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By Rick Boxx

A REAL COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

In the business and professional world, we are always looking for a competitive advantage. Fresh ideas; staff with exceptional skills and abilities; a unique niche for products, services and marketing. We are always exploring what assets we can utilize to give us a leg up on the competition. Not long ago I was reminded of one competitive advantage that most people never consider.

Tom, a friend in the construction business, submitted a bid on a very large building project that he felt was critical for his company to win. He prayed and prayed some more, asking God that the project rights would be awarded to them. God, he reasoned, would understand how important it was to his business, so he trusted they would get the contract. He felt great dismay therefore to learn that one of his competitors had been selected instead.

At first, Tom was very disappointed, even angry with God. Why had his prayers not been answered? Had they been ignored? Then one day, months later, he discovered the “why.” Through a friend in the industry, Tom was informed that the project had turned out to be a financial disaster for his competitor.

What he had perceived as an unanswered prayer was in fact a very definitive answer. God knew, well in advance, how devastating it would have been if Tom’s company’s bid had been selected. The Lord had protected him from undertaking a project that likely would have bankrupted the business. As an old country-western song states, sometimes God’s greatest gifts are what we perceive as “unanswered” prayers.

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I suspect that many times you have felt convinced of the rightness of a certain plan or decision, only to find the outcome very different from what you expected. That has happened in my life and career more times than I could count. This is why experience has taught me to place my trust in God and not my own limited understanding of a particular situation.

Psalm 24:1 teaches, "The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains, the world, and those who dwell in it." To me this speaks about more than ownership. It also reminds us that God is sovereign and directs all things, including our business interests, according to what He knows to be best. Sometimes in spite of our prayers and what we are asking Him to do.

Living in extremely volatile, uncertain times, it seems more difficult than ever to evaluate what we should or should not do to achieve our goals and objectives. Trusting that God is all-knowing and ultimately in control of all circumstances can give us peace to entrust Him with whatever transpires in our lives – and in our work – on a day-to-day basis. Perhaps one of the greatest pieces of business advice I have ever encountered comes from *Proverbs 3:5-6, which instructs us to, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."*

Sometimes God answers our prayers the way we ask. At other times – as was the case with my friend Tom – His answers come very differently than what we had hoped. But invariably, as I have learned over many years in my spiritual journey, the Lord's responses are just what we need. Even when we have no idea of what that might be.

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We need to remember, as another proverb reminds us, *“In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determined his steps”* (Proverbs 16:9). That is an incredible competitive advantage!

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. What do you think is the greatest competitive advantage that you can access at your business or organization?
2. What other strategies do you employ in trying to develop plans or make decisions in a business and professional world filled with so much uncertainty?
3. Do you ever pray about decisions you must make at work, or you will succeed in acquiring new customers or contracts? If you do pray about those, how do you feel at those times when your prayers seem to be unanswered or things turn out differently?
4. Do you regard being able to pray, asking God for wisdom and direction, as a “competitive advantage”?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Psalm 37:3-7,34; Proverbs 16:1,3, 21:2,30; Jeremiah 29:11-13

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