



Ideal Traits of a Chief Executive

Ron R. Kelleher

Ideal Traits of a Chief Executive

Anyone who has been in business for a few years knows which companies in their industry are honest and which companies are “crooks.” Companies have reputations just like people do. What kind of a reputation does your company have? Do you know where that reputation comes from?

Jesus tells us very clearly that reputation comes from the leader of the corporation; “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).

The student is molded by the teacher, not the other way around. So, employees are a reflection of their corporate teachers.

Whether for good or evil, employees reflect the training they receive. Not only do they do what they have been taught, but in a few weeks or months, they become linked to the corporate culture that molds them for their entire career.

Jesus goes on to say, “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit” (Luke 6:43-44).

Again, Jesus is reminding us that the employee is a reflection of the corporate tree from which they grew. No good company creates bad employees, and no bad company creates good employees.

Perhaps one of the most difficult challenges executives face is that of managing and developing people.

The executive struggles to climb the corporate ladder only to find out that just when he thinks he will finally have the power to get things done the way he wants, he can't.

He finds he is saddled with a company that has ambivalent employees who clock-in and clock-out, and managers who spend their time filling out reports instead of dealing with issues.

How can this happen? It isn't the employee's fault! They are the product of the corporation; they are the fruit of the tree.

The corporate tree is to blame. You see, when the corporate culture “allows” waste, sloppy work, and mismanagement, then waste, sloppy work, and mismanagement will result.

Ideal Traits of a Chief Executive

Who is responsible for the corporate culture? No one other than the senior executive. So, if you look down from your window and don't like what you see, look in a mirror. The solution starts with you!

The Righteous Chief Executive

Fortunately, the Bible provides us with a code of ethics for CEO's through the example of David, a young shepherd who played the harp and became king over all Israel.

In Psalm 101, King David provides a list of his ideal standards for righteous leaders. They can be grouped into personal, corporate, and public standards.

Psalm 101:1-8 (NIV)

- 1 I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O LORD, I will sing praise.
- 2 I will be careful to lead a blameless life-- when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart.
- 3 I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me.
- 4 Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil.
- 5 Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence; whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him will I not endure.
- 6 My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me.
- 7 No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence.
- 8 Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evildoer from the city of the LORD.

Ideal Traits of a Chief Executive

Personal Standards

David identified three characteristics that can be grouped into personal standards; commitment to God, integrity, and avoidance of evil.

Commitment to God

David made ten commitments with the phrase, "I will" in this single psalm. The first two appear in verse one, "I will sing of your love and justice; to you, O Lord, I will sing praise." It is important to note that David's first commitment is to God.

David recognized God's love and justice and committed to praising God. Love and justice are two sides of the same coin; there has never been a man so bad that God could not love him, nor a man so pure that he would not face judgment. Implicit in this relationship is great compassion. For without love, judgment would surely be swift and harsh.

As organizational leaders, we need to be committed first to God and then to our work. This keeps our focus where it should be and will hopefully remind us that we should have compassion for our organizations just as God does with us.

Integrity

"I will be careful to lead a blameless life -- when will you come to me? I will walk in my house with a blameless heart." David declared his intention to lead a blameless life, a life of integrity. But even so, he recognized that he needed God's help.

David also understood that the need for integrity began in the home. The use of the phrase, "I will walk" indicates that David understood that leading a blameless life was not something to be achieved in a moment of time but something that was to be the focus of his entire life.

How many people do you know that deal with people one way at work, another at church, another in public, and another at home? David's verse does not say, "I will be good at home and church, but anything goes at the office." It is critical that we lead our lives with integrity, and that means all aspects of our lives.

Ideal Traits of a Chief Executive

Avoid Evil

David understood the ease with which a king could fall into temptation; “I will set before my eyes no vile thing.” The more you can do to avoid the temptation of doing wrong the less you will be tempted.

David continues saying, “The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. Men of a perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil.” He knew that men with impure hearts and false motives were dangerous for the king who wanted to live a life of integrity and he planned to avoid any association with them.

Likewise, as corporate leaders, we should avoid placing ourselves in positions that may lead to temptation as well as avoid working with people who are not committed to living their lives with integrity.

Corporate Standards

David describes three standards of conduct for the office; to avoid gossip, pride, and deceit. Since David had already proclaimed his intention to be blameless, he focused these standards on the people who worked within his court.

Avoid the Gossips

David decided that gossips would not be tolerated in his court; “Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him I will put to silence.” The King James version reads even stronger; “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbor, him will I cut off.” The word used for “cut off” also means “to destroy.” So, when David said he planned to silence the gossips, he was very serious.

How many times have you found people speculating in the latest office gossip? How many times has someone come into your office with gossip? How many times have you read a memo that was part fact and part gossip? What did you do about it? David planned to silence the gossips through intolerance. If people realize that the boss is outspokenly intolerant about gossip, most people will keep their tongues.

Ideal Traits of a Chief Executive

Another solution is to leave your door open to squelch rumors. If you invite people to bring rumors to you for direct answers rather than spread the gossip, you will squelch most of the gossip.

Avoid the Proudful

The conceited and proudful could not expect much patience in David's court; "whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart, him I will not endure." Conceited and proudful people are prone to doing what is expedient, not for doing what is right.

In the corporation, these people take credit for other people's work, cover up mistakes, and misrepresent situations to skew decisions that will favor themselves.

Avoid the Deceitful

Again, David sets out a very strict standard for honesty; "No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence." He intended not to allow people who were known liars to stand before him.

Great discernment is needed to tell the honest from the dishonest, but when you know someone is dishonest, they should have no place in your company.

David summarized his thoughts on corporate standards saying that he would surround himself with the faithful, and the blameless; "My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me."

As CEO's, we would be wise to follow David's example by surrounding ourselves with faithful employees who subscribe to the same code of ethics as we do.

Public Standards

David described a very important obligation to the public that applies to every Chief Executive, that of accountability.

Ideal Traits of a Chief Executive

Accountable

David clearly understood his responsibility to the city and in this case, to the nation Israel; “Every morning I will put to silence all the wicked in the land; I will cut off every evil doer from the city of the Lord.” David planned to get up early every day to ferret out the wicked and cut them off from the city.

Like David, we are responsible for the actions of our employees. But aren't we also responsible to the society at large which makes the operation of our companies possible?

The position of leadership gives us the additional responsibility of using our positions to enhance the development of society. As Christians, we are commanded to be “salt and light” (Matthew 5:13-16). So, we must find ways to show how Christ works in our lives.

One Final Thought

Psalm 101 is focused on action. The word “will” is used sixteen times. In fifteen of the uses, David committed to a standard of behavior that he expected of himself as leader of the nation Israel. That is why the psalm is sometimes referred to as “the royal code of ethics.”

Summarizing this code of ethics,

- We need to keep our focus on God and remember that God provides us with a unique balance of love and judgment that should be reflected in our relationships with others.
- We need to live lives of integrity, and this means at home, at work, and in public.
- We need to avoid evil; putting ourselves in a position to be tempted or being around those we know are evil.
- We need to avoid the gossips, the prideful, and the deceitful. Employees with these characteristics should be removed from positions of authority. Over the long haul, they do more damage than they do good.
- We need to remember that we are accountable to society and we should endeavor to leave this world a better place for our having been here.

The simplest way to think of a code of ethics as it applies to the Christian Chief Executive is to simply ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” If you can answer this question what else do you need to know?