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A MEASURE OF OUR ATTENTION
TO DETAILS

We had just completed our committee reports and taken a break from the International Commission meeting. The task of the Commission was to define and solve the infrastructure problems of St. Petersburg and create ways to enable commerce. Our goal was to develop strategic initiatives that would simultaneously fulfill these objectives. I served as co-chair of the Health Care subcommittee, which was building collaborations between government, business, and charitable entities. As a few of us stood in a small circle enjoying refreshments and light conversation, one of the translators began to introduce me to Mayor Sobchak. Before he could finish, the mayor interrupted him. He smiled and extended a friendly handshake as he said, "I know this man very well. Something with his name on it comes across my desk almost every week. We appreciate the help you have brought to our city and your patience with us." Mayor Sobchak began to describe some of the good things our foundation had accomplished. Apparently, telling a good story was giving him some relief from the battering of bad news he had just received.

Things were not going well for several of the subcommittees and the Mayor had been hearing about it all day from important business

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leaders and diplomats. Just as he finished his remarks about our foundation, a man pushed his way into our circle and began to alternately plead for and demand the Mayor's intervention in his problem. He represented a major Wall Street firm and was openly distraught, almost panicked. He had invested tens of millions of dollars in new business ventures on behalf of his firm and had taken a suite at the Europa hotel while he waited for his new apartment overlooking the famous Nevsky Prospect to be remodeled. He proudly described these facts as evidence of the seriousness of his commitment. With each investment he made, he had also secured board membership in the venture. However, his predicament was very telling of his stewardship. He had been in St. Petersburg for over six months and had not been allowed to attend any of the board meetings. He wanted the Mayor to call his partners and demand that he be allowed to attend. We all stood there in stunned silence, but the Mayor was unmoved. He coldly rejected the man's pleas as "personal problems" and then turned and walked away.

It was a breathless moment as we quietly dispersed and then regrouped around the room. We all knew that this high-powered investment manager understood finance, but we also realized that he had to have ignored too many important administrative details to find himself in this embarrassing position. I sympathized with the man's dilemma. By the time this incident occurred, we had completed three remodeling projects, organized specialized clinics for the elderly, and distributed several shipments of medicine throughout the city. We had learned that the number of people who could and would do the wrong thing was daunting. Attempting to do business without clearly established relationships and procedures creates problems under normal circumstances, but in St. Petersburg, it would have made it impossible to get things done. Even with them, managing resources in Russia could be terrifying.

As we continued our discussions, someone turned to me and asked, "What are you doing to overcome these kinds of problems?" Our strategy was simple. "We decided to accept the chaotic realities of doing business in Russia and take the steps that were necessary to succeed." We were diligently following sound business fundamentals. That meant we had to keep very accurate records of our activities and maintain precise communications with everyone who might affect

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our processes. Not only that, we had made the effort to learn their culture and spend time with them to build strong working relationships. The reason Mayor Sobchak knew my name had as much to do with our determination to document our progress and keep his staff informed as it did with our good works.

Administrative consistency is a measure of our attention to details.

For any project to function effectively, we have to establish the relationships and procedures required for doing business. Then we have to provide each process with the people and resources it needs. To properly oversee our work, we must also communicate with staff, acquire and evaluate production data, identify problems, and create solutions. A reliable man embraces these duties with the same dedication as an elder in the church, “not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

The story of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1-13) is a good example of an ordinary man whose consistent administration of his duties led to greater things. He was a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes of Persia, which meant he tasted everything the king ate and drank to prevent any harm from reaching him. It was a simple task that he performed, but in the eyes of the king, a very important one. One day Nehemiah received bad news about the conditions back in his homeland. While he was fasting and praying for the survivors of the exile, he was inspired to restore the walls of Jerusalem. The king had sent his troops to forcefully stop previous attempts to rebuild (Ezra 4:7-24) so Nehemiah “was very much afraid” to tell him about his idea. But the king looked upon him with favor. God opened the king’s heart to Nehemiah’s vision and he was trusted to manage the resources for a great project.

God has prepared every man with the ability to administer the work that He has called him to do. Even while Nehemiah was still a cupbearer, administering simple duties, he already had within him what it would take to organize and manage the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls. Of course, it’s unreasonable to expect every man with a vision to have the talent to implement all of its processes. He may have to learn some new skills or find partners or staff to help

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him. Nehemiah surveyed the situation, figured out what had to be done, found the people he needed, and delegated the work. He also realized that nothing could replace his consistent personal contact with his project, so he positioned himself firmly in the oversight of each part of the work until it was completed.

Every process is defined and managed by information, which is transmitted both verbally and through documents such as policy manuals, memos, purchase orders, expense reports, production schedules, etc. These exchanges of information help us explain what we want accomplished. They let us know what people are doing and why, monitor how resources are being managed, and provide the data and statistics that are crucial to our success. Each of these vital links relies upon our ability to communicate clearly and with ethical dependability. If we want people to help us reach our goals, our communications need to exhibit: 1) intellectual integrity, 2) moral conscience, 3) task faithfulness, and 4) reasonable judgment.

1) Intellectual integrity produces communications that are accurate, honest, and complete. When a man can be trusted to impart the truth in a helpful and practical manner, he will be perceived by others as reliable. But more importantly, if he teaches his staff to operate by these principles, he can depend upon them to make good decisions and follow through on their commitments. In situations where they are required to make judgments, they will recall his words and take action in ways that are consistent with his will. Because they have confidence in his direction, they will work through problems as they have been taught, expecting to succeed. “A wise man’s heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction” (Proverbs 16:23).

Nehemiah had intellectual integrity about who he was and what he was going to do, never underestimating the importance of what he would say in any situation. In chapter 2:4-5, the king asked Nehemiah, “What is it you want?” Before he answered the king, he “prayed to the God of Heaven.” He was careful not to speak rashly in the king’s presence. But after he prayed, he spoke confidently to the king about his vision and what the king could do to help him. Nehemiah obviously had the favor of the man he served. In this case, it happened to be a king, who could make a great difference in his ability to respond to God’s calling. Nehemiah also exhibited

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intellectual integrity about his success; always attributing it to the grace and favor that God gave him with men.

2) Moral conscience produces communications that are restrained and exhibit decency and personal consideration for others. A man should never forget that much of his success depends upon how people feel about him as a person. Just as intellectual integrity builds confidence in our working relationships, a man who is careful not to speak abusively, coarsely, or with inappropriate innuendo can depend upon people to show respect for his leadership. In a society that has been conditioned to take extreme positions on political correctness, we should not risk the effectiveness of our administration by frivolously trying to achieve comradery. “He who guards his lips guards his life, but he who speaks rashly will come to ruin” (Proverbs 13:3). A healthy distance between our personal and professional relationships helps maintain our leadership role and promotes a respectful workplace.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he did not rush to the Jewish leaders and share his vision. Even after all that God had done to prepare him for his mission, he was careful to prudently inspect the circumstances before he spoke. He wrote, “I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem.... The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work” (Nehemiah 2:12, 16). Nehemiah understood the importance of restraining his enthusiasm until the appropriate time. As our moral conscience develops and we become sensitive to the Lord’s protective nudges, we can avoid the perils of unwisely sharing information and losing our tactical advantage.

3) Task faithfulness produces communications that are specific to the work to be accomplished. They provide answers to the process questions of what, how much, when, and how, and they bring enlightenment that is appropriate to the moment. A man who is focused on the processes he manages develops special knowledge of how things work. As problems occur and are resolved, his knowledge deepens. He becomes more aware of how people interact with resources and what they need to do their jobs well. As he accumulates knowledge

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and sensitivity to the dynamics of a process people begin to describe him as “experienced.” An experienced man who has been faithful to his task is not easily distracted from the substance of his work. Because of his single-mindedness, he is able to provide strategic direction when it is needed and dispatch the necessary resources. “A man finds joy in giving an apt reply – and how good is a timely word!” (Proverbs 15:23).

I cannot remember a project worth doing that did not receive opposition from someone. There will always be people who, through subtle arguments or direct engagement, will try to block our progress for their own purposes. Nehemiah had Sanballat, Tobiah and Gesham. They threatened, manipulated, lied, and generally gave themselves to disrupting the work of restoration. This is one reason why knowing the will of God is so important. It helps us discern the source of opposition and respond in reasonable ways. Nehemiah’s ability to remain task faithful helped deflect many of their schemes. He responded wisely to their evil plans and kept the work progressing. In chapter 6:2-4 he said,

Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.” But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: ‘I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?’ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.

4) Reasonable judgment produces communications that are prudent and create reliable relationships. Each time a decision is made, it can affect the people and resources of an organization as well as the market it serves. This is especially the case with changes in policy and procedure. What we say in a personal interview, a planning meeting, or at a casual luncheon with peers can create ripples of reaction across an entire organization. Even the most confidential communications can find their way into public controversy because of their perceived effect on people. We should accept the fact that all of our

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communications will be subject to scrutiny, and consider the reasonableness of what we say or write. “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).

A man’s personal challenge is to make the stated values of his project the practiced values. If his own practiced values are inconsistent with the stated values, his lack of credibility will undermine the mission’s processes. Even Jesus’ enemies recognized the consistency of His words and actions. In Luke 20:21 they said, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach what is right, and that you do not show partiality but teach the way of God in accordance with the truth.” People should be able to depend upon the guidance they receive. They usually know whether or not someone’s words are trustworthy. When they lack confidence in what they are told, they can become fearful and defensive, then their work and the project will suffer.

James 5:12 says, “Let your yes be yes, and your no, no, or you will be condemned.” This is a particularly compelling statement because ethics and self-discipline form the unseen government in all human systems. There can never be enough policies, procedures, or monitoring to eliminate errors, but when they are reinforced by the administration of a reliable man, an orderly workplace is created.

Perform Each Task with Due Diligence

God’s plan for those who serve Him is that they “will long enjoy the work of their hands” and that “they will not toil in vain” (Isaiah 65:22, 23). I have been blessed in every job by either directly succeeding or through failure learning some of life’s important lessons. This is not a rationalization to cover the bumps and bruises; it is an objective appraisal of what God can do in every experience. “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28 NAS).

When things go very well, some people forget that it was God’s blessing and not just their own brilliance that made their pathway smooth. We can learn a lesson about this from the story of King Uzziah found in 2 Chronicles 26. He was a young man who became king of Judah at the age of 16. “He did what was right in the eyes of

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the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. He sought God during the days of Zechariah who instructed him in the fear of God. As long as he sought the Lord, God gave him success” (vs. 4-5). God prospered his many construction projects, as well as his cattle business, farming, and vineyards. Uzziah also had a well-trained army and his fame spread far and wide because God helped him fight his wars. “But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God” (vs. 16). His pride even caused him to enter the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar, something he knew very well he was not supposed to do. When the priests confronted him, he raged at them, and God struck him instantly with leprosy (vs. 16-19).

The story of King Uzziah should give most men pause to think. I know that I have ignorantly raged in the Lord’s presence because my pride had blinded me to the error of my ways. Of course, I didn’t realize I was raging against the Lord. I thought it was against some person or obstacle in my path keeping me from what I wanted. I was enraged because of my losses in the cordless telephone deal. At the time, it never entered my mind that my sins and lack of diligence had caused my failure. Proverbs 19:3 says, “A man’s own folly ruins his life, yet his heart rages against the Lord.”

Men often rage against the fundamentals of careful, deliberate management, but they do so in ignorance. They may not understand how God uses our diligence to confirm His guidance and raise our level of “assurance.” Our pride can also cause us to resist the discipline that is required to prosper and enjoy success. We can begin to believe we know more than we actually do about our business and what it will accomplish. The truth is we “do not even know what will happen tomorrow” (James 4:14). Even when all of the known factors point to success, no one can be completely certain of how well a project will develop. There are just too many variables that can chip away at our plans. Although we can never completely eliminate risks, we can reduce them by applying the concepts of the scientific method into our everyday management style. When we give each task, topic, or issue the diligence it is due, and restrain ourselves from impulsive decisions, we can find and fix the most serious problems before they undermine our work-processes and/or create expenses that can put us

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out of business. “A wise man is cautious and avoids danger; a fool plunges ahead with great confidence” (Proverbs 14:16 TLB).

The first question most people ask about pursuing the facts (or truth) required for making reliable management decisions is “how much information is enough?” The answer is found in Deuteronomy 13:12-15:

If you hear it said about one of the towns the Lord your God is giving you to live in that wicked men have arisen among you and have led the people of their town astray, saying, ‘Let us go and worship other gods,’ then you must inquire (#1875, ask or question), probe (#2713, examine intimately, search, and explore) and investigate (#7592, earnestly request or demand) thoroughly (#3190 until you do well and are successful and right). And if it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done among you, you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock.

Serious questions require serious amounts of information, but in every case there must be enough information to be certain you have the truth. I learned very early in life how important it was to be sure of the facts. Everyone in the aerospace industry wanted things to be certain. For instance, every supervisor wanted to know “enough” facts about the work their crew had just performed to be comfortable with putting his or her signature on a pre-launch checkout document. If there was a failure (which commonly meant a very large explosion in my Dad’s days of rocketry and/or the possible loss of life when I was working in the Apollo program), the first thing the investigative team did was search for the root cause and begin to earnestly request or demand answers from the person who approved the work on the failed subsystem. The investigative team’s objective was not to find someone to blame; it was to find the person with the information that could possibly lead to the truth of the matter—what actually went wrong and why—so that it could be corrected. That’s the real value of truth—being able to do things right.

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But the more important question is “how do I know my information is reliable?” Simply put, reliable methods produce reliable results. The method I have learned to rely upon and which has repeatedly proven its dependability at home and at work is called the “scientific method.” All of the activities of the scientific method are characterized by an attitude that stresses “rational impartiality” or the unbiased search for reliable facts and truth. Although this method of inquiry involves some detailed techniques for investigation and analysis, my intention is to emphasize only its basic tenets, which are very user-friendly. Following are the steps of the scientific method:

1) *Observation*. When we become aware of a specific problem, circumstance, event, question of fact, or phenomenon that requires an explanation, the first step is to gather enough information by simple observation or inquiry to clearly state the problem and its significance.

2) *Hypothesis*. On the basis of the initial information that is acquired, a hypothesis (or general idea) is formed about what the information means or how it explains an unknown or unproven issue.

3) *Investigation*. The implications of the hypothesis (the facts that you think can be proven to be true) are then further considered and tested by additional observations, investigations, and, when possible, experiments.

4) *Testing*. If the investigation produces additional facts that are in disagreement with the original hypothesis or its implications, the hypothesis is modified or discarded in favor of a new hypothesis, which is then subjected to further investigation and tests. This process is repeated until the results of investigating and testing a hypothesis and its implications are all in agreement and can be easily repeated by another investigator.

5) *Conclusion*. When a hypothesis and its implications are consistently proven to be accurate by each aspect of investigation and testing, they are considered to be reliable.

As a follower of Christ, we are guided by the ultimate truth of the Scriptures as we work through each step of the scientific method. This enhances our ability to analyze information and determine how to use it. We can also receive wisdom from the Holy Spirit as He nudges us through the process as our all-knowing Mentor.

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Researching the facts does three very important things. First, it proves whether or not we have the truth. Second, it is a discipline that builds patience and restraint in us. And third, it provides opportunities for the Lord to tutor us in the ways of life. Proverbs 25:2 says, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out (#2713) a matter is the glory of kings.” There is nothing quite as satisfying or assuring as doing your homework to make sure your natural and spiritual senses are in sync. When they agree with one another and the Scriptures, you can be much more confident that your facts are reliable and that you are walking in the truth. Like any method or technique, these things are only effective when they are consistently applied. Even then, they are not a guarantee for avoiding mistakes, only limiting them. Ultimately, it is our dependence upon the Lord’s mercy and wisdom that enables us to face the responsibilities of each day.

Monitor Every Process for Defects

Once processes have been established, they must be monitored to make sure they continue to produce actions consistent with their purpose. Processes are dynamic. They are either improving or deteriorating, depending upon the attention we give them. Defects can be created by undocumented changes in policies and procedures, the human factors that affect how people do their work, or a myriad of other variables. So the pursuit of defects should be a part of every man’s routine if he wants to constantly produce quality products or services. Here are a few practical methods.

1) Identifying errors can be as easy as receiving product complaints. When a customer tells us that we have fallen short of our stated values, we should take him or her very seriously. Their advice could help us discover a mistake that is costing us other sales. Surprisingly, not many people will take the time to inform us of their dissatisfaction. For every customer who provides negative feedback, there may be many others who quietly find new suppliers. Proverbs 18:15 (TLB) tells us that “the intelligent man is always open to new ideas. In fact, he looks for them.” So whatever business or ministry we operate, we should have a prearranged method for receiving people’s comments.

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2) We can identify non-conforming events by simply walking around the office and production areas and talking to people. Keeping our eyes and ears open to the routines of processes and the people who operate them can be a great source of information for improvement. We can determine whether or not work areas are clean, organized, and orderly through our own quiet observation. Interpersonal conflicts and cohesion in work relationships are just as easily monitored in a few moments of relaxed conversation. People will tell us what's wrong and what their needs are if we will only take the time to listen to them. A disorderly work area, tensions among co-workers, or personal problems at home can directly equate to the breakdown of processes and defects in products or services.

3) We should also establish regular evaluations of our key processes to compare the written policies and procedures with what is actually happening. Everything from the materials we receive to the ways we use them should be compared to our requirements for a quality product or service. When the organized pursuit of defects becomes a routine of the work place, people will be less inclined to feel like they are being put under the microscope. This is especially the case if the focus of the search is to find the causes of errors rather than assessing blame.

We should use a predetermined plan for research such as applying each step of WPA as we did when the processes were being established. By reviewing each step of a process with the people who operate it, we can draw on their experience and identify opportunities for innovation and improvement. By interviewing customers, we could identify changes in the market that may affect our product or service designs. Reviewing old WPA notes and comparing them with current research can help us stay efficient and competitive.

4) Another way to verify the reliability of processes is to establish routine measurements of their performance. By defining normal rates of production, operating costs, or other standards for an event or process, abnormal conditions can be identified as they occur. The measurements can range from simple counts of activity during a given period, to errors per hundred events. It can also be helpful to adjust the accounting of inventory and expenses to track costs associated with specific products or services.

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The average cost per client (a calculation of the expenses for an entire organization or each profit center divided by the total number of clients served during a specific period) can be a very revealing measurement. The cost per client for an organization should be a near constant figure, with incremental increases coming from inflation or other predictable factors. But if the cost per client moves suddenly up or down, one or more of the processes have probably been changed or modified in some way. You may already know what the shift in cost represents. If not, you should begin systematically verifying policies and procedures within the related processes.

The discovery of an error or defect necessitates problem-solving exercises to isolate the root cause, but if we hurry the search and make mistakes, the cause of the errors can become even harder to find. I learned a great lesson about this when I attended a seminar on research methods. Each participant had a minimum of twenty years experience and could be rightly described as a problem solver. We were all confident of our knowledge of research and trouble-shooting methods; in fact, we would discover that we were too confident. The facilitator separated us into “search teams,” so we could participate in a game he had designed to evaluate our problem solving skills. Before it was over, we would all be reassessing our experience in managing processes.

The facilitator passed around two yardsticks on which a number of unique symbols and colors had been painted. We were asked to document the symbols, colors, etc., and treat each of them as a process variable. When our notes were completed, he seated the search teams together in a large circle. He took a seat in the circle and asked us to observe a simple passing of the two yardsticks between himself and another person. We could leave our seats to watch from any vantage point. As he passed the yardsticks, the facilitator announced that he was passing the yardsticks in the only possible way that was acceptable for the process to work properly. We all laughed because we knew that this would be a typical root-cause search. First, identify the requirements for the correct pass (where are the symbols, hand grips, etc.) and then compare them with a test pass (a simple application of process mapping).

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We all assumed it would be an easy search, but were shocked at the failure of the first few teams. Finally, after observing dozens of passes, my partner and I took our turn. The pass was made between two participants of another team. I looked closely at the variables we had chosen and called the first pass, “correct.” The facilitator looked puzzled and sounded hesitant as he nodded his head and said, “Yes, you’re right.” But instead of asking me to describe the controlling variables (or root cause), he asked me to call another pass. I accurately called the second pass, this time noting that the participants did not make the pass correctly. Looking bewildered, the facilitator said, “Keep going.” I called ten consecutive passes correctly. My partner and I were as ecstatic as the other teams were dumbfounded. Each time I made a correct call another team would say something like “that can’t be right! If that is right then....” As they launched their arguments back and forth we demanded the right to share our root-cause diagnosis. The professor relented. We shared our findings, and we were WRONG!

We were all stunned. The professor and some of the learners calculated the probability of our calling the pass correctly ten consecutive times based on the wrong root cause. It was one chance in tens of billions. And, to our further surprise, the key variable was not on the yardsticks, it was whether or not the feet of the passer were crossed when the pass was made. We spent the next several days discussing how misconceptions, biases, skewed perspectives, prejudices, and other factors affect the accuracy of observations. Our experience with two simple yardsticks had become a gentle, yet vivid reminder to those of us who monitored processes: “Work hard and become a leader; be lazy and never succeed” (Proverbs 12: 24 TLB).

Master the Art of Delegating Responsibility

Each time a man delegates responsibility, he is risking not only the success of his plans, but his reputation. To lower his risk, he must remain close to work processes and hold people reasonably accountable, because his stewardship will be judged by the practices of those acting on his behalf. This is why 1 Timothy 5:22 warns us, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others.” When you delegate responsibility to someone you

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expect to be helpful and compassionate, only to discover that he is cold and manipulative, you have harmed yourself. “Like cutting off one’s feet or drinking violence is the sending of a message by the hand of a fool” (Proverbs 26:6).

Success often depends upon a man’s ability to choose people who understand his needs and know what has to be done. This is illustrated by the story of Pharaoh and Joseph in Genesis 41. Pharaoh had two dreams that he could not comprehend. “His mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him” (vs. 8). After his chief cupbearer told him about Joseph, Pharaoh sent for Him and said, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.” “I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires” (vs. 15-16). Pharaoh explained his dreams and then Joseph said to him, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do” (vs. 25).

Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

Genesis 41:29-32

Anyone who has received really serious news can identify with what might have been racing through Pharaoh’s mind. But the pressure of the moment was relieved by the voice of a man with a plan. Joseph was not only able to explain Pharaoh’s predicament, the Lord had also revealed to him what had to be done. He continued,

And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. Let

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Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine.

Genesis 41:33-36

This situation demonstrates why smart managers do not want people around them who can only describe problems; they need people who can also solve them. Pharaoh judged the validity of Joseph's interpretation by the wisdom of his solution.

The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. So Pharaoh asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of God?" Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

Genesis 41:37-40

Joseph was the kind of number two man that everyone would like to have—wise, discerning, and faithful to the facts. "Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt'" (vs. 44).

When a man delegates his vision to people who are resolved to work toward common goals, the possibilities are nearly limitless. Referring to the tower of Babel, the Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them" (Genesis 11:6). This is testimony to the power of being unified and coordinated around a

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common objective. Unification is obtained through the relationships within an organization, as each individual commits himself or herself to the goal. But coordination requires the project to be translated into its fundamental values and strategies. When we carefully document our processes and terminology, everyone can speak the same language.

The reasoning that supports our course of action is called “policy.” The steps that will be taken to fulfill the policy are called “procedure.” A complete picture of our project is often called a “Policy and Procedure Manual.” It includes the specifics of the vision, each person’s job description and benefits, and all the processes within the organization. In short, a policy and procedure manual contains anything relevant to the completion of our plans. It should answer questions about how and when to do things, and the resources that will be required. And it should be regularly updated to conform to changing requirements. When people are clearly focused on a common goal and understand their responsibility in reaching it, a project becomes more certain.

King David had a vision to build the Temple of the Lord and he was careful to make detailed notes of what the Lord had shown him. It was a comprehensive project that would require the efforts of hundreds of people. Although he was given the plans, he knew he would not build the Temple himself. The Lord had spoken to him and said,

When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

2 Samuel 7:12-13

Near the end of his life, David called his son, Solomon, and the leaders of Israel together for what could fairly be described as a training session. He shared the vision for building the Temple and then delegated the responsibility for completing it.

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“So now I charge you in the sight of all Israel and of the assembly of the Lord, and in the hearing of our God: Be careful to follow all the commands of the Lord your God, that you may possess this good land and pass it on as an inheritance to your descendants forever. And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a temple as a sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.” Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms and the place of atonement. He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the Lord and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things. He gave him instructions for the divisions of the priests and Levites, and for all the work of serving in the temple of the Lord, as well as for all the articles to be used in its service.

1 Chronicles 28:8-13

“All this,” David said, “I have in writing from the hand of the Lord upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan.” David also said to Solomon his son, “Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the temple of the Lord is finished.”

1 Chronicles 28:19-20

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David's careful documentation and presentation of the instructions he had received demonstrate the effective practice of faith and principle. And like his father, Solomon ultimately relied on the Lord's grace in whatever he did. As he wrote in Proverbs 21:31, "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord."

Engage in Strategic Record Keeping

Keeping accurate records of the operational and financial activities of an enterprise is a legal necessity. All kinds of reports must be filed with local, state, and federal government agencies. We file forms for everything from taxes to health and safety issues and the list keeps growing. Filing reports is a reality of doing business, and our failure to perform even perfunctory reporting can carry stiff fines. As Jesus said, "Give to Caesar [meaning the king or government] what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's" (Matthew 22:21). Fulfilling our reporting obligations to those in authority is reason enough to gather and preserve data, but there are better reasons. An organization must have accurate records to manage its processes and protect its assets.

Records that increase our process knowledge are extremely useful in improving products and services. They also help us find and eliminate errors by providing facts that direct us to the root causes of problems. When we routinely measure and record things like how much we produce, how many people we serve, how many things we had to do over again, what did not work as expected, or who complained about or praised our work and why, we are gathering information that helps us improve. When we add to these records financial data such as income per item, expense per item, etc., we are giving ourselves the perspective we need to make better decisions. This kind of record keeping provides a manager with the information for "adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things" (Ecclesiastes 7:27).

The systems for keeping records should be designed to anticipate and prevent the common causes of problems: things that can be reasonably predicted to occur. Common causes include such things as errors in orders, billing, payments, receipts, schedules, and other activities which have immediate and direct consequences. Our ability

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to observe and manage the production activities of our mission and make reasonable judgments about their profitability depend upon accurate records. Again, it is a matter of faith and principle, deciding what kinds of systems are required and how much is enough. Our stewardship must be kept in balance with our faith in the Lord's protection.

There will always be people who want to take what we have or harm what we are doing. King David prayed this way, "Keep me from the snares they have laid for me, from the traps set by evildoers. Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by in safety" (Psalm 141:9-10). In today's marketplace, you must always be prepared to take sound administrative action. Whether you discover substance abuse, sexual harassment, discrimination, or some kind of financial dishonesty, you must make an immediate and accurate record of what you see and hear. We live in a very litigious world where you are as likely to get sued for discovering improprieties as the culprit is of being prosecuted. So we need to document and be able to explain our actions in the light of what any reasonable person might do in the same situation.

A memo written about the facts of an event at the very moment of discovery is called a "contemporary extemporaneous note." It is an extremely powerful record, especially if it is handwritten with the date and exact time. When this is attached to any other routine investigative report, it greatly clarifies what you were thinking and saying at a time that might have been gripped with tension. The pressures and rapidly developing actions around such an event could make it difficult to accurately remember and document what happened the next day. So even when you discover something that is only suspicious or unusual, a spontaneous note is never a mistake. You may not be as far away as you think from those "who devise evil plans in their hearts and stir up war" (Psalm 140:2).

With all of the challenges in maintaining stewardship within an organization, there are just as many threats from the outside. Procuring products and services can produce a maze of opportunities for financial loss. Most difficulties with suppliers will be the result of inaccurate clerical operations. It is not unusual for a supplier to make a mistake and then refuse to acknowledge his responsibility. He may try to

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unfairly shift the burden of proof to the customer, thinking he can cover over his errors. “They talk about hiding their snares; they say, ‘Who will see them?’” (Psalm 64:5). This places a man in a very difficult position if he does not have accurate records of the transaction as it progressed.

I have seen a simple set of records settle issues which the most principled arguments had left unsolved. Arguments about the financial management of an organization disappear when good records are presented. Accusations of preferential treatment or discrimination among staff or constituents can be muted by accurate records that reflect a written nondiscriminatory policy. Disputed payments can be easily reconciled when there are signed job orders, receipts, or other documents bearing on the argument. Eventually, the Lord “catches the wise in their craftiness, and the schemes of the wily are swept away” (Job 5:13). “Though they plot evil against you and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed” (Psalm 21:11). From my own experience, we are more likely to limit the time wasted in unproductive confrontations when we keep good records that represent faith and principle.

We distributed millions of dollars in humanitarian medicines to the patients in St. Petersburg’s hospitals and clinics. When a shipment of medicines arrived from America, it required the approval of many government agencies, and my staff kept a list of the constantly changing rules. We had to know more about the laws and customs regulations than the people with whom we were dealing, so they could not trouble us for their own purposes—bribes. On one particular occasion, my staff had met stiff resistance from some new officials who saw the imminent arrival of our shipment as an opportunity to pressure us. They were right. Had the Lord not intervened and helped us, we would have been at their mercy. But our staff and board of directors regularly prayed about these things and the Lord had always been very gracious to us.

This time we were given especially short notice of a new demand before they would approve our shipment for delivery. Although we had very close relationships with the U.S. Consul, the Mayor, the Governor, and others, this situation fell into a small crack of dishonest advantage which the new officials were bent on exploiting. They

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called a special meeting on the issue at a time they knew I was in America and unable to attend. After a time of prayer, I had an idea. Instead of asking them to reschedule the meeting, which I knew we did not have time to do, I sent my young assistant, Sergei, to the meeting. I gave him the following instructions, which he was quite willing to obey considering the threats these men could make against him or his family.

Do not provoke them in any way. Do not argue with them. Do not agree to their demands. You are only to act as my secretary in the matter. You must be completely humble as a servant. Write down everything they say and report it to me, and then I will consult with my colleagues in the U.S. and Russian governments to obtain their counsel on how to respond.

When he arrived at the meeting, he greeted the gentlemen and then read aloud a statement I had prepared regarding the issue. Then he sat down quietly at the end of the table and listened as he carefully took notes of all that was said. They trashed our plans for several minutes before they noticed him taking notes and asked him to explain what he was doing. He then passively read the instructions I had given him. Before he could say anything else they started arguing among themselves about the propriety of having such a record. Sergei kept a calm demeanor even though he was trembling on the inside. Then, one by one, they began to say things to him like, “This is not an official meeting, only a casual meeting of colleagues. The opinions we have shared are not official, only our own personal views. The things we have said are not our final position.” Acting as though he was confused by their conflicting statements, Sergei asked, “Gentlemen, what shall I report to our Chairman regarding your decision?” With obvious frustration they replied almost in unison, “Tell him there will be no problem!”

The average businessman will rarely face as serious a test as Sergei did that day in a crowded little office in St. Petersburg. These hardened “strikers,” as they are called in Russia, became confused and disoriented

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by the presence of a humble young man making an accurate record of their comments. What changed this environment so radically? Was it the principle of accountability through making a record? Was it that we held humbly to our faith in God? Or was it both factors that turned this meeting so dramatically? Our previous arguments had come to no avail. We will never know for sure how the Lord used the principles involved, but we do know that He is the one who “thwarts the plans of the crafty, so that their hands achieve no success” (Job 5:12). As Ecclesiastes 7:25 says, “I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly.”

Manage Time and Information Wisely

When a situation occurs that is favorable to the attainment of our goals or desires, it is called an “opportunity.” Opportunity provides us with the access we need to take action. It is often referred to as an “open door.” To a disciple of Christ, the source of opportunity is God’s will. As King David said in Psalms 75:1-7,

We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds. You say, “I choose the appointed time; it is I who judge uprightly. When the earth and all its people quake, it is I who hold its pillars firm. To the arrogant I say, ‘Boast no more,’ and to the wicked, ‘Do not lift up your horns. Do not lift your horns against heaven; do not speak with outstretched neck.’” No one from the east or the west or from the desert can exalt a man. But it is God who judges: He brings one down, he exalts another.

Time and information are two of the essential elements of opportunity. If we manage them wisely, we can expect our life to be satisfying and fruitful. In Ecclesiastes 3:1, King Solomon points out that, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.” A reliable man carefully gathers information and

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prepares himself to act according to established priorities. Then he must wait patiently “until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13). The four strategic disciplines of time and information are: 1) Organizing Priorities, 2) Advancing Ideas, 3) Problem Solving, and 4) Personal Growth.

1) *Organizing Priorities* is where the elements of time and information intersect most often. Time is precious, so it is necessary to decide in advance what requirements will guide our use of it. The activities that support our most important requirements should become our highest priority. It is the same with information. When we receive a magazine article, letter, or some other paper, we must be able to quickly scan it and decide if it helps us fulfill our most important requirements. If so, it should be placed into a file for immediate review. If not, it should be filed away or discarded. The ability to quickly judge between what is valuable to our agenda and what is not is a skill that can be developed through practice. King David prayed this way, “Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word” (Psalms 119:37).

The best way to establish priorities is to organize work by categories. In my consulting business this has been very helpful because each of my clients is a priority. I have a section for each client on my “To Do List” where I place items that are associated with his or her particular job. Within these sections, I list the specific activities that are priorities each day. When each task is completed, I go immediately to the lists to compare priorities. The priority among priorities is what I do next. I like this method because I don’t have to remember every task. It eliminates errors and the stresses of keeping track of all I have to do. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, The Lord “has made everything beautiful in its time.” By organizing my priorities this way, I am free to enjoy each task without fretting about how I am using my time.

2) *Advancing Ideas* requires the shaping of information and the management of time. Our challenge in life is not how many good ideas we have, but how many of them are heard and accepted. I had a very important client who believed what Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 6:11, which says, “The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?” The people who understood that knew exactly how to reach and hold my client’s

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attention. They shaped whatever they wanted to say to the time he allotted them, tossing from their presentation anything that wasn't really necessary for him to make a decision. I also saw a steady stream of people ignore his special criteria and have their ideas rejected.

All my adult life I have heard teachers and businessmen quote the K.I.S.S. formula—"Keep It Simple, Stupid!" Good ideas presented clearly and concisely hold a person's attention. They provide the man who is willing to limit the number of words he uses with great opportunities. Every person with an idea needs to ask himself these questions: "Would a wise man answer with empty notions or fill his belly with the hot east wind? Would he argue with useless words, with speeches that have no value?" (Job 15:2-3). The one who fails to conform to his listener's requirements for time and information is ignoring the wisdom of these questions and relegating himself to a life of frustration.

3) *Problem Solving* can quickly press the need for accurate information against the urgency of time. An unresolved problem costs time and money, and brings chaos into an otherwise smoothly operating system. During my years in aerospace, I learned how important it was to plan for contingencies as we monitored processes. While a process is running smoothly, we can ask questions like, "What would happen if this part fails, or this supplier does not deliver, or this person becomes ill?" By thinking ahead and establishing contingency plans, we can access resources and information quickly when we need them. When unknown errors do occur, the process knowledge we have gained by preparing for contingencies can expedite problem solving. "The wise heart will know the proper time and procedure. For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter" (Ecclesiastes 8:5-6).

One of my first assignments in the Apollo program was compiling a list of what test procedures and measurements were needed to assure that each system of the spacecraft was working properly. After it was edited by the engineers who would run the tests, this document controlled what information would be recorded and why. Working from our list and the test results, we knew what was required to be sure that a process was working right. We also knew where to search for the causes of errors. This simple method prepared us to respond

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quickly to problems and save tremendous amounts of time and money. It also provided our many constituents with the assurances they needed to support our work. “Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance” (Ecclesiastes 8:1).

4) *Personal Growth* is very often a measurement of how well we have managed time and information. The more effective we become at organizing priorities, advancing ideas, and solving problems, the more mature and experienced we become with life in general. These disciplines cross over into every part of our life and create greater and more frequent opportunities. When I first started making lists and notes it was because I was terrified of forgetting an assignment or being asked something I could not answer. So when someone gave me a new task or used a term I didn’t know, I pulled a small pad from my pocket and wrote it down. I learned to prioritize under pressure and quickly obtain the information I might need in a future conversation. Before long I was not only surviving, but growing in knowledge, and prospering.

When God spoke to the Prophet Jeremiah, He said, “Write in a book all of the words I have spoken to you” (Jeremiah 30:2). Writing notes and lists is not only a good business practice, when done as an act of humility and obedience to the Lord, it pays great dividends. It’s staggering to see how involved in our daily routine the Lord can become. Anyone who has experienced His active interest will surely have wondered, “What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and test him every moment?” (Job 7:17 18).

One of the wonderful things about a relationship with the Lord is that He is with us in every part of our life. He wants to participate in the full range of our activities, from our most personal inner thoughts and relationships, to our most public professional responsibilities. Since He understands our burdens better than we do, He is able to enter into whatever circumstance we encounter. If we need to be a wise manager, who knows better how to help us? Proverbs 1:23, says “If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you.” The very best management of time and information is when

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we call upon the Lord for His wisdom. As King David said, “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long” (Psalms 25:4 5).

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