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 By Rick Boxx

AVOIDING BITTERNESS OVER WORKPLACE FAILURES

When functioning properly, business partnerships can be productive, efficient – and enjoyable. But when they fail, one or more parties in the relationship can suffer great mental and emotional distress. Just as with any failure in the workplace, a failed business partnership can be devastating.

A case in point involved my friend, Don. His once-thriving, positive relationship with his business partner began deteriorating due to differences in values and philosophy about how they should operate on a daily basis with customers and suppliers. Eventually these conflicts could not be resolved and their partnership came to a regrettable end. As a consequence of dissolving the partnership, Don incurred large financial losses personally.

The disappointment of losing a relationship that once held great promise was bad enough. But the impact on him financially greatly intensified his sense of failure and feelings of frustration. A common, even understandable response for many people in such circumstances would be feelings of bitterness and betrayal. However, when Don felt those emotions beginning to rise up inside, he chose to take immediate, evasive action.

Instead of allowing what can be termed “a root of bitterness” to destroy what remained of his relationship with the ex-business partner, Don chose to pursue a peaceful resolution. He made this determination not for the benefit of the former partner, but for himself, understanding how bitterness could affect other areas of his life. As Don admitted to me, “When I feel hurt, it can cause me to close myself off to others. I do not want this situation to undermine my other relationships.”

The Bible speaks directly to this reality. Hebrews 12:14-15 says, *“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.”*

The emotion of bitterness can be destructive, acting similar to cancer in the human body. If allowed to grow unchecked, it can destroy us and everyone crossing our paths. So like excising a cancerous tumor, bitterness must be dealt with and removed before it can cause irreparable damage.

Jesus addressed this when He spoke of how we should respond when treated unfairly. *“You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. “If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also” (Matthew 5:38-40).*

We might argue, “Yes, but after what they did to me, I cannot just let them go without reacting in some way.” Jesus taught that for us as His followers, that “some way” should not be to punish or seek revenge, but rather to offer forgiveness – even when it is not deserved, or even requested. To forgive and then to move on is more for our benefit than for those who have done us harm.

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Without question, business dealings that have gone bad can cause bitterness, but by God's grace, and in our pursuit of peace – rather than seeking to escalate the conflict – bitterness does not have to follow.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever been involved in a business partnership? If so, what was that experience like for you? Why do you think failed business partnerships can be so painful?

2. What do you think of the concept of a "root of bitterness"? Have you ever experienced this yourself? Being honest, do you presently harbor bitterness toward anyone? If so, what has been the effect – not only upon the other person, but also on you?

3. One Bible passage cited in this "Monday Manna" states we should "pursue peace with all men (and women)." Do you think this is always possible? Explain your answer.

4. Do you think the concept of "turning the other cheek" is appropriate for the workplace? Why or why not?

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

Proverbs 4:14-15, 12:26; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Matthew 6:14-15, 18:21-22

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