
Blueprints

A BLUEPRINT ACCURATELY and thoroughly describes all that is needed to complete the plan of the designer.

Sometimes it is easier for us to see God as the Great Designer of the universe than to see him as the Meticulous Architect of our lives and destiny. But whether for a galaxy, a planet, an organization or an individual man or woman, the Scriptures indicate there is a direction determined by God. It is purposeful, not random. It is ordered, not disordered. Some are called in one way, others in another way. Some are gifted or equipped in a particular manner, others differently. One will be given a certain sphere of activity; another will operate in a very different sphere.

Understanding God's blueprint helps us understand more fully our opportunities and responsibilities in the workplace.

I realize this as I think about Jerry . . .

Jerry started with our company right out of high school,

working on the plant floor. Like his peers, he expected to do this work for a short while, then go on to something else. But he found that he enjoyed the work relationships and even found the work itself both interesting and challenging.

He was a good athlete and played shortstop on the company's softball team, helping spark the team to a winning season in a city league. There, rubbing shoulders with employees in other companies, he realized things were pretty good where he worked, and he started thinking about a longer-term involvement.

One day, he caught a line drive right to his heart. Jerry got the eye of Belinda, an attractive young secretary who had joined our company in a product acquisition we'd made. They were soon married, and Belinda left her work to care for their family. Money was tight, but by careful management they were able to get by on Jerry's income, with a little help from secretarial odd jobs Belinda could do out of their home.

Jerry got more serious about his career and took some courses at the local community college. Soon a position opened up for a lab technician in our engineering department. Jerry applied and was the successful candidate. He learned the technical details of our products and was a particular help in bridging the gap between engineering and the plant floor, because he knew the production processes and people so well.

Moving Ahead

The company was increasing its field training, requiring us to work closely with installers and contractors. An opening occurred for a trainer, and Jerry was again the successful candidate.

He got out with our customers and made a fine impression with both his technical knowledge and his people skills, reinforced by a strong moral character. (Customers still call to tell me what a great job he does and how positively he speaks of the company.) When he wasn't out teaching, he helped staff our toll-free "hot line," providing help to service people calling with technical questions.

The company decided to install a fitness center, and Jerry volunteered some spare time to help with the process. Later, he became the head of an employee team to oversee the center's activities and promote the overall concept of fitness among our employees.

Recently, he was appointed to the top position in our training program, with several others working for him. He is so highly thought of that Jerry was voted that year by our company's senior management to receive the President's Choice Award, presented at our company's Christmas dinner.

The Unique Plan

Jerry is a treasured employee. We have every expectation that he will continue to advance, growing in the ways he contributes, and enjoying it in the process. He has a destiny in God. There is a plan that is unique for him. He was created for a purpose. I feel we are at our highest and best as his employer if we can provide a context for his growth and enable him to find and fit in with God's blueprint for his life.

There are many others like Jerry in the company. Penny, for example, began with us as a temporary clerk over twenty years

ago. Today she is our director of human resources and a member of our senior management team. Penny's contributions have been tremendous over this period, her competency and value growing steadily.

I am so gratified to be surrounded by folks like this, who genuinely love Monday.

Earlier I mentioned three dimensions of God's plan: *calling*, *gifting* and *sphere*. Here they are in more detail.

Calling

We usually think of a *calling* in religious terms—such as a calling to the ministry. But a calling to a vocation goes beyond just the religious connotation. We can be called to the arts, to athletics, to government service or to business. If it is God's call, it is a legitimate and high calling. In other words, you can be an “ordained” plumber! People called to business have many opportunities for service unavailable to those who are specifically focused on ministry vocations.

We tend to overlook the call to nonreligious vocations that many prominent biblical figures had at various times in their lives. Joseph was an administrator to Egypt's Pharaoh, Moses and David tended sheep, Peter was a fisherman, Lydia managed a garment business, and Paul made tents.

One of my favorite examples is Daniel, a young man taken captive by the Babylonians. He was a person of sterling character and exceptional ability, called to be the equivalent of today's civil servant (in a foreign post not of his choosing!). So compelling were his wisdom and conduct that King Nebuchadnezzar pro-

moted him to ruler over the whole province of Babylon and to chief administrator over all its wise men. Later, Daniel's effectiveness caused him to rise to key positions under other heathen kings.

Leaders in business can be instrumental in helping people find and fulfill their calling.

Michael Novak, a Roman Catholic theologian, covers this important point well in *Business as a Calling*. He quotes Kenneth Lay, chairman and CEO of Enron Corp., the largest natural gas company in the U.S.:

I was, and am, a strong believer that one of the most satisfying things in life is to create a highly moral and ethical environment in which every individual is allowed and encouraged to realize their God-given potential.

At our company, we take care in the interview process to discern whether the applicant is being called to work with us. We find it helpful to have multiple interviews and then compare notes. We conduct a series of tests, looking for a match-up of skills with our needs in the workplace. We check references to learn from past work experiences. We commit our hiring activities to prayer.

It makes a tremendous difference later on, especially when an employee is struggling with something at work, when he or she can say, "I know this is what I'm called to do. I am supposed to be here."

Gifting

The Bible also speaks about how various people are *gifted* or *equipped*. In the apostle Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he speaks of how different gifts complement each other, using the

analogy of the human body: “For in fact the body is not one member but many. . . . But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.”

We especially see the application of this principle of gifting in the placement of people. Jerry is a good example of a person with latent skills that needed to be developed and given opportunity. Eric, mentioned earlier, hit a blind alley before his gifts were identified and he moved into supervision, where he has excelled.

More and more we place an emphasis on people working in teams, where a blend of giftings is particularly important. One may be more analytical; another has greater verbal abilities. One works best with details; another is good at seeing the big picture.

Performance evaluations are a valuable tool in counseling employees. In using them, we obviously look back in review of a person’s performance, but the main emphasis is looking forward: What do you want to prepare for? How can we help?

Cross-training is also a helpful guide. A person is placed in another assignment on a temporary basis: for example, a production employee works in inventory or quality control. After this new work experience, the person will have a much better idea of whether to prepare for a different type of work in the company and possibly take courses toward that goal.

Sphere

The third dimension of God’s blueprint is *sphere*. In the book of Acts we read that God “has made . . . every nation . . . to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” You live in

a certain period of history and were born in a certain place by God's design. Likewise, God sets us into areas of responsibility. The apostle Paul was conscious of this when he told the Corinthians he was determined to operate within the limits of the sphere God had allotted him.

Our businesses have spheres which involve areas of expertise—core competencies. Whenever we go very far outside these areas, we can get into trouble—a fact borne out by the recent unwinding of many conglomerates whose management naively thought that if they could do one thing well, they could do everything well. We do best when we stay with the things we know. Even the brilliant basketball player Michael Jordan learned this lesson when, for a season, he donned a baseball uniform!

To me, it is a great comfort to know that we don't have to be good at everything. It's a relief to be able to say no with a clear conscience when we realize that a request is beyond our area of call or outside our sphere. This is simply the recognition that there is a blueprint for us in God's design.

I've observed over the years that God's grace is most available when we're operating in our areas of calling, gifting and sphere. When we step outside those areas, prompting an inordinate struggle to get things done or to be effective, it may be time for a reality check. We may be seeing an indication that we have pushed beyond the boundaries of God's grace and are expecting more than he is pleased to give. This can be true for individuals and for businesses.

In contrast, it is a wonderful thing when we are centered in our calling, utilizing our giftings, operating in our God-appointed sphere.

As much as possible, we want our workplace to provide such an environment. As with Jerry, our employees are people of destiny. They need to be in a work context where nurturing, experimentation and growth are encouraged, where God's high calling can be realized—where they can discover and fulfill his blueprint for their lives.