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BUSINESS DILEMMA EDITION

WHEN CORPORATE AND PERSONAL VALUES CLASH

When an international media corporation acquired the community newspaper where I worked as editor, I was given additional responsibilities as publisher, succeeding the former owner who had left the company. In this expanded role I not only had oversight for the editorial operations of the newspaper, but also was required to interface with advertisers and the staff that operated our printing press.

In the printing business, presses are costly capital investments, so to maintain profitability they must be kept in use as much as possible. For when our newspapers were not being printed, the company would seek printing contracts for other publications to ensure our press and the pressmen remained busy.

My role was not to solicit outside printing projects or to oversee them, but the press operators would keep me informed about what they were working on. One afternoon a pressman came into my office and showed me a periodical that was being printed. "Have you seen this?" he asked. Looking through it, I could see the content of this publication was unlike anything we had done before and did not align with the values of the small community where our business had been held in high esteem over the years.

My first thought, knowing how word quickly spreads in a small, everyone-knows-everyone community like ours, was how residents, civic leaders and our loyal advertisers would respond if they discovered such a project was being produced. My second thought was that the message of this publication conflicted with my personal values as well.

"Well, what do you think?" the press foreman asked, obviously uncomfortable with the content of the publication he was required to print. I knew something needed to be done. But what? It was not my responsibility to judge the content of materials printed on our local press; my job was to make sure the work was completed to the satisfaction of the customer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Have you ever been confronted with an issue at work that conflicted with your personal values or beliefs? If so, what was that situation – and how did you respond?

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2. How should we weigh personal and even community values against the practical importance for a business to make a profit?
3. What would you have done if you had been in this situation?

BEST PRACTICES

I knew it was not my decision whether our company would continue to print this publication, and understood the revenue from the project could not be ignored from a business perspective. However, I also realized that continuing to print it on the press in our small town could have a seriously adverse impact on the long-standing reputation of our newspaper.

My personal convictions were not a factor, I knew, although it seemed appropriate that I communicate them to my superiors.

So I drafted a letter, expressing my personal opposition to having even indirect involvement in printing this publication. However, the emphasis of my letter was the potential for undermining the good will that had been built up over a period of years and the likelihood it could have a negative affect on the newspaper's bottom line in terms of advertising revenues and readership.

Since the parent company had also acquired other newspapers with printing presses in other parts of the city, I suggested one option would be to reassign the publication to a press in a part of the city where community sensitivities would not be a concern.

As it turned out, my immediate boss informed me that while he was not concerned about my personal views, he did agree that maintaining the good will of our community was important. So the contract for the publication was retained, but it was quickly moved to a different area of the city. Crisis averted.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

- When confronted with conflicts of values and beliefs in business, our first response might be to voice strong words of protest. But often the best course is to pray, trusting God to intervene as He sees fit. ***“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases” (Proverbs 21:1).***

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- Issues with the potential for affecting a reputation, both corporate and individual, should receive serious consideration. New business can always be found, but once a reputation is tarnished it is hard to restore. ***“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (Proverbs 22:1).***
- Sometimes complex problems seem to defy simple resolution, leaving us at a loss as to what can or should be done. At such times, praying for wisdom is the best and most important step. Rather than “when all else fails, pray,” we should pray first. It can save a lot of time and free us from unnecessary stress. ***“If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).***
- The question, “What would Jesus do?” is relevant when faced with a conflict of values. It can help us to discern whether a strong, uncompromising stand is necessary or if simply expressing our differing point of view is sufficient. ***“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3:23-24).***

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