

A Christian CEO?

A Christian CEO? I would imagine that the American public would have two primary responses to a phrase like that, and the two would be complete opposites. One would be incredulity. “Could a man or woman who really acts like a Christian be a successful CEO?” they might ask. Another, perhaps more common among the “church-folk” of the Midwest, would be complete indifference. “So what? Being a Christian has nothing to do with *my* business practices.” they would respond. Let’s leave the first question aside for now, and delve into the second response. Does being a Christian have anything to do with a business? I would say that it certainly does!

Imagine a company with several hundred employees, located in west central Minnesota. We design and manufacture solar-assisted battery-powered cars. As the founder of this corporation and the current CEO, I have structured this company to the best of my abilities as Christ would have. What does that entail? Let’s find out...

I have decided that this company is going to be a company of service. It is *not* going to be in the primary business of getting *more* money and making *more* stuff and making others buy as *much* of our stuff as possible. Money is not the object in this organization. It is not a priority. As Jesus said,

“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:26-28, NIV.)

Our corporate goal is to give as much as we can to those around us. Yes, we must consider cash—this is a business, after all. Yet our defining purpose is to make the best solar-assisted battery-powered cars that we can to better serve our fellow humans beings. By serving them, we want to show Christ’s love to them in a very real and tangible way. Quoting James, “If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?” (James 2:16, NIV.) It is this defining purpose, this goal of ministry, that affects every area of our business.

First, what would advertising be like? It would be as slick and professional as possible. We are not sloppy, and we care deeply about our company. But, the driving force behind the

ads is our commitment to service. Every promotion we put out on a product will be informative, to the point, and, most importantly, honest. Some will be funny, others will be quaint, others might be surprising. We want people to know that we are here, after all. But, they will never be intentionally misleading, exaggerated, or pointless. We want to give our customers the best information we can about our cars—both pros and cons. Then, they can make an informed and worthwhile decision. If they do not choose us, then we can feel confident that we have served them just as well, for we told them the entire truth.

Second, the pricing of our product would be as fair to everyone involved as possible. We would expect little if any net profit—all of the money that we get in return for our vehicles would be used for raw materials, salaries, advertising, and other necessary business expenses. Poor families in need of such a vehicle would be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, for no two poor families are alike. Many are poor because of circumstances, in which case we would do our best to help them out by giving appropriate discounts. However, many are poor because of their own errors. In cases like these, we want to help them too. We need to make sure they receive financial counseling first of all. If we decide, through prayer, that God would have us give the family a vehicle or a discount, we will. We are here to serve.

Thirdly, our salary and benefits would be based on three primary considerations: need, performance, and responsibility. (Note that seniority and position are not included.) Each of these would be taken into consideration so that no one would have too much nor too little for them do effectively do the Lord's work at our company.

“Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.” (Proverbs 30:8-9, NIV.)

We need to consider what the employee's needs are as a starting point. From there, we can consider how well they are using their talents and abilities that they have been given.

“...From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” (Luke 12:48, NIV.) Finally, we ought to consider the amount of responsibility that they are holding. This consideration would take the form of a stipend paid to the employees with highest responsibilities only under one condition: the employee made a mistake and was forced to leave the company. Why?

Simply because those with the highest responsibilities have the highest risks in their day-to-day decisions in a company. I'd like to imagine that nothing like this would ever happen, but the real world is too messy for that.

I will admit that this last point is the least concrete of the above ideas. Probably the only way to flesh it out in a real-world situation will be trial and error and prayer. Perhaps, we cannot follow all of these guidelines right away, and some of them maybe never will see fruition. Yet, they fall directly into our goal of serving others and showing Christ's love to them. So, we must pursue them as much as possible. And, as we do so, we should consider some of the examples that have been set before us by churches, non-profit ministries, and Christian schools. In each of these, I can think of many examples when pastors, teachers, and other employees have been willing to make do with very minimal salaries and less than ideal working conditions. Why? They believe that they are following God's calling. Our company, at its deepest level, is a ministry. Our employees have joined us in our ministry because they want to serve the Lord, whatever the cost. It is very possible, given the first two stipulations on advertising and pricing, that our company will have money shortages. We will have to do our best to make ends meet, all the while trusting God to bring us through.

It should be obvious by now what the differences between our Christian company and the traditional capitalist American corporation are. Our advertising is honest and informative. Our pricing is never set solely to make a profit, it is set to be just large enough to pay our bills. And, finally, our salary structure is radically different. Why? Simply because we are here to be used by God and to serve Him and those around us—not to serve ourselves and our own, usually selfish, interests. And, in doing so, we must trust Him completely. It is this core difference that makes our company so radically different.

I think you can see that being a Christian makes a huge impact on how we run our businesses. Being a Christian, in fact, has *a lot* to do with our business practices. For existing businesses, this might require big changes that take many years. In any case, it will take a lot of prayer, faith, and love to make it through. Living as Christ called us to live—in its fullest extent—has never been easy. But with His help every day, we can make it through.