**FAITH AND CITIZENSHIP IN BUSINESS**

FOR THE ROSSI CENTER

Views and Examples by Gerald Meis

I graduated from the University of Iowa in 1964 and thought I was academically prepared for the real world. Little did I realize that my education had just begun. My thoughts are views of Faith and Citizenship as seen through the eyes of a small businessman, and I have found that many moral decisions faced day to day are not totally black and white. In my case the foundation for many of the moral decisions that I made in my career was formed during my Catholic elementary and high school years.

So what are some of the qualities a person needs to manage a small business? At the top of the list is integrity. Integrity in handling the financial revenue and expenses of the business and integrity in managing and nurturing employees.

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching For Business Ethics says “Profit is necessary for a business’s continued operation, and there is nothing intrinsically wrong with earning a profit. From the Perspective of Catholic Social Teaching, the moral justification for a business involves the contribution it makes to human flourishing, how it corresponds its activity with God’s plan for creation, and how it “unfolds” God’s Kingdom on earth. The ultimate goal of business is meeting human needs, not the accumulation of profit. Business exists to serve people, not the other way around.” (1)

It follows then that every manager has the responsibility to serve his orher customers ethically applying integrity to daily customer decisions. Entwined in all this is a moral obligation for a manager to establish a culture in the business that sets an expectation of equity and integrity. A manager of a successful business has, besides overseeing the operation of the business, a moral obligation to give back to his or her community. This may take the form of time and talent. Serving on not-for-profit boards, being a resource for not-for-profits, using his or her business knowledge to help these entities flourish are just some of the ways to give back. My own experience is that so many of these not-for-profit boards have a very good vision for the needs of the populations they serve but underestimate the financial resources needed to accomplish these goals. This is where a business person's involvement is invaluable. Besides time and talent, treasure is another obligation a successful business has to the community they serve. Financially supporting United Way and other nonprofit organizations are examples of entities that need treasure.

For more information on Faith and Citizenship, these two publications are worth reading:

* CHRISTIAN ETHICS and SPIRITUALITY in LEADING a BUSINESS ORGANIZATION: EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.
* RELIGIOUS APPROACHES on BUSINESS ETHICS: CURRENT SITUATION and FUTURE PERSPECTIVES.

You can google both of these to find them.

Now let us look at some of the moral and ethical decisions a local small business manager has had to make while managing during the virus. This business is considered essential by the Federal Government. The path this small business manager followed with two retail stores in the same market area is as follows. The stores employ a number of older key people so when the Covid-19 became a reality in early 2020 the manager made the decision to lay off the older most vulnerable employees making it possible for them to collect unemployment benefits along with the extra benefits offered to them. The next step was to close one of the stores to optimize safety and because of a lack of willing workers. This closure lasted six weeks. The remaining store was operated with younger employees who had to adjust to unprecedented online orders, deliveries and curbside pickup. Store hours had to be temporarily reduced to manage this new temporary business model. When the small business loan program became available the manager made the decision to bypass the loan opportunity and leave the funds available to businesses impacted much more than his business. After six weeks most of the older employees requested to return to work in as safe an environment as possible. The second store was then reopened with the employees and customers all required to wear masks as had been the policy at the store that had remained open. Getting the second store open helped relieve cash flow issues caused by having just one store open. Between 3/15/2020 and 12/31/2020 the two stores have handled 162,699 transactions with more than 32,000 employee hours. Not one case of Covid-19 had been documented as being transmitted by either of the store's employees or customers. If a customer got Covid-19 in one of the stores it had to be transmitted by another customer. One store did have a student employee contact Covid-19 from one of his friends. When the manager learned of this the store was temporarily closed for eight days while all of the employees were tested and negative tests came back.

I have tried to present my thoughts on Faith and Citizenship derived from my experience as a small businessman, and then presented the approach a local small businessman took with his business coping with Covid19. My reference earlier stating that many moral decisions that I faced were not black and white probably applies to decisions made by many in all aspects of the business world. A person must rely on his or her moral compass to make good and consistent moral decisions.

Works Cited

1. Zalot, J. D., & Guevin, B. (2011). Principles of Catholic Social Teaching for Business

Ethics. *Catholic Ethics in Today’s World,*revised edition. doi:https://www.smp.org/dynamicmedia/files/d1bdd74a034b4269d9a20f3e79d84fb2/TX002016-2-Article-Principles\_of\_Catholic\_Social\_Teaching\_for\_Business\_Ethics.pdf