

MONDAY MANNA

5 September 2016

THREE PARADOXES OF BUSINESS

By Rick Boxx

Have you ever taken time to examine your personal worldview and factors that have formed it? Our worldviews are critical since they shape the ways we think about the world and how we respond to it. In that light, many commonly held views on business run counter to the biblical worldview, and we would be wise to understand how these perspectives conflict. Here are a few of them:

Profit. In the 1980s, noted economist Milton Friedman proclaimed, “the only purpose for business is profit.” Many leaders embraced Friedman’s view, justifying their pursuit of enhanced profits at all costs. In 1987, this worldview went on public display in the theatrical film, “Wall Street.” In one pivotal scene, at the same time the actual stock market was crashing, largely due to greed, Michael Douglas, playing the film role of Gordon Gecko, ironically declares, “Greed is good!” Unfortunately, many still believe this mantra, despite much evidence that such thinking is wrong.

The paradox arises when we consider what the Bible says. For instance, 1 Corinthians 10:31 teaches, *“Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* This is saying that God desires our businesses – our work – to glorify Him, not just acquire profits. Which view have you chosen?

Partnership. Jim had an exciting new business idea but it required a significant sum of start-up money. An acquaintance offered to invest the necessary funds and become Jim’s equal partner. Although Jim’s wife cautioned her husband against being “unequally yoked” with this man who did not share the same beliefs and values, Jim charged ahead anyway, eager to obtain the financing he needed.

The story came to a short-lived, sad conclusion one year later when Jim’s partner forced him out of the business due to his disdain for his spiritual beliefs. We see a similar dilemma in 2 Chronicles 20:37 after Jehoshaphat, the king of Israel, partnered with a wicked king to build ships. God destroyed the ships and sent a prophet to tell Jehoshaphat, *“Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your works.”*

Position. The business and professional world says we can choose whomever we want to be our partners. God, however, owns everything according to the Scriptures. If that is true, should He have the right to choose the people with whom we partner – and how we work with them?

When I was young, climbing the corporate ladder, my mindset was focused on moving higher and higher so more people would serve *me*. Then one day an experience rocked that worldview!

The president of the bank I was working for asked all of the employees to drive their cars around back because *he* was going to wash their cars as an act of service to the staff. When in disbelief I challenged his unconventional approach, my boss smiled knowingly and reminded me Jesus served His disciples when He humbly washed their feet.

Jesus said in Luke 22:26, *“The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant.”* The mindset of our world says leaders should be served, but God says the best leaders are those that serve others.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction to these apparent paradoxes in worldviews about how we should operate in the business world?
2. In your view, is it ever justifiable to conclude, "I know the Bible teaches differently about how we should conduct ourselves in the workplace, but to succeed in business, you have to do what you have to do!"? Explain your answer.
3. Do you agree that personal and professional beliefs and values should be considered in forming a business partnership? Why shouldn't we just consider the gifts, talents and tangible investments that the respective partners can contribute and leave it at that?
4. Have you ever worked for someone who viewed his or her role in the company as being that of a servant? What impact do you think such an attitude has on employees, customers and suppliers? Do you think it could diminish the leader's influence and power in any way? Why or why not?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

- Matthew 6:19-24,33;
- Mark 10:45;
- Ephesians 6:5-9;
- Colossians 3:23-24

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