

Christian-Owned Companies: What Does it Look Like When a Follower of Jesus Runs a Business?

A Book Review

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ABSTRACT: If our lives are to reflect the spirit and nature of Christ, it must do so beyond the walls of church on Sunday morning. That spirit and nature of Christ must spill over into our daily lives, including our vocational pursuits. As an instructor, I believe it is my responsibility to provide real-world examples of faith at work in a business setting. Zigarelli's (2019) newest book titled *Christian-Owned Companies* provides some great principles and examples of what a business "...looks like when a follower of Jesus runs a business..." (p. 1).

INTRODUCTION

In the book *Christian-Owned Companies*, Zigarelli (2019) begins his executive summary using a common classroom conversation that every business instructor has experienced at one time or another when discussing the application of biblical principles in business. He follows this illustration by proposing that the best way to explore that issue is by examining data that can be derived by looking at how 50 Christian-owned businesses operate, regardless of size, industry, or geography. Zigarelli proposes that these 50 businesses provide insight into how a Christ-follower can run a successful, for-profit business based on eight biblical principles that translate into best practices. Not all 50 businesses are discussed in the following sections. Only a few were selected as prime examples of each principle.

PRINCIPLE 1: THEY SEEK TO HONOR GOD IN ALL THEY DO

To illustrate this first principle, Zigarelli begins his study of Christian-owned businesses by looking at ServiceMaster, Chick-fil-a, Hobby Lobby, Martin's World-Famous Pastry Shoppe, and Turbocam International. While not all of these companies are still Christian-owned, the founders of each had one common goal. Their goal was to demonstrate

their business mission and purpose by exhibiting practices that the owners believed honored God. One well-known example from this group is Chick-fil-a's practice of closing on Sunday. Another example of this principle is Hobby Lobby's fight against a federal law that required businesses to add abortifacients as part of their benefits plan.

PRINCIPLE 2: THEY MAKE PRODUCTS THAT MAKE A BETTER WORLD

It is easy to get sidetracked with the inclusion of Guinness Brewing in this section. If you consider the historical perspective and the context, one will be able to understand how brewing beer was a healthier alternative at the time. Another, and probably more palatable example of Principle 2, is D. Light Design, which set out to develop solar-powered lights for the poor, who were suffering at the hands of kerosene and gas lighting in their homes. The story of Dick Capin is also included in this section. Founder of CapinCrouse, Dick felt he was called by God to help non-profits improve their quality of management and ultimately the effectiveness of their ministries. In 1979, he helped found the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, providing a service to advance the cause of hundreds of ministries.

PRINCIPLE 3: THEY FUND FAITHFUL CAUSES

More interesting than the success of Domino's Pizza was the way God touched Tom Monaghan's heart and transformed him into someone who took "a millionaire's vow of poverty" (p. 90). Domino's Pizza had always supported faith-based initiatives. It was later in life that Monaghan felt the call of God to give more and keep less. The story of Toms Shoes is also included in this section. Their "Buy One, Give One" program has set the standard for other companies in how to fund faithful causes.

PRINCIPLE 4: THEY TREAT THEIR EMPLOYEES LIKE FAMILY

For those of us who teach management or leadership courses, we understand the principle that the better you treat your employees the more loyal and productive they are. H. J Heinz Company set the bar for offering some of the best benefits to their employees. The plants were state-of-the art, sanitary, well-ventilated, good lighting, and temperature-controlled, to name a few. Other benefits included free physician services, dentists, pensions, a swimming pool, a rooftop garden, and countless other benefits. The most amazing part of this was that it occurred in 1900, during the industrial revolution when most businesses were going the opposite direction. Wegmans Food Markets is also included here as an example of an organization that cares for its employees. Their approach landed them first in the Harris Poll of corporate reputation in 2019 (p. 155). Care for employees does pay off.

PRINCIPLE 5: THEY CREATE JOBS FOR PEOPLE WHO WOULD NOT HAVE ONE

Just the mention of the Hershey Chocolate Company can make mouths water. In the 1930s when most employers were laying people off, Milton Hershey created alternate jobs for his people. During that time, he built the Hershey Theater, Hersheypark Arena and Stadium, and Hotel Hershey to create work for his people. Second Chance Coffee approaches this principle from a different perspective. They hire and employ those who have been convicted of crimes, who would probably not be employed otherwise. The result of creating jobs in this way is a recidivism rate of merely four percent for their employees as compared to the average rate of fifty percent for the general population.

PRINCIPLE 6: THEY VALUE CREATION CARE

There are many examples today of businesses attempting to create sustainable systems and processes. As Christians, we are called to be good stewards of all God has provided here on earth. One business that takes this seriously is Herman Miller. Shifting away from Brazilian Rosewood (from the rainforest) to cherry and walnut from well-managed forests to construct its famous Eames Chair, Herman Miller demonstrated its stewardship in a tangible way. Another example is Cardone Industries. They are in the business of remanufacturing what others would have tossed into the landfill. They repurpose and rejuvenate enough rebuilt auto parts each year to fill two ocean liners of potentially corrosive metals that would otherwise lay in the landfill and rust. Being good stewards of God's creation is at the core of its business.

PRINCIPLE 7: THEY STAND FIRM, REGARDLESS OF COST

The cost of goods produced or the cost of doing business are significant factors for any business, including businesses based on Christian principles. In this section of the book examples are given of businesses that stood on principle regardless of the potential cost. Flow Automotive Companies believe that business should occupy a "God-ordained" position in regard to customer service, regardless of the cost. If the cost of repairs exceeds the original estimate given the customer, Flow pays the difference. If the original problem is not remedied on the first try, Flow will take care of the problem and the owner will never pay to have that problem fixed again. In addition, they will pick up and drop off your car. Another example of this principle is Correct Craft boat company. They were asked to build boats to support the U. S. forces in WWII. The government insisted they work seven days per week to build the boats. Correct Craft refused to violate the principle of a day of rest for their employees at the cost of losing the government contract. Correct Craft ended up building more boats than the other companies working six days per week. Both examples model what God can do in business if we honor him at any cost.

PRINCIPLE 8: THEY INTRODUCE PEOPLE TO GOD

As followers of Christ we are called to be his witness to others in the hope that they will in turn decide to become a follower. The call to introduce people to God includes all resources at our disposal, even for a business owner. R. G.

LeTourneau is a prime example of using his resources to introduce people to God. He practiced tithing the profits from his business. At first, he gave 10 percent. That grew to 50 percent and then 90 percent. His giving culminated in the founding of LeTourneau University. He demonstrated how to use business as a platform for God. Norm Miller was another example. He felt that he could use his position as a leader in Interstate Batteries to share the Gospel with employees and customers (dealers). He instituted prayer meetings and Bible studies for employees to attend as an option before and after work. Sending Bibles and tracts to dealers was also a regular practice. Miller established a chaplain's office and assisted in developing ad campaigns that would expose people to the Gospel. Only through faithful use of the resources available to them were these business leaders able to accomplish all they did.

CONCLUSION

As a business instructor at a faith-based institution of higher education, I think resources that illustrate the integration of faith and business are invaluable. Zigarelli's book offers illustrations of world-class businesses led by those who were committed to the cause of Christ. This review only includes a sampling of the businesses discussed in the book. It contains a wealth of stories that detail how business leaders have marshalled the resources of their organizations to further God's kingdom. These stories can serve as a witness to students that God does honor those who follow after him not only in their personal lives, but also in the marketplace. While Zigarelli is not offering a traditional text that introduces and discusses the primary functions of management of the different theories of leadership, he does offer real-life examples of how to lead a business and manage its resources in a way that furthers God's kingdom through temporal means in addition to humility of heart and spirit as demonstrated by organizational leaders. Christian-Owned Companies could serve as a great supplemental reading to any business course.

REFERENCE

Zigarelli, Michael (2019). *Christian-Owned Companies*. Hildesheim, Germany: 9 to 5 Media.

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