

B Relationship with Clients: Serving others

How can we move from being Christians who happen to work in a business to those who truly put Christ first in their whole approach to business? It can make a great difference if we can look on our careers as a vocation, rather than just a means of earning our daily bread.

Over the years Rosalind has had a great gift at helping people to see their work as midwives as a *vocation*. It might be argued that midwifery is a profession that perhaps lends itself more than most to such thoughts, but the challenge is for all of us to do this in these uncertain times when enormous demands are made for our allegiance to a company cause, without any automatic return on that loyalty if we are no longer perceived to 'fit.' The percentage of people who find their work stimulating is fairly low, we are blessed if we feel at home in it, but here are some general points to consider what we can do to serve our clients.

The thing that distinguishes church from business is that business that are prepared to take risks often grow, whereas many churches often close ranks and are instinctively reluctant to do the same. The Church sometimes views the business world as being too worldly and tarnished by greed and the love of money. However, many businesses generally treat their staff well. In other words, however much things should be the other way round, there are things we can learn from the business world.

Managing directors certainly need to be role models for their staff, being willing to let others share their thoughts and concerns, and being prepared to share their own vulnerability as well as their strengths and visions.

1. Show interest and compassion

Evidence suggests that it is not the most brilliant or enthusiastic teachers who make the most profound impact, but those who connect most profoundly with us. Paul said of Timothy that he had no one else like him, who takes a real interest in their welfare – for everyone else was looking out for their own interests and not those of Jesus. (Phil. 2:20-21) Just as the Lord “presences” Himself with us may we take a genuine interest in the people we serve, and let His love flow out through us.

- a) In most walks of life, people are interested not just in how much we know, or how brilliant we are, but in how much we care. Our attitudes and informal conversation (our smiles and body language in other words) all reveal the genuine interest we take in people, who, in all too many walks of life, rarely experience such personal attention.
- b) If we work in a profession such as law or medicine, people are normally very stressed when they come to visit us. To make them feel at much as ease as we can is all part of putting our faith into practice. People expect us to know our subject, but they will be pleasantly surprised if we also provide empathy and support.
- c) To put this another way, many preachers love to preach – but whether they truly love the people they are preaching to is perhaps another matter? How does this relate to us?
- d) People often turn to pastors or lawyers when, humanly speaking, it is too late for major change of heart to occur, in other words, after they have made all but irrevocable decisions. We may not be able to do very much for them professionally, but we can still care and listen a lot, and do whatever the Lord shows us. Pray for the Lord to send the right people your way, and for you to be the kind of person that they need right then! The passionate are always pressing in, asking God for opportunities

to demonstrate the life of His Kingdom. The danger comes when we are more concerned for our own safety or career than in being willing to follow His leading.

2. The Gift of Listening

As the missionary bishop of Zanzibar and Tanganyika a hundred years ago, my great uncle was greatly used to develop the African church. He quickly came to realise that the most important thing for him to do was to listen to people – and he developed this gift to an extraordinary degree. Most often all that was necessary came out of what the other person said.

Many of us are too quick to venture our opinions and lay down the law. May the Lord help us to find out what the true situation is, and where people are really up to.

3. Seek the Lord's wisdom

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. This is a call to professional people to practice being 'present to the Lord' whilst going about their day-to-day work. From there it is a very small step to asking Him to give them His wisdom when they have come to the end of their own.

- a) Many in professions such as the law are by instinct and training analysts and assessors rather than instinctively intuitive. Without denying our core being, it is important to make a serious effort to develop the intuitive side – not least by staying in touch with people who are gifted in that way. The people we are serving, too, may come across as a bit "emotional" but they often have insights and "hunches" that are important.
- b) Pray to be able to discern that which rings true, that which is but the fruit of strange imaginings (and even paranoia) – and everything in between.
- c) No one is pretending that it is easy to love who have betrayed or in some other way hurt or disappointed us – but we are storing up problems for ourselves if we do not. We are also giving the Lord the opportunity to do new things for and through us if we do. (cf Matt. 5:44)

Jesus is more interested in proclaiming the Kingdom than in worming out who is "in the right". That is why, in every deadlocked relationship or situation, someone has to be prepared to make the first move. Practise this now#

4. Be willing to learn

"Correction" comes so many ways to us, and we must be quick to pick up on it, but this section is devoted to an exercise suggested to me by Lois Mason as a more sophisticated more intuitively oriented version of 'what would Jesus do? Not everyone will relate to this way of working, but for some it will represent an excellent opportunity to "self-correct" in the Lord's presence.

Do an exercise where each individual in the stillness pictured a work situation that didn't go as well as they would have liked and then pictures themselves asking the Lord into that situation and seeing what comes up as they let the imagined situation 'run on' – i.e they picture the Lord with them and then picture themselves asking the Lord what He would like to say to them, their colleagues, and their clients, and see if in their meditation the situation begins to turn out differently to how it did and if any unlooked for, previously unnoticed possibilities emerge.

5. Understand the heart of God and the times that we live in

There are many preachers who *only* preach the love of God, because we need to understand the whole nature of God and what He is doing. We are as a society under the wrath of God. We deserve it abundantly. We have done everything we can to distance Him from our society – and judgement is always according to opportunity:

Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you.” (Matt. 11:20-22)

Having said that, (and there is a great deal we need to understand about the God of Holiness, who cannot endure sinfulness), we come back to the starting point that God is love.

When John Wesley was dying he reputedly called out, “Send for my sermon on love – there is only love in the heart of God?”

Commenting on the fact that “Love never fails” (see I Corinthians 13:8), Rick Joyner writes:

“This is the foundational principle upon which all of the other kingdom economic principles are built . . . The lack of patience is found at the root of many financial catastrophes, including the present world financial crisis. You will almost certainly find impatience at the root of every case of over-leverage. Impatience is not a fruit of the Spirit, and if we are seeking to live by the Spirit, we cannot allow impatience to rule us, but rather patience, which is a fruit of the Spirit.

“Just about every major mistake I have made financially I can trace to my impatience. I now take any kind of pressure to rush a financial decision as a good reason to back off and reconsider what I am doing altogether. I do not think I’ve ever met an estate agent who didn’t try to rush the process by telling you to hurry since other people are looking at the property or are close to making an offer. Every time I have succumbed to that pressure, I made a mistake, and every time I resisted it, I have come out much better.”

A good principle to bear in mind is that we do not go into action when Goliath shouts but when the Spirit leads. Bearing in mind that the Shepherd leads but the Butcher drives, it is really important not to be using overt or covert forms of manipulation to put pressure on others to do what we would have them do. That is the essence of witchcraft rather than the hallmark of the kingdom. As Rick Joyner reminds us, “*There is a reason why the first characteristic listed for love is patience. Impatience is not love but selfishness.*”

Love is kind (see 1 Corinthians 13:4)

Kindness is one of the really great Christian qualities. What would our business dealings look like if they were always done with kindness? One thing it might affect is requiring us to always treat our fellow workers, employees, or those we do business with, with the utmost consideration. It might also cause us to refuse to do business with companies or people who mistreat or exploit their employees.

“We should understand that living by biblical ethics is not going to be easy, and it can be costly. That is the nature of the true Christian life. In this age, evil does get reward-

ed, and righteousness is often penalized. However, the true Christian life and true kingdom business principles can never be measured by what we get in this world or this life.

“Because we are told in 1 Corinthians 13:8 that “love never fails,” we know that if we build on this kingdom principle then we cannot fail. We should also consider that it will be to the degree that we build on love that we will succeed. For this reason, we will take a bit of time to review the biblical definition of love, and how love must be practically applied to our economy.

“Love is more than just having good feelings toward someone. Love is practical and maintains its noble character when it would be more advantageous not to do so. Love endures difficulties and remains even when that love is not returned. Love is not based on circumstances or the hope of reward, but on a nature that is joined to God’s nature. We could add to this by sharing God’s nature, we also share in His power.

Love . . . is not jealous (see 1 Corinthians 13:4)

We will consider the whole issue of jealousy again a little further on, but when my friend Lois Mason saw this title she immediately jotted down:

Being present to ourselves – making time and space to look at our own inner dialogue and emotions and recognise what is motivating us. Time to stop and ask myself the question “What am I frightened of that is driving my jealous/protective action/attitude?”

The following are extracts from Rick Joyner’s recent writings.

“How strikingly different business would be if businessmen and women never did anything out of reaction to what their competitors did and never spoke evil of them, but rather sought the good of their competitors, even sending them business when they could. That sounds too good to be true, but some have actually done this and prospered.

“Jealousy, and the fear that so often lies behind it, will always hurt the one who has it the most.

Many churches [and no doubt many firms as well] feel they are in competition with other churches. What are the emotions that rise up when we see others that are more popular and successful than ourselves? Rick Joyner says,

“Any who feel this way are operating in a spirit of jealousy, regardless of how much they may claim not to be. We are told in Matthew 27:18 that it was because of envy, or jealousy, that Jesus was delivered up to be crucified. Even Pilate, could recognize the jealousy of the Sanhedrin in wanting to put Jesus to death. Jealousy is usually easy to recognise.

“Jealousy kills. It is the opposite of love, and will have no place in the kingdom of God. If we are going to build our lives, church, or business, on the kingdom of God, jealousy can have no place in it. This may be the single greatest cause of division in the church. In almost every case, the root of division is the terrible and destructive evil of jealousy. Every single work that has been built with a spirit of jealousy in its framework will ultimately come down, just as the jealousy of the rulers of Israel toward Jesus ultimately resulted in their city being reduced to rubble. Jealousy is an ultimate evil, and the Kingdom of God will have none of it.

The Lord told us that what we do to the least of His little ones, we do to Him (see Matthew 25:40). How we treat another church [or firm!] is the same way that we are counted to have treated Him. We may condemn the leaders of Israel for what they did, but has the Church not been just as guilty as them? This remains a primary reason why many churches are ultimately decimated just as Jerusalem was.

“How very much better if we cooperate instead of compete. What we release in heaven, or the spiritual realm, is released in the world. If the Church is going to spiritually spawn and oversee kingdom enterprises, we must not let the leaven of jealousy be sown in them, or they will be doomed. If we allow jealousy to affect our relationships to other churches, it will come out in what our members do as well, and it is a seed that destroys.

“When the Lord looks down on a city, He only sees one church, and all of the congregations are members of the one body. If we are in a place where there are multiple churches, most local congregations will specialize and become strong in a certain aspect of ministry. For example, one might be strong in teaching the fundamentals, one in healing, another in evangelism, another in family ministry, and so forth.

“How much healthier would the body be if the churches all saw themselves as part of a greater whole, and for the sake of the members, sent them to the one that could help them the most where they needed it? If we trusted the Holy Spirit this way, unity would grow in the body in such a way that the whole world would start to marvel at it and maybe believe the gospel we preach about the love of God.

“If we have the Spirit of God and another church begins to prosper, we will be happy about it and will support and promote it. If we do that, we too can share in the spiritual fruit of the work. If we have the Spirit of God, we will do the same with other businesses if we are truly seeking to build a Kingdom enterprise.

“To be the light of the world that we are called to be, we need to be a city set on a hill, a community that is an example to the world. We are not seeking to withdraw from the world but to help it. We are called a “holy nation,” and the word “holy” means to be separate, distinct. This will begin to take place in preparation for the coming of the kingdom, but what I was prophetically shown was similar to the Jews during the Middle Ages when they were scattered about in the nations. They had their own separate communities and commerce, but they did a lot of business with the nations they were in and helped develop the commerce of those nations. They were a community within the larger community, but they maintained their uniqueness and, to some degree, separateness, while being a blessing to all the nations they were sojourning in. The body of Christ is going to begin to do the same.

“I believe that the only economic foundation that will not be shaken in the future will be an asset-based economy rather than a credit-based economy. However, we will not be able to get there all at once. We need a wise, practical, step-by-step plan to get there. Our ultimate goal is to raise up the strongest possible Christians in our church community, who are on the strongest possible foundations in every area of their lives, including being financially independent.

6. Making the best use of our resources

‘If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.’ (Ps. 62:10)

There is no reason why God cannot entrust us with greater riches but there is a challenge to us about how we steward them. A student who gives 10% of his meagre funds may later give considerably larger sums; but this may actually represent a much smaller percentage than the 10% that he used to give to the work of the Lord. The person may be under the impression that he is giving generously because the actual sum is greater, but the percentage is less. If God gives us a surplus, this could be a way to tell us that we should be imaginative in fuelling people and projects in works that are only for the Kingdom. As a general rule of thumb: let others give to non-kingdom issues.

Here is a simple prayer to help us be effective and strategic in this area:

“Lord, is there anything that I’m spending money on that You would not have me do, and is there anyone or anything that You would have me contribute more to? Be alert to the Lord showing you things that are not readily obvious with the naked eye.

Think big but start small. What we do in our own little way links in with god’s global initiatives because it is the same Spirit at work in and through us. For that reason we must not allow ourselves to feel useless and condemned because our work does not have mega 000s after it! The important thing is to “make the most of every opportunity” (Col. 4:5) and do what we can.

7. Think of the woman who poured expensive ointment over Jesus’ head

Although others rebuked her for this extravagant gesture, Jesus said that she had done a beautiful thing (Matt. 26:10), and that, “she did what she could”. (Mark 14:8) He also added this unusual endorsement. “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”(Matt. 26:13)

It is easy to take this verse passively and comfort ourselves that we are doing all that we can.” I don’t think that is the real spirit of it at all. We are called to be passionate and to *look at situations through the eyes of faith rather than of fatalism.* (“Oh well, I’m sure it will work out all right,” or “This is never going to work out.”

8. **Brother Andrew** reminds us that, ‘God’s character nature and purposes are changeless, His plans are flexible.’ So much of His planning depends upon our praying.

a) **Here is a brilliant antidote to fatalism:** Repentance is a sincere apology to God for mistrusted our Lord so long, and faith is a throwing of oneself with complete confidence on Christ’s mercy.” (A.W.Tozer)

9. There is often more to do than we at first imagine

“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1 Cor. 2:9) How do we access that “more” the Lord has in mind for us?

The first thing may be to look a little more critically at what we are already doing. As Rick Joyner reminds us,

“One definition of insanity is to keep doing the same thing while expecting a different result. We are going to have to do some things differently, and to some extent it will be a lifestyle change, but it will lead to a much better life. All we have to lose are the yokes that bind us”.

Imagine your spirit as a pair of scales. It shouldn't need the Lord to place a lead ingot on one end to get the scales to move; we want to be open to His gentle leaning and leading.

- a) It is good to ask the Lord questions: sometimes loaded ones. If you are not getting through on one track, try another.
- b) Lord, show us if there is some new way of serving we can attempt for you. God honours initiative – not everything we attempt will work, but He would much rather that people used what they have and did their best.
- c) One lawyer, asking what he could do to reach out to staff and clients alike, began inviting people along to Tuesday evening meetings called Salt and Light that he runs in the firm's offices. This has been a considerable success both for those already Christians and for those who are seeking.
- d) On a larger canvas we saw this in America in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Churches all over the nation came up with creative solutions to help, feeding and housing large numbers of people who had lost their homes, paying off church payrolls and so on, praying with the suddenly destitute and so on. It was exact opposite of hand-wringing "there's nothing I can do, the problems are too big."
- e) Ask the Lord to show you anything He would have you undertake for Him, any people he would have you contact, any wisdom for them, or any people He would particularly have you pray for.