make a vice out of even good things, like clothing or food or even recreational equipment, it is clear that there is a difference between selling or trading in useless vanities, and providing legitimate services. If there is a doubt, pray about it. Any honest inquiry before God will

⁹ Rom. chapter 14

be answered in one way or another. And if you don't know if what you're doing is something God can bless, you can't do it in faith in any event. You must settle the issue, because to operate in unbelief about your work is sin.¹⁰

Those who serve most effectively will lead. It really is that simple. In any business or trade, in the long-run, the servants will succeed. The Almighty's business will succeed. It won't be because God is simply more powerful than Satan, but because God is a servant, and Satan is an exploiter. Even at the top, the servant always wins.

¹⁰ "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Rom. 14:23