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## Two Worlds, or One?

**A**S MUCH AS MY CONVERSION had begun a process of transformation in my mind and spirit, I realized there was a wide gulf in my thinking between this new dimension of faith and how it applied to my work. True, I saw that certain Scriptures could bring guidance or comfort to work-related situations. But by and large I found myself in two separate worlds. Significant growth was taking place in both—but largely unrelated.

During that time, in the late sixties, some basic business decisions had set the stage for sustained expansion. In fact, the Beckett Corporation grew each year—and kept growing—at a compound growth rate exceeding 20 percent for most of the next two decades. Key decisions helped fuel that growth—hiring talented personnel in sales and engineering, refocusing our marketing efforts on major oil companies, forming a network of distributors and dealers, developing a new generation of fuel-sav-

ing burner units, and enlarging and improving our plant facilities and equipment.

We borrowed heavily to fund our growth, and we were fortunate to generate sufficient cash flow to repay our debt ahead of schedule. We were a small fish in a large pond, but we gained growing recognition for our technology, good customer service and support. Ours was a youthful and aggressive team, willing to take risks. In time the rewards became evident.

### **The Home Front**

My business activities were exhilarating but bore little direct relationship to what was happening away from work. Our third child and first son, Kevin, was born in 1967, just as I was entering a new dimension in my walk with the Lord. A few years later our third daughter, Catherine, was born. Wendy and I were thoroughly devoted to our four precious children, but nothing exceeded my desire to grow spiritually during this dynamic period. I suppose I was a little like a plant that had just sprouted, and for a season one new shoot after another sprang forth.

Wendy and I attended and even helped sponsor numerous Christian teaching seminars, helping solidify and accelerate the growth of our faith. We met in small "cell groups" in homes for fellowship. We discovered a growing number of good books about Christians who were making a difference. Seeing the great interest among our friends in such literature prompted me to link up with several other businessmen to establish a Christian bookstore, which for years served the greater Cleveland area with biblically based books and audio and video teaching materials.

Increasingly, I found the Bible had become my primary spiritual life-source. The decision to read it each day was bearing good fruit, bringing a gradual renewal in my thinking. But I still hadn't made the connection that its great insights related directly to my work and could be instrumental in shaping our company's policies and practices.

Nor did I see that the Lord himself, with whom I was becoming increasingly better acquainted, would actually guide my thoughts and actions in very practical business matters, if I would allow him to do so. It wasn't long, however, until a situation developed in the company that shook me to the core, forcing me to turn to the Lord in a more direct way.

### **The Wake-Up Call**

I had grown up with the understanding, largely from my dad, that companies and their employees were better off in a union-free environment. But I also knew we could do only so much to influence such decisions—employees under the law were free to form or affiliate with a labor organization whenever they chose. As I thought about such a possibility in our company, my reaction was always one of raw fear. One day, that which I feared came upon us.

When I received the news that an organization attempt was underway, that fear became almost paralyzing in its intensity. Then the fear turned to anger—anger that some of our employees would consider such a course, rather than talking with our management about their concerns. Soon the anger turned to the sober realization that we had to act, wisely but decisively, if we were to have any hope of staying union-free.

### The Campaign

I sought out a local labor attorney, known in our town for his tough approach to organization attempts. He agreed to help us. Then, just a few weeks into the development of our campaign, he suddenly died of a heart attack.

The pressure of this situation, if nothing else, prompted me to earnest prayer. Faced with our attorney's death, I almost concluded we should handle the situation by ourselves, rather than starting all over with an unknown lawyer. That was until I happened to be reading from the book of Proverbs and, to my surprise, my eyes fell on a very pointed verse. In the translation I was reading at the time, Proverbs 12:15 said, "Don't act without the advice of counsel!"

Well, within a few days we had located an attorney from Cleveland who, as it turned out, gave us outstanding advice, helping guide our month-long campaign to rebuild our employees' confidence in the company.

As I thought through what was at stake in this organization attempt, it became clear to me that the most important thing we could lose was our direct relationship with our employees. I genuinely cared for our people, then numbering nearly thirty on our plant floor. I knew there was no way an outside organization, permanently interposed between employer and employee, could bring the same dimension of care and concern. Rather, in all likelihood, it would actually obstruct what should be a close working relationship.

This, too, I saw as a biblically based position, directly addressed in the sixth chapter of the apostle Paul's letter to the

church in Ephesus. There, employers are reminded that the way they conduct themselves with their employees should be a reflection of the caring and compassionate way each of us is treated by our heavenly Father.

So with conviction, good counsel and a sound strategy, we shared our views and concerns with our employees, all within the tight guidelines imposed by the National Labor Relations Board. A vote was taken, and the overwhelming decision of our employees was to stay union-free.

### **Making Adjustments**

We were greatly relieved and thankful. We believed God had helped us, guiding us through this difficult time. But it was also a tremendous wake-up call. I realized we had neglected communication. Many aspects of our employee policies and practices were not well understood. Some of our benefits were substandard, and we promptly took steps to improve them. We developed a new employee handbook, made some changes in supervision, and took much more seriously the growing mandate I was now convinced we had—to work more closely together with our employees, clearly communicating our goals and aspirations and seeking the best possible work environment for every person in the company as we moved forward.

As a result of this gut-wrenching experience, I also began to realize that I could not, or should not, be living in two separate worlds. For over a decade, I had seen clear evidence that the Lord had a vital interest in my work. I concluded it would be utterly foolish for me to somehow partition my life into one way of

thinking and conduct on Sundays and another during the work week. There needed to be a much fuller integration of my two worlds.

This seemed to me to be a practical and sensible way of looking at faith—that it encompassed the full spectrum of life. But there were still gaps in my understanding. Later I more fully realized there are cultural reasons why it is so difficult for us, especially in the West, to see our work and our faith as unified—to see them as parts of one world, not separated into two.

This is the focus of the next section of the book. The insights discussed there have totally transformed my thinking—and the thinking of others with whom I have shared them over the years.