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Gleanings

The Greatest Business Book

This past month, business pundit Stephen Covey died. Covey was the author of what many believe is the greatest book on leadership, and arguably business, ever written—*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

The seven habits Covey touted were:

1. Be proactive.
2. Begin with the end in mind.
3. Put first things first.
4. Think win-win.
5. Seek first to understand, then be understood.
6. Synergize.
7. Sharpen the saw.



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I read Covey's book many years ago and have embraced his seven habits. As I look at these seven concepts afresh, I realize how well recognized these concepts are in the business culture, particularly in North America, which is perhaps why Covey is regarded as a business pundit. But is wide acceptance the basis for classifying Covey's book as the greatest business book?

If God created the universe, then God created all the rules of existence, including the rules of business. Given this, could the greatest book on business come from the pen of a man? Or does the greatest book on business come from God? And if the greatest book on business comes from God, what book is it?

I think you see where I am going with this. As much as I value Covey's work, I believe that the seminal book of all reality—including business—is the Bible. In fact, the very word *Bible* means "the book."

All knowledge and wisdom, therefore, finds its origin in the Bible. This is not easy for most of us to grasp because we have tacitly assumed that the Bible speaks primarily about spiritual matters. We don't easily recognize that the Bible is foundational for science, public policy, education, marriage, parenting, and business. And if it is foundational, it is the seminal book, and, therefore, the greatest book. As such, the Bible is the standard against which all other books are measured.

Reaching the understanding that the Bible is the greatest business book was not easy for me. I didn't see it until I was over forty years old. Here is the synopsis of how this truth was revealed to me.

More than two decades ago, one of my spiritual fathers asked me two questions. The first was the predicate to the second question. Knowing that I was a business consultant, he asked, "Where did you get the principles you use to advise your clients?" The question seemed simple and I answered that I learned the principles from my own experience, my dad, common sense, and reading business books. Then he asked me the question that changed my life: "*Do you think the Bible has anything to say about business?*"

This was a vexing question, particularly for a theologically trained person. My honest answer was no. I had never considered that the Bible was relevant to business, but, from my theological training, I knew the answer had to be yes. This launched a long journey seeking to grasp a biblical worldview of business.

My journey of discovery involved many activities—reading books, attending conferences, engaging in discussions with a wide variety of people, plus much prayer and study of Scripture. During the course of a decade, the process of embracing the Bible as the greatest business book transformed me. My clients even noticed the change.

I realized that my views of reality had changed. Issues such as management, leadership, wealth, investing, success, prosperity, purpose, hiring, and growth were no longer defined by human wisdom masquerading as best practices. My view of business was now shaped by biblically defined best practices. There are many examples of how biblically defined best practices differ from humanly defined best practices. Consider the following.

Many today assume that sexual preference is an individual freedom and choice. Adultery is no longer regarded as sin; it is simply a choice. Humanly defined best business practices generally are neutral on adultery because it is viewed as a private matter that has little or nothing to do with business. But

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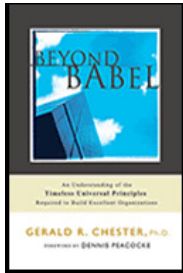
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biblically, adultery, in addition to being sin, is a sign of judgment. Note the following proverb: "The mouth of an adulterous woman is a deep pit; a man who is under the Lord's wrath falls into it" (Proverbs 22:14 NIV). This text suggests that God uses adultery as a form of judgment. If a person is under judgment, everything in the person's life, including the person's work, will be subject to the consequences of God's judgment. Would you want to do business with anyone who is under the wrath of God? Humanly defined best practices fails to see this reality.

Another example is the definition of success. Conventional best practices almost always denominates success in terms of money. It is assumed that if someone is wealthy, the person was blessed by God. Biblically, however, when unrighteous people attain wealth, it is tool of judgment (see Psalms 73). Therefore money cannot be the measure of success; there must be another definition. Jesus offered his definition of success when he uttered these words to the Father: "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do" (John 17:4 NIV). Success for Jesus was not measured by money but was simply obedience to his divinely ordained work assignment.

A third example is strategic planning. Humanly defined best practices teach that the purpose of strategic planning is to help an individual or organization efficiently make money. After all, why would you do something if you can't make money? The Scriptures, however, provide a different view. James 4:13–16 reads: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil" (NIV). James does not demean strategic planning; rather he focuses on the motive. Humanly defined best practices are always money driven, which according to James 4:1–4 is diametrically opposed to God. The biblically correct motive for strategic planning is to discern the will of God. Therefore the real objective of strategic planning is not to make money but to align with the will of God.

Hopefully you can see from these examples how biblically based best practices are dramatically different from the commonly accepted best practices.

Perhaps you also noted that seeing business from a biblical worldview is not intuitive, it requires biblical study. Just attending church or Bible studies may not—in fact, probably will not—enable you to develop a sound biblical view of business. Sadly, in my experience, few churches have a vision for teaching a biblical worldview of business. The best way to develop biblically based best practices is to be discipled by one or more people who have applied themselves to the study of work from a biblical worldview. It is these people who see and value the Bible as the greatest business book.

By recognizing the Bible as the greatest business book, I am not saying that all other business books are useless. Rather, as the greatest business book, the Bible is the ultimate standard of truth. All other books are valuable only to the degree that they present knowledge that is consistent with the Bible. Accordingly, I view Covey's seven habits through a biblical worldview and find that his principles reflect a level of biblical thinking. Therefore I find value in his principles. Their value is not based on pragmatism. Covey's principles are valuable because they can be presented congruent with the timeless, universal standard for all reality, the Bible.

The Bible is the greatest business book because it is the greatest book. It is God's revelation to us, his creatures, about his creation—why business exists, why we exist, and what we exist to do. To live well and to be effective in business, we must live biblically. Therefore the best business practices must be rooted in biblical truth, not in humanly defined wisdom.

Training from a Biblical Worldview

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Your Need	Training Venue	Information (click below)
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	Strategic Life Alignment Alumni Event Recordings	Recordings Available
Training to Fulfill Your Life Purpose	<i>Seminar:</i> Keys to Starting a Successful Business	October 26, 2012 (Dallas, TX)
	<i>Webinar:</i> Keys to Starting a Successful Business	November 5, 12, and 19, 2012
	Business Transformation Series Seminars	Recordings Available