

CASE STUDY

Tom hires his long time friend Dick as sales manager for his new business venture. After five years of continual growth, the venture's sales top out. Over the next three years, sales steadily decline.

With Dick being unable to get sales back on track, Tom hires Harry as Vice President of Sales. While Harry through an innovative web based sales approach has been successful increasing sales for his previous employers, he comes with a reputation as a hardnosed manager with a combative style.

Over the next two years sales increase substantially as the result of Harry's implementation of his web based sales approach at the company. Unfortunately, being computer challenged and unable to adjust to Harry's combative management style, Dick's sales production continues to drop.

The next year, Tom is faced with a difficult decision. While company sales are approaching an all time high, Harry's combative management style is negatively affecting company morale, and Dick has not closed a sale in six months. What is Tom to do?

SOLUTION

Matthew 25:14-30, *The Parable of the Talents*, offers Tom as well as Dick and Harry guidance in resolving their work place issues.

"There is considerable debate about what the parable may have criticized when uttered during Jesus' ministry. The message for Matt 's readers is not one of meriting reward but of dedicated and fruitful response by the Christian to God's gift in and through Jesus (from the Q parable of the talents). In the form cited in the *Gospel of the Nazaraeans*, the man to be punished is not one who hid the talent but one who lived dissolutely and squandered it—a moralizing interpretation." (Raymond E. Brown, "An Introduction to the New Testament," Doubleday 1997 NY, NY page 199).

Regardless of the interpretation, it is clear we are called to take risks for the Kingdom of God, and arguably for our organizations. God does not give us gifts and talents so that we hide them; whether it be money, abilities, time, or training nothing is irrelevant.

“As Christian leaders, we have been gifted with two primary abilities:

1. To grow our organizations, and
2. To deal fairly and compassionately with our colleagues whose lives we influence and who share in the mission of the organization.”

“Putting the organization first is the most effective way to multiply talents and keep the organization and all who are involved with it in the best possible condition.”

The executive “. . . must always balance the short-term impact of any decision on employees, customers, stakeholders, and communities against the potential long-term impact to the organization as the result of continued financial deterioration, and missed opportunities.”

“The Christian executive has a duty to make such decisions based on Christian principles and the best interest of the organization. Once a decision is made it is the responsibility of the Christian leader to use the most compassionate means to treat those affected and support them as they rebuild their lives.” (quoted passages are from “Executive Values,” see book review).

Many well-meaning Christian leaders believe that it violates Christian principles to make decisions that will cause emotion and financial pain to employees. The short term decision to keep Dick and Harry may make Tom feel good but may have disastrous effects on the company long-term. Before making the decision to fire either or both Dick and Harry, has Tom taken all available steps to correct the situation? Retraining Dick? Counseling for Harry? Affect of his decision on other employees? Short- and long-term consequences of his decision?

Stewardship of people can very easily become paternalistic. Good stewardship does not create dependency in people but rather encourages them to develop their own talents to the greatest possible degree.

The word of the Lord that came to Zechariah in **Zechariah 7: 8-14**, can provide Tom with further guidance in resolving his issue if Dick and Harry can't or won't change.

“Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgment, and show kindness and compassion to each other. . . . But they refused to listen; they stubbornly turned their backs and stopped their ears so as not to hear. . . . Then the Lord of hosts in his great anger . . . would scatter them. Thus the land was left desolate after them with no one traveling to and fro; they made the pleasant land into a desert.”