

Foundations of Christian Management: Peter Drucker's Legacy

By Mark G. Holbrook

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Christian management lost a true pioneer last November when **Peter Drucker** concluded his earthly sojourn of almost 96 years. We owe much to Dr. Drucker for his lifetime contribution to management excellence. Many of the management principles we embrace as standard practice today were considered groundbreaking, even revolutionary, when Drucker published *The Practice of Management* in 1954.

BusinessWeek recently stated, "Whether it's recognized or not, the organization and practice of management today is derived largely from the thinking of Peter Drucker. His teachings form a blueprint for every thinking leader."¹

Christian managers in particular are beneficiaries of Dr. Drucker's pioneering work. He devoted much of his teaching energy to non-profit management, especially in his later years. **Dan**

Maltby, director of Biola University's Master of Arts in Organizational Leadership, La Mirada, Calif. (biola.edu), was privileged to study under Drucker's teaching while a graduate student at Claremont Graduate School.

According to Maltby, "Peter loved the challenges and opportunities of working with the non-profit sector. He believed that non-profit organizations had the greater challenge. He would say, 'Their measure of success was changed lives; they only keep those books on the other side!'"

One of Drucker's more insightful propositions was that management requires a disciplined approach to developing people. In his mind, the concept of management as a discipline was all about getting the most out of people by treating them as valued associates. Embedded in this proposition are basic assumptions about management that should resonate with every Christian leader.

Yet, when Drucker first articulated these management disciplines, Christian organizations resisted or rejected outright the idea that such worldly concepts could apply to ministry.

In a 1989 *Leadership* interview, Drucker commented, "Thirty years ago, many non-profits were contemptuous not only of the word management but even of the concept. They said, 'We don't need management. We don't have a bottom line.'"²

Gladly, that view has changed dramatically; but there are still ministries today that do not embrace management as a Christian discipline even though the loftiest of management principles are derived directly from Scripture.

Consider the now common understanding that employers should treat their employees with respect and dignity. Scripture speaks directly to this issue: "Masters, grant to your slaves (employees) justice and fairness..." (Colossians 4:1). "... whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Mark 10:43).

These profoundly effective management principles should be

required of every Christian manager. Drucker consistently advocated these radical truths: "Effective leaders know they have authority only because they have the trust of the organization. They understand that the needs and opportunities of an organization come before their own needs."³

Perhaps Drucker's greatest contribution to management was to reposition our thinking about what it means to be a manager. Throughout his teaching and writings, he strove to elevate the practices of management from the levels of mere technical competence or artistic expression. Instead, he argued that management should

be considered a profession, marked by high competence in foundational disciplines.

As Christian managers, our management of people and resources is all about stewardship of Kingdom resources. Christian management is not just secular management with a spiritual twist. It is fundamentally different in at least three significant ways:

1. It is different in motive. We seek to serve and honor the Lord above all. We

understand that our management competence should ultimately reflect our spiritual commitment.

2. It is different in our relationships. We relate to one another in the ministry workplace in ways that remain totally foreign, even incomprehensible, in the secular workplace. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Godly love should be evident in the Christian workplace.

3. It is different in outcome. We believe that God-honoring management of Kingdom resources will yield temporal *and* eternal results. What we do well today will matter forever. Jesus cuts to the core of why good management matters: "Therefore if you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous (morally neutral) wealth (material things), who will entrust *the true riches* to you?" (Luke 16:11).

Christian management indeed owes much to the insights of Peter Drucker, the 1990 recipient of CMA's Christian Management Award. We would all do well to embrace his teaching while we focus on our own high calling to reflect the very glory of our Lord in how we go about managing our earthly endeavors. "... whatever you do, do *all* to the glory of God."

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1 "The Man Who Invented Management," *BusinessWeek*, Nov. 28, 2005

2 "Managing to Minister, An Interview with Peter Drucker," *Leadership*, April 1, 1989

3 *BusinessWeek*, op.cit.

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