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8-10-2015

Beauty of Business

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Recommended Citation

Visser, John, "Beauty of Business" (2015). *Faculty Work: Comprehensive List*. Paper 300.
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Beauty of Business

Abstract

"There is nothing at all wrong with making money, even a lot of it, if it is done in the process of building healthy organizations, creating jobs, and providing needed goods."

Posting about a Christian perspective on business from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/the-beauty-of-business/>

Keywords

In All Things, secularism, wealth, income, corporate responsibility

Disciplines

Business | Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

The Beauty of Business

 [all inallthings.org/the-beauty-of-business/](http://allinallthings.org/the-beauty-of-business/)

John Visser

The reputation and – to a lesser degree – the practice of business, perhaps more than that of any other institution, suffers from the kind of reductionism that is the stepchild of dualistic and secular thinking. Some business-bashing is deserved, because some businesses operate in very opportunistic ways, but much of it can be traced back to a misunderstanding of what business is and does.

Unfortunately, once we have been fooled into thinking that life can be compartmentalized, that we can wall off religious beliefs from the rest of life, and that our economic lives belong on the secular side of that wall, we are left with few options for defining or carrying out business activity in a holistic way. We are backed into having to find some “secular purpose” for business, which too often in a materialistic world gets reduced down to “making money.”

In fact, there is nothing at all wrong with making money, even a lot of it, if it is done in the process of building healthy organizations, creating jobs, and providing needed goods and services at prices that improve people’s lives. Profits are critically important for encouraging innovation and risk taking, and for luring resources to where they are most needed in an economy. Unfortunately, it is very hard for people to keep these broader purposes in the forefront of their minds when they have been hoodwinked into bowing to the secular god of mammon and thinking that businesses are accomplishing their primary purpose by simply making lots of money.

Thankfully, businesses can be and often are much more than this! Properly structured and run, they are not only vehicles for stewardship and sustainability, but they are also the best hope for pulling and keeping people out of poverty. One reason for this is that to survive, businesses must create value. In other words, they must produce products and services that a society values more than it values the time, money, knowledge, or resources that were needed to produce that product or service. Granted, societies can have misguided values, and some businesses will capitalize on this, but for the most part we should not blame businesses because families, churches, or schools are unconcerned or unsuccessful in inculcating positive and godly values in people.

In fact, “doing business” may be the most interdisciplinary of all pursuits. Entrepreneurs and managers need to be both scientists and artists, capable of bringing together natural, physical, financial, intellectual, emotional, aesthetic, social, and even governmental resources in a harmonious way, and for a single purpose – not unlike what a maestro does when he pulls together a diverse group of musicians and instruments for the purpose of making beautiful music. In addition, to ensure a steady supply of and appropriate balance among these resources, the business person must be vigilant about the unique characteristics, needs, motivations, and values of the diverse participants in this process, as well as the vicissitudes of the myriad variables that affect the supply and demand for these resources.

In fairness to those who hyper-focus on profits, money is central to this activity because many of the resources that businesses employ are “purchased” with money. The rights to natural and public resources, the ownership of machinery and equipment, and the right to use people’s time, accumulated educational and experiential resources, and creativity are all compensated with money. But, creative managers reward their suppliers, employees, and communities with far more than money and give their customers far more than low prices. They respond to and shape their values, all the while looking for fair and adequate ways to reward them for their willingness to continue to provide needed resources to the business.

For example, businesses need to reward the owners and creditors with sufficient dividends and interest to compensate them for saving and risking their money. However, these owners and creditors also need to be rewarded with assurances that their money is being used in a manner that is consistent within the legal and moral boundaries of their contract. Suppliers must be rewarded not only with timely payments, but with fair expectations, workable time frames, and satisfying long-term relationships; employees must be rewarded not only with adequate pay but with creative benefits, a healthy work environment, reasonable expectations, personal development, and time for family. Additionally, government and the public must be rewarded not only with honestly computed tax payments, but also with regulatory compliance, community partnerships, educational partnerships, and environmental stewardship; similarly, customers should be rewarded not only with low prices, but also with accurate marketing messages, high quality, serviceability, and warranties.

In doing these things, businesses increase the income and wealth not only of owners, but also of employees, customers, suppliers, taxpayers, communities, and nations. Done well and sustainably, they can also increase the income and wealth of future generations as they reinvest profits and bequeath things like land improvements, buildings, technology, books, durable goods, estates, and foundations to heirs. This wealth increases productivity and incomes as it allows for investments in child-rearing and education, on-the-job training, productivity-enhancing software, machinery or tools, and time-saving products for the home. It also reduces the damage associated with life's ups and downs and the likelihood of catastrophic losses by giving people, organizations, and economies financial cushions during tough times and resources to share with the needy. In addition, asset ownership offers both access to capital (since assets make good collateral) and opportunities to develop the kind of decision-making, management and stewardship skills associated with home or business ownership. Business activity also promotes sustainable community development as job creation and profits gradually edge out government dependency or charity.

All of this, of course, requires an environment where people are free to pursue business according to the dictations of their hearts – with emotion, effort, and attention to detail that borders on religious fervor. But it also means that hearts need to be oriented in the right direction. This means businesses must be interested not only in making money, but in promoting human flourishing through job and wealth creation, innovation, managerial integrity, stewardship, and service. When business is done this way, economies, governments, and civil society flourish, people prosper, and God is praised. *Soli Deo Gloria.*