

Proverbs for Business and Management

Presented by Mary Lowman

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Day One

I believe the book of Proverbs is the best management and employee relations book ever written. Let's explore five different proverbs and how they relate to our jobs. I encourage you to make Proverbs a daily reading habit. There are 31 chapters, so it's easy to read the chapter that corresponds to the day of the month. I've been doing that for several years and find the practical advice has been most beneficial in my life.

Today let's look at Proverbs 22:10.

Drive out the mocker and out goes strife; quarrels and insults are ended (Proverbs 22:10).

Another translation reads *drive out the scoffer and contention will go out. Even strife and dishonor will cease.*

Have you ever worked with a person who was a mocker and a scoffer? That's the person who makes fun of others, who ridicules people and organizations, who is arrogant and causes problems seemingly on purpose. When there's a mocker in the group, the work environment can be pretty miserable.

This proverb says by getting rid of a mocker, you get rid of strife. For those of you who are in management positions, it's good to remember there are times when the best thing you can do is to get rid of an employee. Now, I hope that doesn't sound cruel, but a person who is intent on offending others—and some people are—can have very detrimental effects on an organization.

Of course, as Christians, we still must care about people regardless of how unlovable they are. And though we can never change people, the Holy Spirit can, so we shouldn't give up praying for them. But that doesn't mean we allow them to ruin the working environment for everyone else. Remember, the workplace is not a rehab center or a counseling office. We want to help people when possible, but you don't hire people to reform or change them; you hire them to do a job.

Solomon said, in his wisdom, you're better off to drive out the mocker and the scoffer, for by so doing, the strife and dishonor will stop, people will be able to work productively together, and everyone will benefit, including the person who is the troublemaker. Allowing him or her to continue to get by with that inappropriate behavior doesn't help that individual.

My experience in business tells me many managers need to bite some bullets for the good of the organization and drive out the mockers and scoffers who are disrupting the workplace. It's some good advice found in Proverbs.

Day Two

We're looking at Proverbs for business. Let's read a few verses from Proverbs 6:

Go to the ant, you sluggard: consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provision in summer and gathers its food at harvest (Proverbs 6:6-8).

In the margin of my Bible by this verse I have written "self-motivated." The ant is a self-motivated creature. Without anyone standing over all those ants and telling them what to do, they perform their jobs diligently and are prepared for what lies ahead.

Self-motivation is a key factor in our business world today. It is sometimes rare to find people who have it. Too many people are just trying to get by with as little as possible. They don't look beyond their noses to see what else could be done. They take no initiative and are not willing to go any extra miles.

A Christian in the workplace should be like the ant: self-motivated, willing to dig in and get the work done without prompting or constant supervision. Does your manager trust you? Can she or he be assured you will do your job diligently whether anyone's watching? Certainly, a Christian should produce that kind of reputation.

Our witness in the world can never be effective if our lives aren't different. If we have the "It's not my job" attitude that is prevalent today, if we drag our feet and do only what we're told to do, if we gripe and complain about doing anything above and beyond our job description, how will our coworkers and management know Christ makes a difference in our lives? They won't, and our verbal witness, if there is one, will fall on deaf ears.

Christians have a power far beyond self to help motivate us. We have God's Holy Spirit dwelling within us to give us the strength we need to be self-motivated. And we should have an outstanding testimony on our jobs that we do our work, we do it whether anyone's watching or not, we do it to the best of our ability, and we're willing to go the extra mile.

Go to the ant and consider its ways. We can learn wisdom and self-motivation from them.

Day Three

Proverbs is a very practical book, one which we can easily apply to our everyday lives in the working world. I'm looking at Proverbs for business to see how some specific proverbs apply to our jobs.

Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning (Proverbs 9:9).

One of the most important characteristics every Christian should have, in my opinion, is teachableness. A person who is teachable is a very wise and truly humble person who recognizes they don't know it all, and there's always something new to learn.

As a manager, I can tell you it is a joy to have an employee who has a teachable spirit, who is willing to learn and looking for ways to improve. A manager will endure mistakes and learning cycles, a manager will hang in there with you much longer if he or she sees an attitude of teachableness—wanting to learn. Nothing is more frustrating than trying to work with a person who knows it all and has no desire to learn anything new.

How about you? Are you teachable? How do you respond when you're given helpful hints or suggestions? Do you resent them? Sometimes we can learn from younger people, people in the business shorter times than us, people below us in rank. But if you feel threatened when someone tries to teach you something, you're likely to stagnate right where you are.

It is very smart and mature to accept teaching, to listen to new ideas and suggestions. Managers need this quality as much—perhaps more—than anyone else. Many times, we managers fail to listen to our employees, who have very good ideas that could help us if we were more teachable.

The day you get beyond being teachable, you're in trouble, because that's the day you'll stop growing. And you don't just stand still; you go backwards.

How about it? Do you need to ask God to make you a teachable person? No matter how good and smart you are already, you can be wiser still, Proverbs says, and you can add to your learning and wisdom by allowing others to instruct you.

Day Four

I'm looking at Proverbs for business, because the book of Proverbs is wonderfully applicable to the situations we face in our working worlds.

...you have been trapped by what you said, ensnared by the words of your mouth, then do this...to free yourself, since you have fallen into your neighbor's hands: Go and humble yourself...Allow no sleep to your eyes...Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler (Proverbs 6:2-5).

How many times have you wanted to crawl under a table because you said something you wished you hadn't? Perhaps they were words spoken in anger or haste, or words of gossip, or judgmental words. Unkind, untruthful, harsh, unnecessary words that inflicted harm of some kind.

What do you do? You can't unsay them; you can't delete them; you can't erase them. Those words hang there in your memory and the memory of others. What can you do?

Solomon says to go and humble yourself to the person your words harmed; go, confess to them, and do it immediately. Apologize and do all you can to free yourself from the damage of those words.

Now, I know that's not easy to do. But it's a lot easier than not doing it! Once in a hotel on a business trip, I accused a hotel employee of neglecting to follow my instructions. I was certain I had given those instructions. Nicely, but directly, I said, "I'm sure it's your fault; please correct it."

A few minutes later I came to realize I was the one who was wrong, not him. It was embarrassing; I wanted to run away. But I forced myself to go to the phone, call the young man and apologize to him. Even a simple apology like that wasn't easy, but once I did it, I felt so free. And I could tell it made a big difference to him. He kept saying, "That's so nice of you to call. Thank you." It wasn't nice of me; it was the right thing to do.

If you've offended someone with words, don't procrastinate. Go right now, today and apologize. That's good advice from Proverbs.

Day Five

The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him (Proverbs 18:17).

We're looking at Proverbs for business this week. This proverb is very good advice for us on our jobs.

What it teaches us is to withhold judgment and opinions until we've heard both sides to any story. We shouldn't be gullible, and we shouldn't jump to conclusions.

This is a particularly difficult area for me, because I am very impulsive and very much an overreactor. And every time I do that, I regret it. I am by God's grace focusing prayer and attention in my life on learning to wait until I hear both sides of any story, to make sure I've got my facts straight, to remember there may be something here I just don't know yet.

I remember coming into the office on a very busy day to find a message that irritated me at once. With only partial information, I thought this other person was doing something way out of line, and I overreacted. I went to the phone and started dialing the number to get things straightened out. Thankfully, she was not in, and I didn't get to speak with her at that time.

When she did return my call and explained the situation, I realized the message had not been complete, and if I had talked with her earlier, I would have overreacted and probably hurt her feelings. God protected me that time and reminded me how much I need to learn not to overreact.

Wise Solomon warned us the first person to present their case can sound very convincing because we haven't heard the other side of the story. We need to listen to people but not be too quick to agree or disagree with them until we've sorted out the facts and know what we're dealing with. This is good advice for managers and employees alike.

I want to encourage you to go to the Proverbs daily for guidance. There are 31 chapters, so you can read the one that corresponds to the day of the month. I've been doing that for several years, and many times God has used the Proverbs to give me clear guidance, especially on job-related issues.