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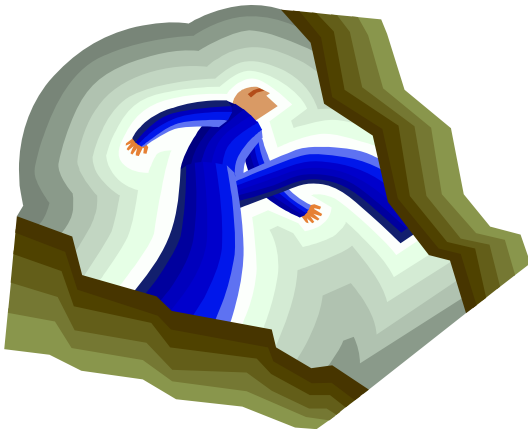
GOOD NEWS *Associates*

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Business and Church: Let's Heal the Divide!

by John Braun



I am a pastor. Even though I sometimes struggle with a love/hate relationship with “the church,” pastoring is still my first love. But I am also an entrepreneur and I have sometimes been a business owner. Some intriguing questions have arisen during the past few years as I followed a call to network with Church of the Brethren businesspersons. Two questions stand out in particular.

1. Why have I heard almost every profession labeled a calling in church circles except business? Is there a rift between church and business?
2. Where a perceived rift is present, do we in the church recognize the consequences for our mission when business members are met with distrust?

Let me say it clearly: *Business is a calling*. I have heard dozens of businesspeople say that they always felt called to business but struggled with doubt because the language and affirmation of calling were absent in their church experiences. I have heard many more business people report that their pastors seem to be uncomfortable with them and never come to visit them at their businesses. Business concerns are omitted from conversations at church. A pool of profound knowledge about effective missions to the marketplace remains untapped. Fortunately, the pattern is quite different in some churches and denominations.

Christopher Sauer was a colonial Brethren businessman. He set what might be a good motto for all of us, by declaring that he did business “For the glory of God and my neighbor’s good.” I suspect that he had a pretty good sense of God’s heart regarding wholesome community. The Hebrew word *shalom* is usually translated as *peace* but its meaning is deeper and broader. *Shalom* means wholeness, prosperity, “all-is-well”, peace in the land and peace in every home. To get there requires honest business people; employers who treat everyone fairly and compassionately. Businesses and the marketplace itself must thus honor God. Without that partnership, there can be no *shalom*. We’re still learning that a business prospers more fully when customers, employees, suppliers, the poor, and the community are all stakeholders in the business. That means that each of these constituents have a claim on the decisions facing the business and on the benefits the business reaps.

Many times over I have been impressed by the huge contributions to hospitals, colleges, programs for the poor, service agencies and communities through funding, increased employment and the like made by business people whom I have visited. Their kindness and generosity to employees and those in need in their communities, usually given quietly, is exemplary. The founder of Radiant Optics invented a unique workplace heater. In developing his invention and bringing it to market, he became a business owner and employer. He would have preferred to sell the patent for his heater and continue to invent things. However, he once told me that there is nothing nobler than providing employment so that workers and their families can thrive. Another Seattle area employer comes to mind. The owner's business skills and the company's warehouse are being utilized to gather, pack and ship a container of supplies to Zambia, in aid of 8,000,000 children who are victims of AIDS.

Does the question come up for others as it does for me, regarding the large number of churches that are declining in membership? Is God crazy or something? When neighborhoods and communities have all kinds of needs, why are local churches being abandoned? Does the problem perhaps lie in local churches that have not focused their energy and mission toward meeting those local needs but have instead claimed a "higher calling" or more distant mission? Perhaps if a church were to understand and commission their business people as the church's missionaries to the marketplace vital ministries would begin to thrive. Entrepreneurs and businesspeople are gifted with the following traits that the church needs:

1. Imagination: knowing how to get from needs to solutions
2. Marketplace savvy: identifying needs, developing products that will be welcomed, targeting specific populations and providing effective communications
3. Investment: recognizing the long-term benefits of actions that may not seem productive in the short term
4. Loyalty: developing customer loyalty by building a reputation for integrity, fair play and investment in the community
5. Measured risk-taking: being willing to seize a worthwhile opportunity, even when there is a chance of loss
6. Sustainability: creating strategies to keep an enterprise afloat through unpredicted difficulties
7. Cutting losses: preserving assets for the next opportunity when an enterprise fails

All of these skills can help the church in its efforts to reach local communities. A small church fellowship in Cincinnati has put some of these skills to work in an intriguing manner. Business leaders in the congregation are urged to use their influence on city decision makers to champion the needs of the poor. Meanwhile, the church has relocated to the inner city to work and worship among the poor. Being an entrepreneur himself, the pastor has opened a ServiceMaster Clean franchise to provide entry-level employment and dignity for his staff and their families.

If there is a rift between the church and business, let's heal that distrust as quickly as possible so that we can all reap the benefits!



John Braun is a pastor, theologian, counselor and businessman. His heart is prophetic, his vision is global, and his actions are entrepreneurial. As a GOOD NEW Associate, he is presently serving as interim pastor at Wenatchee Brethren-Baptist Church in Wenatchee, WA. He can be reached at john@goodnewsassoc.org.

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