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Equipping, Enabling, and Encouraging Marketplace Leaders

8 Critical Attributes for Leaders You Didn't Learn About in Business School

The establishment of resolutions often marks the beginning of the year. A sort of mini-goal setting conference we have with ourselves these resolutions take all forms from dieting to keeping up with industry publications. In years past my wife, Barbara, decided to give up all snack foods and candy for 30 days, then extended her goal to a year. In an effort to keep the stock prices of all the snack food manufacturers from taking a nosedive I tried to pick up the slack by consuming not only my fair share, but also hers.

For some, New Year's resolutions are the result of serious introspection. It is perhaps the one time in the year when an individual sits down to take stock of him or herself and ponder such serious subjects as the meaning and purpose of life.

Whether your resolutions are light-hearted or serious, or perhaps nonexistent, the New Year seems a fitting time to review our lives as business people. We spend an average of 52 hours a week at work, some more, some less. What we do and how we act during those hours is a reflection on us and makes a tremendous impression on the people with whom we share our lives.

We Are a Light to the World

Jesus, teaching the disciples said, *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."* (Matt 5:14-16).

Let's take a look at this passage a little bit at a time. *"You are the light of the world"* Jesus' declaration is simple and direct: if you are His disciple you are a light to the world. As a disciple you represent His teaching to others.



“A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl.” Both of these statements get at the purpose of being a light to the world. You can’t hide a city, especially one perched on top of a hill. The purpose of lighting a lamp is not to hide its light but to use it to light up a room: *“Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.”*

As disciples who are a light to the world we should not attempt to hide our light but, *“In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”* Not only are we not to hide our light but we are to make sure it shines before men.

This is very important. Non-believers will see the light, realize that God is working our lives, and want to develop a personal relationship with Him also.

What is this “light” we are to let shine forth? Paul wrote to the Corinthians, *“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”* (2 Cor. 4:6). The light in our hearts is the knowledge of Jesus Christ: he lived his life as an example to us, he died for our sins, and he rose from the grave to take His place at the right hand of God. So if the light in our life is Jesus and we are to let this light shine forth then we must try to live our lives like Jesus did his.

Business Beatitudes

Let’s look at some standards of behavior found in the Bible that apply to our business lives.

Matthew recorded Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in which He taught the essence of the Christian life, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 5:3-10).

We do not have to guess what the blessing will bring since in each case the blessing is followed by a second clause that defines the result of the blessing. The *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* defines the word *blessed* as, “A description of a believer’s inner condition.” Thus the Beatitudes do not describe how to become saved but rather the characteristics of one who is saved. It would be wrong to think that having three or four of these characteristics would be sufficient. We should make every effort to obtain all of these blessings as a group.



Poor in Spirit

Poor in spirit describes an attitude of the heart. It is the opposite of being proud in spirit. To be poor in spirit means that we recognize our spiritual bankruptcy apart from Christ and depend on Him for spiritual fulfillment.

A control addict would be an example of someone who is not poor in spirit. They try through their own power to control events and the world around them. It seldom occurs to a control addict to put problems in God's hands, they prefer to work things out for themselves.

Mourn

"Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted," is not to suggest that we should walk around with sad faces all the time. However, we should mourn the sin in the world that separates man from God. While we believers have the comfort of knowing that Christ died for our sins there are many in the world whose sin is what keeps them from knowing God.

Meek

The "meek will inherit the earth" is a direct reference to Psalm 37 where the characteristics of the meek are contrasted with the wicked.

In this case the meek, who have submitted themselves to the will of God, will receive His blessings while the wicked will be cut off.

For us, to be meek means that we need to submit to the will of God. Peter and James refer to meekness in our relationships and in these cases it is clear that meekness suggests gentleness and the ability to exercise self-control.

Hunger & Thirst for Righteousness

We should be driven to lead a life of personal righteousness. A simple way to think about personal righteousness is to ask yourself in any situation, "What would Jesus do?"

A story written by Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps*, tells the story of several children who encounter many difficult times and the wise old man who counsels them by always asking the question, "What would Jesus do?"

Often, in the rush of completing an assignment, or while under the pressure of taking care of an emergency, business people rush in with answers and never ask, "Is this the right thing?", or "Is this what Jesus would do?"

Merciful

The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* says, "Mercy embraces both forgiveness for the guilty and compassion for the suffering and the needy."

Forgiveness does not mean that we fail to punish or train those who make mistakes. These are two completely separate things. Compassion for the suffering and the needy does not mean that



we should rush to take care of everyone's hurts. Sometimes the most compassionate thing is to teach someone how to avoid making the same mistake again in the future.

For example, you forgive the person who makes a mistake that costs you a sale, or damages inventory. Once forgiven you should still discipline the employee who made the mistake. How else will they learn?

You may feel compassion for the starving people in a poor country and you may take action to help feed them. But true compassion goes on to teach them how to become self-sufficient. It's like the old line, "Give a man a fish and feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and feed him for life."

Pure In Heart

Double-minded people are constantly in a struggle. That is why Jesus said, "*No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*" (Matt 6:24). To be pure in heart means to have a single focus on God and in doing His will.

A contemporary example of a double-minded businessman is someone who knows that it is wrong to lie about what his product will do, but he does it anyway to make the sale.

Another example is the CEO who will let his or her employees do whatever is necessary to be successful, even if that means being deceptive or dishonest.

Peacemakers

The peacemakers are not the pacifists you may remember from the 1960's. Peacemakers are those who take delight in reconciliation rather than division, or strife. Some consider the Bible to portray anything but peace, especially as they read about the wars between the nations. But Jesus came as the ultimate peacemaker; to reconcile man with God, and to each other.

The desire for peace does not give way to principle however. Remember that Jesus stormed into the temple and turned over the tables of the moneychangers and called them a den of robbers (Matt 21:13). Principle was at stake and on this principle there was no room for compromise.

Persecuted

Those that follow Christ can expect persecution for their beliefs. Similarly, business people who hold to Biblical standards of behavior can expect persecution. I have read a comment in a performance review file that said, "His integrity sometimes gets in the way of getting the job done." If you hold to high standards there will be those that will try to bring you down.



Words to Ponder

The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity. (Prov. 11:1-3)

The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful. (Prov. 12:22)

The greatest homage we can pay to truth, is to use it. (James Russell Lowell)

Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. But you, O LORD, have mercy on me: raise me up, that I may repay them. (Ps. 41:9-10)

The responsibility of tolerance lies in those who have the wider vision. (George Eliot)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (Heb. 10:24)

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence. (1 John 3:18-19)



Getting Started

Business life is not getting any easier. Increasing costs and relentless competition is squeezing profits. High-quality skilled workers are getting harder and harder to find.

More than ever the working world needs a strong guiding light. We can be that light if we incorporate the Beatitudes into our working lives.

Here are ten virtues of a Godly executive taken directly from the Beatitudes:

Self-Discipline

Discipline yourself in what you say and do. Learn to control your tongue not only in what you say but how you say things. If we can learn to control our tongues we can easily discipline the rest of our working lives.

“A man who cannot control his tongue can often be seen eating his own words.”

Learn also to control what you do: be focused and attentive at work. Remember, employees will follow your example. If they see you taking off early to play golf on company time they will also.

Compassion

Compassion is the ability to stand with others in their moment of need. We should be willing to support those who need support, help those who need help, train those who need training, and discipline those who need discipline.

Compassion does not mean we try to take over decision making for those who are “less enlightened”. Compassion is helping others take full responsibility for developing a healthy life that contributes to society.

Responsibility

Responsibility means that we are accountable for our actions. The first Biblical example of passing the buck to avoid taking responsibility occurs in Genesis with Adam and Eve. Adam blames Eve. “She made me eat the apple”, he says. And Eve promptly blames the servant.

If you want employees who will act responsibly and take responsibility for their own actions then you as their leader must set this example. You cannot stand on the factory floor and blame the “headquarters” when a lay-off announcement needs to be made.

Employees learn responsibility when responsible leaders set a strong example, and when employee expectations are clear and consistent.



Friendship

Friendship may not seem an important virtue for an executive but it is. Do you remember your parents ever saying, “I don’t like you hanging around with Jimmy, he’s a bad influence?” Parents understand the role that peers play in shaping your values. In the same way the friends you pick will affect your values and standards. If you spend a lot of time with people who play fast and loose with company policy or the law then pretty soon you’ll be tempted to do the same. The best way to avoid this downfall is to avoid the temptation in the first place.

Work

The writer of Proverbs describes the lazy man, “*The sluggard buries his hand in the dish: he will not even bring it back to his mouth!*” (Proverbs 19:24). The Bible also says that a man who is not willing to work should not eat. We need to be reliable, consistent workers and leaders. But we must also have balance in our lives. It is a mistake to become a workaholic who fails to provide leadership in the family.

Courage

The Bible relates many examples of courage. Believers are often exhorted to hold onto their courage in the face of those in the world that seek to harm them.

The Psalmist wrote, “*It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.*” (Psalms 18:32). To maintain our courage in the face of adversity we need to have God arming us with the His strength.

Perseverance

In his, *The Book of Virtues*, author William Bennett wrote, “Much good that might have been achieved in the world is lost through hesitation, faltering, wavering, vacillating, or just not sticking with it.” Perseverance is the ability to stick with a task until it is completed.

Some years ago I heard a statistic about sales people: 80% quit trying after the buyer says no once, 10% quit trying after the buyer says no twice, 7% quit trying after the buyer says no three times, and only 3% of salespeople will keep trying to make a sale beyond four tries with a buyer.

Where would we be today if Edison had quit trying to make a light bulb after the fourth failure? Thank goodness for his perseverance. The light bulb didn’t work until his 10,000th try!

Imagine how much business you could develop, how many new products you could create, or how much more efficient your manufacturing would be if everyone was so persistent that they refused to accept failure?



Honesty

Honesty is not a Biblical option. We are commanded, “*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.*” (Exodus 20:16).

God focused on business people to make sure they got the message about honesty, “*Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt.*” (Leviticus 19:36).

Loyalty

There are numerous examples of Biblical loyalty; Joseph was loyal to his master Potiphar even when Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce him, Job remained loyal to God throughout all his trials, and David remained loyal to his king, Saul, even when Saul tried to kill David.

The real value of loyalty comes when a relationship is tested. When the chips are down do you stand by the people or organizations to whom you have pledged allegiance?

Faith

You have faith in the chair you are sitting in to hold you up. When you sit down you really don’t think about it you simply have faith. Faith is the ability to believe in what you cannot see.

Faith is the cornerstone of our belief in God, “*I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*” (John 14:12).

One Final Thought

The instruction was direct, “*You are to be a light unto the world.*” The responsibility to represent Christ’s message is inescapable. Even if you do not see yourself as an evangelist, your life is a living testimony to your relationship with Jesus.

Writing to the Romans, Paul said, “*...because we know that suffering produces perseverance: perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*” (Rom. 5:3-5).

There is virtue in being a Godly executive, but the path is not easy to follow. There will be suffering. There will be persecution. These trials will produce in us the ability to persevere, they will produce strong character, they will produce strong character, and a hope for the eternal life that we have been promised. Virtues of an executive well worth pursuing!



Meeting Notes

Use these meeting notes to build your employee's understanding of the ten executive virtues.

Ask your employees what virtues they want in their managers, peers and themselves. No discussion of the “rightness or wrongness” of a given characteristic. Capture the list on a generated chart.

Fill in any missing virtues from the ten key virtues list:

- Self-Discipline
- Compassion
- Responsibility
- Friendship
- Work
- Courage
- Perseverance
- Honesty
- Loyalty
- Faith

Have employees discuss how each virtue contributes to the success of the company.

Consolidate the list to 10-15 virtues by having the employee's group similar virtues under a single heading.

Have the group establish definitions for each virtue.

Insure that the entire group can accept each virtue and its definition.

Ask each employees to list the virtues on a piece of paper in order of importance to them.

Next have each person rank themselves versus each virtue. Use a 1-10 scale. One for weak, 5 for average, ten for strong.

Have each employee make some notes for how they can use a strong virtue to improve their performance or the performance of others. Next, ask them to consider how they can improve a weak virtue and thereby increase their performance. For example, if your self-discipline is weak consider finding a mentor to help focus your work. If your self-discipline is strong consider how you can use the strength to improve the performance of the group.



Key Points:

The following ten executive virtues are important for any worker and mandatory for business leaders:

Self Discipline

Learn to control your tongue and your actions. Employees will follow the example you set.

Compassion

Stand with people in their moments of need. Be willing to help those who need help, train those who need training, and discipline those who need discipline.

Responsibility

Be accountable for your actions. Passing the buck is not a sign of a strong leader.

Friendship

Pick your friends carefully. You will become like the company you keep.

Work

A strong work ethic is to be commended but balance your work with your family's needs. Remember you are also a leader in your family.

Courage

Courage is the ability to hold our place in the face of opposition. Know that God arms you with the strength you need to see you through any adversity.

Perseverance

Stick-to-it-tiveness is a critical element in the success of any enterprise. Nothing worthwhile was ever accomplished that did not require perseverance.

Honesty

Lawyers and used car salesmen have a reputation. Some deserve it and some don't. You also have a reputation. Honesty isn't the best policy – it's the only policy.

Loyalty

Traitors have never been very popular. Loyalty is a sign of a mature person.

Faith

Faith in Jesus will enable you to do far more in life than hard work alone.