

Power in Business and Church

(1) *Lynn Roy*

World Access, Waterloo, Ontario

With a last name like Roy, and not Shantz or Martin or Thiessen, it quickly becomes apparent that I am an import to the Mennonite faith. I chose to become part of Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church ten years ago. When asked to participate in this discussion, I was excited and then humbled to have an opportunity to explore a concept which has become so important in my life—that is, how power in business can be used as outreach.

Three years ago I strongly considered leaving my position as chief operating officer of a multi-million dollar company for something more “spiritual.” I considered many opportunities that would perhaps be deemed by others and by me to be more “worthy.” But then it occurred to me that perhaps my workplace, where people spend 50 percent of their waking hours, could be my own mission location. I was excited by the fact that I had access to 150 individuals, mostly non-Christian, to whom I could introduce the qualities of Christ on a daily basis. Now, I am not Jimmy Swaggart or a big-toothed evangelist but what I work to be, and what close Christian colleagues work to ensure that I am, is a servant leader. By this I mean someone who attempts to exhibit qualities that Christ would be proud of and who encourages and develops those qualities in the management team that surrounds me.

Having the power of running a corporate entity involves the privilege of selecting speakers for the company’s quarterly meetings. We often invite a pastor from Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church or a Christian professor from Wilfrid Laurier University to give a 20-minute presentation on a relevant business topic, such as team building, conflict resolution, etc. We would all recognize this as a sermon, but it is done in a secular manner so that no one suspects that we are really evangelizing. This may sound manipulative, but I don’t believe it is, as those biblical principles are awesome in a workplace, especially when placed in secular vernacular when at all possible. The best part is when the speaker leaves and non-Christian individuals approach me and say, “That was really great . . . Who was that

speaker?” When I can reply, “Oh, that was the pastor from my church,” it is an incredibly powerful way of attracting seekers to the church. There are still many people who think that church has to be boring and irrelevant to their daily lives, and this is an amazing opportunity to show them another side.

I think what my power in my workplace allows me to do is combine my two loves—Jesus Christ and people—to a greater cause. The Great Commandment and the Great Commission have become the vision of the church I attend, and that is “To Make More and Better Disciples.” To that end, I attest that the *concept of using power in the workplace as an outreach* fulfills both of those objectives. In the workplace Christians have a secular audience watching them everyday in their business dealings. By following the example of Christ, we can be part of his marketing plan to make more disciples. To the extent that we as “power-owners” can exemplify servant leadership, we will ultimately and necessarily become better disciples.

(2) *Milo Shantz, President*
Mercedes Corp., St. Jacobs, Ontario

Responding to the question [put to participants in this panel], “How do my faith, my values and my ethical standards affect the decisions I make in my business activities,” I like to think that I make my decisions on the basis of all three. Early in life my parents demonstrated Christian values by the way they lived, and what I learned in my church community made for sound business practice. I learned that being a Christian involves honesty, frankness, community, fairness, and listening. These qualities empowered me to do business.

“What can the church and business say to each other, or do they operate in different worlds?” I believe they operate in different worlds, but I can name five persons who early in my life became mentors [on this issue] and I am working at naming others. Orie Miller is one of them.

Orie Miller, a business person and churchman, was one of those who on my first trip to South America thirty years ago assured me as a young entrepreneur that it was okay to be in business. He shared his principles regarding charity and the management of wealth. As a powerful church leader involved in many church institutions, he provided stimulation and

encouragement to younger people to become involved in the forerunners of Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA). These organizations provided forums for interaction between church and business, and for some business people MEDA became church. Presently, the local chapter of MEDA has involved many members who meet regularly to share their life stories and experiences in business.

The church is made up of people who work at a variety of jobs, but it appears that the business person is often singled out (because of leadership? wealth? taking risks? creating change?) as a “bad” person. My own community (St. Jacobs) was designated by the Region of Waterloo and the Province of Ontario as a tourist destination and the core area for expansion is clearly defined. When my corporation was proposing a 30-room inn and a minor variance was required, none of us in the corporation was aware of any objections and no one in the village had spoken to us about concerns. Yet at the local council meeting several dozen people showed up to object to our proposals, including members of my own congregation. We have also experienced small groups calling the media, stating inaccuracies and outright falsehoods.

These are the forms of power we encounter, along with community gossip and false assumptions: 1) In 1987 I was working in my overalls in St. Jacobs and overheard visitors at a restaurant naming me and being complimentary about their experience, but going on to say that I was in trouble with the local Mennonite church and was forced to start my own congregation in Waterloo; 2) The inn next door to the church, of which my family is one of 20 equal shareholders, is often referred to as “my” inn; 3) The controversial tourist train which travels from Waterloo to St. Jacobs, of which I am not a shareholder, is often called “Milo’s train.”

The issues I have faced are not unique to me. Other entrepreneurs have faced similar pains. What is also common to our shared experiences is that in many cases we have not felt support from our church community. In fact, often we have felt just the opposite: we have felt condemnation. Somehow we need to find a way whereby we can encourage dialogue rather than confrontation. We need to encourage forums where disagreements and misunderstandings can be brought to the forefront, so that in the light of a sincere desire to understand one another we can have a meaningful

conversation. Maybe some of this could start in Sunday school classes or in small group settings where we all tell our stories. By starting this way, maybe we can get to know each other as individuals and eventually start supporting one another.

(3) *Joyce Bontrager Lehman, Chartered Public Accountant
Lehman & Wilkinson, Keene, New Hampshire*

Do business and the church operate in different worlds? Yes, is the easy and perhaps the obvious answer, but for those who are in business and work every day, it does not help connect Sunday to Monday. Such a split is too dramatic, too intense to maintain, and one side or the other eventually gives way. We must find ways to communicate, to learn from each other, to listen, and to nurture.

I noticed a church marquee with the words: “If you want to get work done, every committee should have three people, two of whom are absent!” In decision-making, there are perceived differences: the autocratic top-down corporate model versus the idealistic consensus model. I am not sure these differences are real. Many businesses are learning that a flatter management structure is often more effective. And there are too many churches, in my opinion, moving to the other end of the spectrum, dictating rather than talking. Perhaps the two could meet in the middle and help each other to stay there.

What about accountability and vision? Businesses need to justify their existence every single day with a clear vision of meeting the needs of their customers. What about the greater church, the conference, the congregation? To whom is it accountable? Who are the customers? What is the purpose? Is it effective, useful? How is that measured? Are all resources well utilized? Some would say these questions are not appropriate for a congregation. I believe they are. But I also know that the answers, if any, are not easy, cannot be uniform, and must be dynamic.

Another sign on a church marquee (these were both churches within the Anabaptist family): “God calls us to be faithful, not successful.” I was distressed and saddened. Why the conflict? What is the message? Whatever

the intent, I know the message further marginalized members of that congregation who already felt like second-class citizens. We need to be careful with our words. Money, power, success, profit, and “bottom-line orientation” are often used in ways that have negative connotations. We need to exorcise those habits and neutralize the judgment inherent in those words. Profit is not greed. It is an excess of revenue over expenses, a necessity for the existence of any organization. Other words are euphemisms. “Stewardship” is used to mean “giving money away” rather than “making the most of all God-given talents and gifts.” The latter is a challenge for young and old, rich and poor, and the real task of the “stewardship committee.” The other is simply fundraising and should be so named.

Business people, or others, do not have to choose between success and faithfulness. And the church is the place to start, with careful conversation, empathy, and perhaps even understanding. Instead of creating a barrier, the church can embrace the gifts and resources of all its members.