

“Bridging the Gap Between our Faith and Business Worlds Through Servant Leadership”

April 20, 2012

Good morning.

I would like to talk to you this morning about bridging the gap between your “faith journey” and your “business career.”

Specifically, how becoming a “servant leader” has helped me apply my faith in the business world.

Personal Background

First, I would like to share a little personal background.

I grew up in rural North Alabama on a farm four miles from the nearest paved road.

I can remember when both sets of grandparents didn’t have electricity.

It was a great place to grow up.

My parents were active Christians. Our family attended a very small country Baptist church.

My earliest remembrances of church are the many spankings I got for “showing out” during the worship service.

It was in this country church that I gave my heart to Jesus at the age of 13.

Over the years, I had wonderful Sunday School teachers that drilled me in the Bible until it became part of my life.

I was also extremely fortunate to have parents who loved me and prayed for me every day they were here on earth.

The influence of Godly parents and the training I received in this country church gave me a foundation of faith, around which the rest of my life has been built.

In high school, I loved fast cars more than girls. Today, I would probably be called a “nerd.”

I went to the University of Alabama to study Aerospace Engineering. This was just after the Russians launched their first Sputnik satellite.

I graduated with excellent grades and a new wife.

My wife, Billie, was my eighth grade sweetheart. She has been the love of my life for over 50 years.

While serving in many church positions in both Baptist and Methodist churches, my first love has always been teaching young adults, which I have done for over 40 years.

Currently, I teach the Kindred Spirits Class of young adults at Marietta First United Methodist Church.

I have been fortunate to have a number of different business careers. Nearly all have met with a great deal of success. However, there was one spectacular failure.

My first business career was in the aerospace industry where I worked for nearly 40 years.

I retired from aerospace in 2000 as Executive Vice President of Lockheed Martin Corporation, where I led their worldwide aircraft business.

During my tenure as head of Aeronautical Systems at Lockheed Martin, we won every major U.S. and international military aircraft competition put out for bid.

These wins set the stage for Lockheed Martin to become the dominate military aircraft manufacturer in the world.

When I retired, the Lockheed Martin world-wide sales of the aircraft business unit approached \$7 billion annually with 36,000 employees.

After retirement, my second business career was in public service.

At Governor Barnes' and later Governor Purdue's requests, I directed the state effort to save our military bases in Georgia from closing.

I was also asked by Mayor Dunaway to put together and help implement a strategic plan to redevelop our city of Marietta.

In addition, I have worked to resurrect the Strand Theater and start an Aviation Museum.

In my third business career, I helped found Alpha Bank and Trust and develop a new homeland security company called Scantech.

Finally, my fourth career change was when I recently wrote and published my first Christian book titled “When Two or More are Gathered...in Prayer.”

By the way, there is no such thing as retirement. There is just a “second half” to your life.

Leadership Choice

As a leader at work, in my home, and at church, I had a choice to make. What kind of leader would I be?

You have the same choice. What kind of leader will you be?

I submit that everyone is a leader!!!

The question is not: will you lead; but, how will you lead?

In a book titled “The Servant Leader,” Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges describe two types of leaders—“self-serving leaders” and “servant leaders.”

Self-serving leaders are those who want to be a leader to get power, get recognition, get promoted, or get a pay raise.

Being a self-serving leader may lead to power, fame, and financial wealth; but it will not give you the greatest satisfaction and happiness. Your fulfillment and satisfaction with your life will come as you meet people’s needs in the marketplace, at home, and at church.

As you consider what type of person you want to be, and what kind of leadership style you want to use, I would like you to consider the idea of being a “servant leader.”

A servant leader is one that is totally devoted to serving others while at the same time being totally committed to achieving their personal goals.

Being a servant leader can help you successfully bridge between your faith journey and your business life, home life, and leisure life.

I first heard of “servant leaders” in high school from a minister who spoke during Wednesday chapel.

The minister used as his text the story of Jesus taking the role of a servant and washing the disciple's feet.

The minister said “the highest calling of leadership was to be a “servant leader” that leads like Jesus.”

He also talked about Robert Greenleaf's pioneering work at AT&T that used servant leadership in the work place.

Jesus said, “Whoever will be great among you must be your servant” (Matthew 20:25).

It dawned on me that this was how a Christian should lead.

I have come to believe that Jesus is the greatest leadership role model of all time!

Look what Jesus did in training 12 nobodies in about a year and a half. These 12 nobodies changed the world.

Servant leadership works in the marketplace as well.

In Jim Collins' recent book “Good to Great,” he describes the leaders of enduring great companies that have sustained fantastic financial growth of 4 to 7 times the growth of the market annually for decades.

Collins found that the leaders of these great companies:

- a. Were personally humble with intense professional will to make their company the very best.
- b. They loved and cared for their people.

They were servant leaders!

“Servant leadership” as a leadership model has guided me throughout my entire life, and I believe in no small way it has contributed to my continued success and happiness.

Heart

To become a servant leader starts in the heart. It begins with motivation.

Is the motivation for what you're doing for self-interest or is it for the benefit of those you are leading?

In the early 1970's, my wife and I had a spiritual crisis that involved our hearts. We were very unhappy in our church. We grumbled a lot.

We didn't seem to fit in our church and couldn't make friends.

However, we were still very active in church, holding all kinds of jobs.

I tried to bridge the gap by trying to use business methods to help me in my faith journey. They didn't work.

We got more and more frustrated as time passed.

In retrospect, I was trying to do God's work the world's way with my power, rather than God's power.

There was still a gap between me and God.

What I hadn't realized is that I had taken over the throne of my life. I had booted God off the throne. I was in control.

However, God wanted to be in control of all of my life.

He wanted to give me the "heart of a servant" and bridge the gap to Him by bringing my faith to every aspect of my life including my business career.

An encounter with a group of Christian business men and women that came to our church as part of a lay witness weekend changed my life.

They explained to me that God wanted to control not part of my life but all of my life.

I had to give up self-interest to be the servant leader God wanted me to be.

I bridged the gap between me and God by letting the Holy Spirit have total control of my life.

Motivation that comes from a heart filled with the love of Jesus will make a difference in our world.

I would like to illustrate this with a story told by the scientist and poet Loren Eiseley.

Before starting to work one morning, he decided to walk along the beach. As he was walking along the shore, he looked off in the distance, and saw what he thought was a young man dancing.

As he got closer, he found the man wasn't dancing at all. The young man was reaching down to the beach, picking up starfish, and then flinging them back into the surf.

Eiseley saw hundreds of starfish stranded on the beach, where the surf had receded,

So he asked the young man what he was doing. He said "I am throwing the starfish back into the surf. If I don't throw them back, they will all die."

Eiseley looked at the young man and said, "Don't you know there are hundreds of starfish, and that you can't possibly throw them all back?"

And the young man, seemingly not hearing what Eiseley said, reached down, picked up a starfish, threw it back into the surf, and said, "I made a difference to that one."

A servant's heart also works in the home and marketplace!

As a servant leader with a heart for God, you will make a difference by enabling others. It could be:

- **Doing the dishes for your wife to give her some free time, or**
- **Giving up something you wanted to do in order to meet your children's needs**
- **Cutting through red tape to enable an employee to do his or her job**

Let me illustrate with a personal example.

In 1983, a Senior Lockheed Executive wanted me to work directly for him. This, I did not want to do.

He had a history of working on useless projects and using people, and then casting them aside. His management style promoted conflict.

This executive was a "self-serving" leader.

Through a set of unusual circumstances, I found myself working directly for this executive anyway.

He wanted me to build and lead a "skunk works" organization in Marietta to develop stealthy aircraft.

Our operation became known as the "black hole," because if you ever went into this classified facility no one heard from you again.

The main line Engineering Managers did not support what we were doing, because it was outside their chain of command.

They would only give me what they considered their worst engineers to man the project.

We proceeded to build an outstanding team because these misfits had something to prove and knew they could make a difference if given a chance.

All they needed was some servant leadership to care for them and to point them the way.

The black hole team made many breakthroughs in stealth technology. Many are included on the F-22 and F-35 stealth fighters today.

When I went back a year later to the Engineering Managers for more people, the response was “you can’t have anymore; you already have all the good people!”

Giving vision and purpose, while caring for our people, had turned the misfits into being viewed as the best engineers in the company.

As a result of this work, I was promoted three times in less than five years to Vice President of Engineering.

The man I didn’t want to work for became my greatest advocate. What could have been a disastrous job turned into a great opportunity.

Head

Becoming a “servant leader” also involves the head, where your vision of the future, your belief system, and your core values are stored.

Servant leaders have a clear and compelling vision that excites passion in the leader and commitment in those who follow the leader.

Your core values are important, because they drive all of your behavior. They are what you stand for.

Personal core values may include such things as:

- **Spiritual beliefs**
- **Excellence**
- **Honesty and integrity**
- **Loyalty**

- **Fairness**
- **Courage**
- **Sense of Humor**

True success as a servant leader comes from the leader living every day his or her core values in front of the whole world.

A leader elicits trust from us when we have confidence in their core values, their competence, and their passion to achieve their vision.

Let me share a personal example about “living your core values and servant leadership.”

In 1989, I was asked to take over the leadership of the Lockheed F-22 stealth fighter program in California.

I did not want the job because, at the time, we were losing badly in the competition with Northrop Grumman.

I was ordered to take over the program anyway.

The previous leaders of the F-22 program were the kind that shouted, cursed, and fired employees.

Our program staff was made up of many who were not the company’s best performers.

They also shouted and cursed to get work done because that is what they saw their leaders do.

In fact, our situation was so bad that the Air Force F-22 Project Office wanted to declare Northrop the winner half way through the competition. They thought Lockheed could never catch up.

By the way, if Lockheed didn’t win the F-22, they were going to be out of the aircraft business in just a few years.

By implementing Christian core values and “servant leadership” principles along with a lot of hard work, we turned the F-22 program around.

To make a long story short, Lockheed blew by Northrop Grumman to win the F-22 program going away.

Plus, the Air Force said the work product of the Lockheed team was the finest they had ever seen.

The power of the people working on the F-22 program was unleashed, and they stood taller because their leaders served them and cared about them. They acted out their core values.

The F-22 today is the most fantastic military airplane ever conceived.

This win resulted in Lockheed receiving an initial F-22 contract of \$12 billion which was the largest contract ever awarded by the DOD up to that time.

The F-22 was the first program to use the “integrated product team” management concept in the workplace which is based on servant leadership principles.

Essentially, in the integrated product teams:

- a. The teams had a common vision and goals for specific parts of the airplane
- b. All the team members had to agree to the product design
- c. The product was more important than their personal goals
- d. The team members learned to care for each other
- e. They gave of their best and more
- f. They wanted to win with all their heart

Teams like this can do the impossible!

Today, integrated product teams have been adopted by the DOD as the preferred management organization for all military programs.

The same servant leadership principles for a team also apply to the church:

- a. We need to have a common vision and goals
- b. Serving others is more important than being served.
- c. Our members need to love and care for each other.
- d. Everyone gives of their best and more.
- e. We want to win the world for Christ with all our heart.

With servant leadership, the church can do the impossible and build a bridge to a world in need.

Hands

Your journey to become a servant leader will end with your hands. You must put servant leadership into practice.

The traditional view of business management is that the people who report to managers or bosses are supposed to serve the bosses.

Now as a servant leader, you will serve and meet the needs for the people for which you are responsible.

The servant leader actively removes any obstacles in the path of those working with him or her.

In this way, servant leaders unleash the strengths, talents, and passions of those they serve.

Upon being notified of the F-22 win, we had to move the program from Burbank, CA to Marietta, GA. The corporation had decided to close our Burbank plant.

For the Air Force to have confidence in Lockheed, we had to prove to them that we could get the core team to move to Georgia.

We had to remove any obstacle that stood in the way of our people moving from California to Georgia.

I literally interviewed nearly 1000 people helping solve each one's problems.

As a result, about 85% of the people on the project moved with us to Marietta.

Just before we closed down in Burbank, the entire staff asked me to come out in front of our building. They had rented a mobile billboard and each person had posted a personal note of thanks to me on a copy of their handprint made out of construction paper.

The F-22 program had truly become a team and family.

Rewards for A Servant Leader

Being a servant leader has many rewards.

As a servant leader your personal rewards will be satisfaction and happiness.

Your life will have significance.

Rewards to a Team

There are also great rewards to organizations and teams that are led by servant leaders.

They have higher levels of achievement than those led by self-serving leaders.

People exceed performance expectations when those who lead instill vision, care for team members, and when the team members are accepted for what they are, even though they may not be the best performers.

This is wonderfully illustrated in a movie called “Miracle” produced by Walt Disney a few years ago, which shows the impact that caring can have on team performance.

This movie is about a group of talented “self-serving” hockey players coached by Herb Brooks who are in training for the 1980 Olympics.

Over time, they became a good team, but they could not achieve their potential, no matter how hard they tried.

It was not until Coach Brooks led them to the point that they began to care for each other, pursue a common vision, and have a passion to win, that they achieved their highest potential and beat the Russians to win the gold.

The disciples of Jesus were no different. Up until the crucifixion, the disciples were absorbed in self-interest. They argued among themselves as to who would be the greatest?

After the resurrection, Jesus gave them a vision and put his Spirit in their heart. They became servant leaders.

As a result they had a passion to win the world for Christ. In the end, they did the impossible and changed our world.

It is no different for Christians of today. In doing the work of the church, if you care for others, pursue a common vision, have the passion to win the world for Christ, and listen to the leading of the Holy Spirit, you too can achieve the impossible.

Rewards for You and Me

If you know that there is a servant leader in the form of a boss, parent, or friend that cares for you, encourages you, loves you, and supports you, no amount of discouragement will keep you from achieving your highest potential.

This idea is captured by a poem entitled "The Race" (anonymous).

Whenever I start to hang my head in front of failure's face,
my downward fall is broken by the memory of a race.
A children's race, young boys, young men; how I remember well,
excitement sure, but also fear, it wasn't hard to tell.
They all lined up so full of hope, each thought to win that race
or tie for first, or if not that, at least take second place.
Their parents watched from off the side, each cheering for their
son, and each boy hoped to show his folks that he would be the
one.

The whistle blew and off they flew, like chariots of fire, to
win, to be the hero there, was each young boy's desire.
One boy in particular, whose dad was in the crowd, was running in
the lead and thought "My dad will be so proud."
But as he speeded down the field and crossed a shallow dip, the
little boy who thought he'd win, lost his step and slipped.
Trying hard to catch himself, his arms flew everywhere, and
amidst the laughter of the crowd he fell flat on his face.
As he fell, his hope fell too; he couldn't win it now.
Humiliated, he just wished to disappear somehow.

But as he fell his dad stood up and showed his anxious face,
which to the boy so clearly said, "Get up and win that race!"
He quickly rose, no damage done, behind a bit that's all, and ran
with all his mind and might to make up for his fall.
So anxious to restore himself, to catch up and to win,
his mind went faster than his legs. He slipped and fell again.
He wished that he had quit before with only one disgrace.
"I'm hopeless as a runner now, I shouldn't try to race."

But through the laughing crowd he searched and found his
father's face with a steady look that said again, "Get up and win
that race!" So he jumped up to try again, ten yards behind the
last.

"If I'm to gain those yards," he thought, "I've got to run real
fast!" Exceeding everything he had, he regained eight, then
ten... but trying hard to catch the lead, he slipped and fell

again.

Defeat! He lay there silently. A tear dropped from his eye. "There's no sense running anymore! Three strikes I'm out! Why try? I've lost, so what's the use?" he thought. "I'll live with my disgrace."

But then he thought about his dad, who soon he'd have to face. "Get up," an echo sounded low, "you haven't lost at all, for all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall. Get up!" the echo urged him on, "Get up and take your place!

You were not meant for failure here! Get up and win that race!" So, up he rose to run once more, refusing to forfeit, and he resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.

So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been, still he gave it all he had and ran like he could win.

Three times he'd fallen stumbling, three times he rose again.

Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end. They cheered another boy who crossed the line and won first place, head high and proud and happy -- no falling, no disgrace. But, when the fallen youngster crossed the line, in last place, the crowd gave him a greater cheer for finishing the race. And even though he came in last with head bowed low, unproud, you would have thought he'd won the race, to listen to the crowd. And to his dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well."

"To me, you won," his father said. "You rose each time you fell." And now when things seem dark and bleak and difficult to face, the memory of that little boy helps me in my own race. For all of life is like that race, with ups and downs and all.

And all you have to do to win is rise each time you fall. And when depression and despair shout loudly in my face, another voice within me says, "Get up and win that race!"

Yes, even in the face of discouragement and failure, if you know your Heavenly Father loves you and the people around you love and care for you, you will hear voices telling you to "Get up and win that race."

Let me share a personal example where God, family, and friends helped me through my most spectacular business failure.

Until seven years ago, everything I had done in my various business careers had been highly successful.

However, God was not through with shaping my character.

In 2005, I help start a new bank called Alpha Bank and Trust and served as its chairman. The bank was founded on servant leadership principles and Christian core values.

We raised a record amount of capital. For two years, it was the fastest growing community bank in Georgia.

Unfortunately, our lending was focused on real estate. You can guess the rest. With the recent economic melt down, many of our real estate loans failed.

As a team, we worked tirelessly to keep the bank alive. We tried to raise additional money.

We prayed individually and together as a team that God would intervene and help us save the bank.

Alpha Bank, that started with such great promise, failed on December 1, 2008.

I wondered why God did not answer my prayers. It was a humbling experience.

It was here that I heard the voices of my Heavenly Father, family, friends, and even bank investors say “Get up. Your life is not over.”

It was just after the time of the bank crisis that I felt God wanted me to write a book on corporate prayer.

The title of the book is “When Two or More are Gathered...in Prayer.”

So often, we pray and wonder why God does not answer our prayers. This book deals with how two or more Christians can pray together with increased power and have confidence that they will receive answers to their prayers.

I worried about writing a book on corporate prayer, because I was afraid I would say something theologically stupid and end up being embarrassed.

Satan whispered you are an engineer not a trained theologian. You are going to look like a fool.

I worried that a lot of my stories were personal examples about my failures as a Christian that might leave me exposed to ridicule.

I also worried that I might be accused of being a fraud, since I personally struggle with praying. For some reason, praying does not come naturally to me. I much prefer to “do things” rather than pray.

I had to bridge the gap between my fear of what others might say about me, and what God wanted me to do.

Trusting God to take care of my pride and worries, the book was published in 2009. Over a 1000 copies have been sold or given away.

Closing Remarks

In closing, today and every day you face a fork in the road. It is up to you to choose how you will live the rest of your life.

Will you choose to live your life as a “self-serving” leader with a gap between you and God?

Or, will you choose to be a “servant leader” with strong core values totally devoted to serving others while intensely pursuing your personal vision of the future?

Think how great it will be to one day hear our Master say: “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of the Lord.”

We will enter into the joy of the Lord by crossing over the bridge we have built one stone at a time by loving God and by loving and serving others.

God bless you all.

Micky Blackwell