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By Rick Boxx

BUSINESS LIKE CHESS, NOT CHECKERS

The process of establishing and operating a business used to be simpler. Customers had expectations and businesses responded. Then, with the Internet and other technological advances, the pace of doing things quickened and business became faster and more complex.

In Mark Miller's book, Chess, Not Checkers, he uses a recreational metaphor to remind us of the importance of strategy in business today. In business, playing a responsive game of checkers used to be adequate. One move at a time, react to the opponent's last move. However, in today's fast-paced world, well thought-out and executed strategies become crucial to success. A chess champion succeeds by remaining several moves ahead of the competition. So if you have been playing checkers in business, maybe it is time to understand the times and begin playing chess by developing a new strategy.

This idea of strategizing is not new. In the Bible's Old Testament we find a brief description of a family that understood changing times and how to respond. It says, "Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred"

(1 Chronicles 12:32) This passage does not describe the problems or issues these "sons of Issachar" were facing, or what they did in response. But two things are clear:

They understood the times. In other words, they were very aware of circumstances confronting them and had a firm grasp of the ramifications.

They knew what Israel, the people group to which they belonged, should do to address these circumstances, whether they were opportunities, challenges, threats or dangers.

You can probably think of many examples that reflect our changing times, around the world, within our society, and in the particular industry or profession where you pursue your livelihood every day. Some of these changes come rapidly, often without warning, and at times we find ourselves confused about what we should do. On moments like this a solid deeply rooted faith in God and His divine guidance can offer wisdom, peace and reassurance. Here are examples from Proverbs:

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Augustine Chow, President

Room 905, Nathan Center, 580G-K, Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong

TEL.: (852) 2805 1923 Fax (852) 3905 8789 ▪ E-MAIL: enquiry@CBMC.org.hk

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Dedicate what you do – or plan to do – to God. An important issue to consider is not only what we intend to do, but what our underlying motivations are. Is our desire simply to grow the business and reap higher profits? Are we seeking primarily to undermine our competitors? Or do we recognize God has placed us where we are, and our desire is to serve Him – and others – in a way that honors and pleases Him? “Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3).

Trust God to redirect your plans as He sees fit. Sometimes we devise a plan and become frustrated when it does not go as expected. At times like that it helps to realize God might have a better idea. In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps” (Proverbs 16:9).

We do not always have to know the “why” behind what happens. Unexpected developments can upset our best-conceived plans, so it is wise to trust in God’s will and direction, since His long-term understanding is far better than our own. “A man’s steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way” (Proverbs 20:24).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever played checkers or chess? If so, have you found the two games to be different in approach and strategy? If so, in what way?
2. Do you agree that in today’s ever-changing business and professional world, a chess master’s approach to making workplace and corporate decisions is more appropriate than that employed by those skilled at playing checkers? Explain your answer.
3. How difficult do you think it is these days of constant change to be like the “sons of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what (they) should do”? How do rapid shifts in the marketplace environment affect long-term planning strategies?

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4. It is suggested that we should involve God – perhaps through prayer, the study of principles in the Bible, and consulting with other people who believe in Him and trust Him – in devising business plans? Do you agree? Why or why not?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Psalms 37:4-7; Proverbs 16:4,33, 19:21, 21:30-31, 27:1; Matthew 6:24-34; James 4:13-17

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