

Chapter 1

A Christ-centered Viewpoint

Let's begin with the timely question: "What is a board's Stewardship responsibility for the leadership selection, transition, and development of its CEO?" To answer this question, we must ask another question, "What does it mean to be Christ-centered—as an organization—in our stewardship as members of its board, and in our responsibility for the development of our CEO?" These are questions begging for the application of faith that leads to wholeness.

The Christ-centered Organization

Most people know what we mean by "faith-based" organizations. It tends to become a political term. Across the broad spectrum of religious ministries, faith-based organizations are nonprofit entities with a motivation for some form of public service to the community and often having some kind of support from governmental agencies.

Most people also have an idea about the meaning of "Christian" organizations. It has to be an historical term. They envision a ministry with roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition, whether a group that keeps its Christian identity in name alone (YMCA) or one whose statement of faith and practice is unequivocally Christian (The Salvation Army).

What, then, do we mean by a "Christ-centered" organization?

Every organization has a driving force at the core that determines its identity and establishes its character. In secular organizations, the

driving force may be professional expertise, market share, technology, research, service, or profit. A Christ-centered organization will not be exempt from the influence of these factors, but they cannot be the driving force. It is the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Word of God and enacted through the agency of the Holy Spirit that drives the Christ-centered organization—from the inside out. Seen in its vision, stated in its mission, and felt in its tone, the mind and spirit of Jesus Christ defines its identity and shapes its character.

A “Christ-centered organization” is not an exclusive term because “faith-based” and “Christian” organizations may also be “Christ-centered.” Integration of Christ’s principles as revealed in the Word of God and infused by the Holy Spirit defines the difference. Frank Gaberlein, my mentor, gave an analogy that illustrates the idea. He said that we must drive deep our stake of commitment in Jesus Christ in order to let the tether of influence and action reach out to the full circumference of our life and ministry. If the stake is firm, the tether can be long, but if the stake is wobbly, the tether that plays out too far will pull up the stake.

Apply this analogy to the definition of a Christ-centered organization. If the stake is firm at center, it can play out in spirit and discipline to the farthest reaches of the ministry. Specifically applied, the mind and spirit of Christ must be the integrating center that penetrates and pervades every thought and action of the organization. No one pretends that this is easy, but if we accept Paul’s organic model for the Body of Christ in I Corinthians 12:12-31, we have to admit that it is possible. A Christ-centered organization will have structural clarity, division of labor, assignment of roles, and use of gifts working together with the mind of Christ and brought to life by the Spirit of Christ. The key, of course, is interpersonal relationships. They start with the connection between Christ the Head and the members of His Body. The proof of these connections is in the relationships among the members of the Body of Christ. To be effective, the organization must have different roles for its members, but not in

a hierarchy of status that elevates some and demeans others. Each member is esteemed as a contributor to the organization with equal concern for the other.

A Christ-centered board is distinct from other nonprofit boards in five ways:

- 1. Common Christian faith.** The board members should all be mature Christians following Jesus Christ. These are people involved in prayerful intercession and act in faith and in integrity in all they do in their personal and professional lives.
- 2. Statement of Christian faith.** A Christ-centered organization has a statement of faith that all board members support as a basis for all decisions made by the board. These faith commitments provide the values and theological framework for all decisions made by the board.
- 3. Christian worldview.** As a result of the board members common Christian faith and the organization's written Statement of Faith, the board seeks to operate from a Christian worldview. This means that board members acknowledge God as the Creator and Sustainer of life and that God's eternal kingdom is the ultimate purpose of our existence. The focus of a Christ-centered organization, therefore, is to seek to accomplish the Great Commission as outlined in the Bible.
- 4. A maturing fellowship.** As members of the Body of Christ, each member of the board of a Christ-centered organization is committed to caring for each other, learning and growing together, creating a climate for personal, professional and spiritual growth for every employee of the ministry, and demonstrating love to all whom they serve.
- 5. Accountable to God as stewards.** Board members are accountable to God, Who provides the moral authority for all that is done. With this understanding that God owns all,

board members serve as stewards of God's creation and are accountable to God. The board member's actions, plans, and policies are ultimately responsible for reflecting God's Will for the organization. Board members should remember that Jesus Christ is our Possessor and our Dispossessor. He ordains, sustains, and blesses. The organization belongs entirely to God. Prayerful deliberation then becomes the norm and not the exception.

Organizational studies back up the practical outcomes of this biblical model for the Christ-centered organization. With the mind and spirit of Christ as its integrating center, the Christ-centered organization is a dynamic movement toward wholeness: (a) All of its members are personally committed to Jesus Christ and to the outworking of the Great Commission in the purpose of the organization; (b) All of its members find meaning in their lives and satisfaction in their work by being a partner in the ministry with all other members; and (c) All of its members are motivated by the redemptive hope of seeing God's Will done in the contemporary world and anticipating His coming in glory.

Christ-centered Stewardship

Primary responsibility for setting the policies of the Christ-centered organization rests with the members of its governing board. For good reason, they are often called "trustees" because they are charged to hold in trust all of the resources given to them by God. "Stewards" conveys the same meaning but with biblical roots. In the original language, "stewards" meant "householders" who managed all of the affairs of the household. The term makes a clear distinction between "ownership" and "stewardship." While everything belongs to the owner of the household, the steward owns nothing. Yet the owner (God) trusts the steward with management of all that He has and holds the steward accountable for all that He owns. For the Christ-centered organization, therefore, the biblical definition of a steward determines the role of the board in every facet of its governing role.

Owner of nothing, manager of all, and accountable for all sums up what it means to be on the board of a Christ-centered organization.

The Christ-centered Board-CEO Relationship

Among all of the relationships in the Christ-centered organization, the key connector is between the board and the CEO, more specifically, between the board chair and the CEO. The soul of the organization depends upon this primary relationship. In the original language, “soul” and “throat” are synonymous words. The throat is not only the physical connector between the head and the body, it is the two-way passage for instructions from the brain and feelings from the nerves at the same time that air from the lungs and blood from the heart are going to the head. Following this analogy, the soul of the Christ-centered organization can be read by the thoughts and feelings of the mind of Christ and the breath and blood of the Spirit of Christ.

The board-CEO relationship is the soul of the Christ-centered organization. It connects leaders to followers, communicates vision and mission to the body, and sets the tone for the organization. At the same time, it perceives the strength and vitality of the organization that flows from the body back to the head. To read the quality of the Christ-centered organization, check the quality of the board-CEO relationship. Be even more specific. Check the relationship between the board chair and the CEO. This is where it all begins. If the board and its chair are committed to the growth and development of their executive leader, the message ripples through the whole organization. From the integral point of the board and board chair-CEO relationship, the spiritual health of the organization is created.

Christ-centered CEO Leadership

Study after study tells us that the key to leadership development is a board that supports and challenges its CEO. Follow-up studies add the fact that the board must be strategically engaged and intimately present in the life cycle of selecting, transitioning, and developing its

leader. For Christ-centered organizations, this relationship is more than effective governance; it is testimony to the role of the board as stewards of the rare gift of CEO leadership in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ.

Christ-centered CEO leadership is evidence of the mind and spirit of Christ wholly integrated into our character and competence. In an introductory course in theology, the professor illustrated his lecture on holiness by pulling a thread from his blue serge suit. Holding it to light, he said, “Holiness is like this. Every thread of our being will have the tone and texture of the whole cloth.” His analogy awakened in me the understanding of holiness as wholeness and created in me an insatiable thirst for the presence of His Spirit in every part of my character and in every expression of my competence. That thirst has never been quenched and the desire to bring every thought and action into obedience with the mind of Christ is my consuming desire. The irony is that the closer we get to God, the more unworthy we feel and the more we confess our need to be holy. When we talk about CEO leadership, we are not talking about perfection, we are talking about progress. As the mind and spirit of Christ are integrated into the character of the CEO, the move toward maturity will be evident in a good reputation, practical wisdom, and spiritual-mindedness, the same qualities for which the seven deacons were elected in Acts 6.

Wholeness comes into focus in CEO leadership because this is the fulcrum upon which the future of the Christ-centered organization is balanced. Yet CEO leadership development does not stand alone. The environment of the parent organization, the principle of biblical stewardship, and the investment of the board in its CEO must all work together as holistic, Christ-centered threads in a seamless garment. The beauty of this relationship is that the Christ-centered organization does not have to wear its faith on its sleeve. It will be a well-defined structure governed by clear policies and fair practices, meeting the highest level of professional standards, and being fully

accountable in the public eye. But if you pull a thread from any part of the cloth, it will have the texture of truth and the tone of grace. On the wall of the boardroom or executive office of every Christ-centered organization, the words of Micah Network's *Declaration on Integral Mission* might well be a constant reminder: "As in the life of Jesus, being, doing and saying are at the heart of our integral task."

In this book, we put this same passion into print as we see the mind and spirit of Christ permeating the whole and creating the distinctive character of the Christ-centered organization, its board, and its executive leader.