

## LESSON 32: Business Performance

# Impacting Your Industry

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### INTRODUCTION

Being a follower of Jesus *and* a business owner comes with significant responsibilities. Not only are we responsible for our own spiritual journey and application of our beliefs to our daily activities, we also have a high calling of shepherding those God has placed in our care within the business.

As we grow in our business experience and wisdom we should not only be looking at how we can transform the culture of our workplace with our Biblical worldview, but we also have a responsibility to assure that our profession or industry is known for having a good and honorable reputation. This may require you to begin considering how to take a leadership role within your industry.

### TRADE AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

As far back as the Roman Empire, there was a desire for tradesmen to associate with others who had similar skills. These associations became known as “guilds.” Originally, these were developed to protect the tradesmen, customers and employees from risks in the industry—such as unethical practices—and to have a place for trade secrets to be shared and learned.

When the guilds fell on disfavor due to stifling innovation and limiting the ability of people to use their God given gift in a skill that was heavily regulated, they began to die out. In the 13th century and beyond in London a new name was coined as many guild-like organizations called “livery companies” began to surface. Many of these had a strong tie to the Catholic Church until the Protestant Reformation.

In America, although there are some guilds in the entertainment and journalism world, similar organizations are normally called trade associations. They date back to the 18th century. These associations are typically member paying organizations who convene for multiple purposes—



including industry education, advocacy for the profession and development and accountability of professional ethical standards.

Although trade associations have many valuable benefits, history has revealed that they can also bring with them concerns if left unchecked. For instance, guilds virtually died out for centuries because they had become so bureaucratic and heavy handed that they stifled innovation, fixed prices and prevented people from joining the profession, unless approved by those who were also trying to protect their turf.

Some industries have been significantly damaged due to allowing less reputable characters to taint their profession. When there is no governance or oversight in an industry, it can lead to undermining the entire industry. Some industries have wisely set professional standards and certifications that have allowed for a way to police the undesirables in the industry. This can be taken too far, preventing some from becoming part of an industry, but it does have merit to be considered for many professions.

## INDUSTRY INFLUENCES

Industries tend to head in the direction the innovators or key leaders guide the rest of the industry. This can either chart a course towards becoming a well-respected industry or one that becomes despised.

Consider the payday loan industry. They discovered a niche of serving the poorer community that banks were not adequately serving. Although they discovered a profitable niche, it wasn't long before several in the industry discovered a loophole to state regulations that could increase their profitability dramatically.

They began partnering with Indian reservations that did not have to comply with state laws, allowing them to charge exorbitant rates. This has led to an industry with a bad reputation and many are now being prosecuted for their immoral activities.

As followers of Jesus we have an opportunity, and some would say a responsibility, to take a leadership role in our industry, in order to help it become an agent of the "common good." Bobby Albert was one of those industry influencers in the moving and storage industry.

Bobby owned a moving and storage company in Texas that was growing rapidly. As he became successful in building a strong and ethical culture within his organization, he realized that he had an opportunity to impact his industry as well. Bobby joined his national and state trade associations and began getting more involved.

Bobby began teaching at these trade associations about some of the unique approaches he had taken in his business to instill values that come from the Bible. He also shared about a program



he implemented of hiring a chaplain service that not only served his employees, but also was used to serve the needs of his customers.

Bobby also began hosting a prayer breakfast meeting at each of the trade association annual conferences. These gatherings helped Bobby encourage prayer and identify those in his industry who were also Christians who he could partner with to steer their industry into a more ethical one.

Another example of an industry influencer is Ron Blue. Ron had built a financial planning and advisory practice that served wealthy clients. Ron’s heart was for these clients to recognize that amassing more wealth than they could possibly spend in their lifetime was not as meaningful as becoming more generous. As he had success in leading clients to increase their generosity, he began to dream of what it could look like if he began casting a similar vision for the peers in his industry.

Kingdom Advisors was the nonprofit vehicle Ron Blue used to launch his dream. This unique trade association for Christian financial professionals has trained over 2,500 financial professionals on how to better help their clients to embrace generosity rather than the traditional method of hoarding wealth.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

What organizations or opportunities are available in your industry that you could become involved in from a leadership perspective? What costs or risks may be involved in providing leadership to these opportunities? What benefits?

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2. What is the reputation like for your industry? What are the industry weaknesses that need addressed? What Biblical solutions might you bring to the conversation?

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3. How do you feel about investing time in your industry? At what stage or development of your business career does it make the most sense to participate?

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4. What unique strategies could be considered or implemented in your industry that could steer it towards being more ethical and community minded?

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5. What research might be valuable for you to undertake about the variety of trade associations in your industry or other organizations that serve small businesses that may need some ethical leadership? What will you commit to do this next month?

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