The book "Serving Two Masters?: Reflections on God and Profit" by C. William Pollard, explores the idea that principles of faith and smart business practices are not mutually exclusive, but can unite to strengthen corporate culture and lead to extraordinary financial success.

Imagine you are a manager at a large company. You stay current with the latest thinking in business management and leadership. You are up on the trends in sales and operations. But for the wealth of resources available, you haven't found much support in answering some of the most important questions about your business life: How can I manage the tension of living an authentic faith while delivering ever-increasing business results? Is there meaning in my work beyond making a living? How can I understand the world of money and profit in the context of my faith or a purpose and meaning for life? Who's been there before me?

Unlike the religious or faith-oriented books on the subject, "Serving Two Masters" provides practical insights from people who don't just read Fortune or The Wall Street Journal, but who are quoted in them. Drawn from over forty years of executive experience, Pollard's reflections will speak to everyone who has wrestled with the integration of faith and work as well as provide practical management and leadership insights taken straight from the real-world issues ServiceMaster faced when the firm was recognized by Fortune magazine as the nation's top service company.

My Personal Review:
What a striking and ironic juxtaposition! On the same day that MSN.com ran an article on the ten best prisons for CEO's, Harper Collins published a
book by former ServiceMaster CEO, C. William Pollard. Seeing the recent pathetic performance of Enron's Kenneth Lay in the dock trying to explain away egregious acts of misfeasance and malfeasance, it is a refreshing change to hear from a CEO who wrestled with his conscience before being prodded to do so by a Grand Jury!

In this book, that consists of a compilation of short inspirational messages that Pollard delivered to the ServiceMaster Board of Directors over the course of twenty-five years, the author leads us gently through a healthy questioning over the over-arching question: "Are principles of faith and principles of smart business practice compatible?"

ServiceMaster's formal Corporate Objectives make it clear that the company's leaders believe that it is possible to integrate these two streams of principles into one organization. The ServiceMaster vision is:

To honor God in all we do

To help people develop

To pursue excellence

And to grow profitably

"We are often asked if these four objectives are compatible. Some people believe there is an inevitable conflict between spiritual values and economic objectives. Can a person, they wonder, honor God and make a profit?" (Pages 108-109)

Through the book, Pollard answers with great clarity this rhetorical question. He offers one inspiring example and case study after another to reinforce the fact that a company can successfully navigate the tricky waters of being faithful to God while at the same time keeping faith with all of the company's stakeholders.

At the heart of the ServiceMaster philosophy is the principle of "Servant Leadership."

"Several months ago, while teaching a ServiceMaster case study at Harvard Business School, I was asked by one of the students, 'What is the most important trait you would look for in your successor?' My answer was, 'A person who had or could develop a servant's heart.'" (Page 42)

Pollard continues his explanation of the centrality of servanthood to the ServiceMaster way of life:

"The theme of our annual report this year is 'Leading and Learning by Serving.' The sculpture on the cover was created by Esther Augsburger and depicts Jesus Christ washing his disciples' feet - a striking and
practical example of servant leadership. This sculpture and the granite wall behind it listing those who have contributed twenty-five years or more of service to our company, will be at the entrance of our new office facility at One ServiceMaster Way. It will be a reminder that our company has been built by those who have made career commitments to serve with a mission and a purpose." (Page 45)

Skeptics might wonder if a corporate culture in which faith in Jesus Christ is part of the public persona of the CEO is a place where those who are not practicing Christians might feel oppressed or uncomfortable. Is ServiceMaster a company that beats its employees and customers over the head with the Bible? Pollard addresses these concerns as he tells about his friend and colleague, Bisher Mufti:

"Now, for me as a follower of Jesus Christ and also a leader in this firm, I must live my faith in such a way that it is not imposed upon my colleagues, but instead can be examined, understood, and in some cases, embraced by them as they seek not only to do things right, but also to do the right thing."

"One of those colleagues and friends is currently serving as vice president of our international division with primary responsibilities for our businesses in the Middle East. Bisher Mufti joined ServiceMaster twenty-eight years ago as a young immigrant from Jordan. His first job was a second-shift floor cleaner in one of the hospitals we were serving. He has grown in our business and in his essay in this year's annual report, he specifically comments on how, as a Muslim, he has been accepted and nurture in our community. He has learned that there can be a common ground in our business for people of different faiths. It begins with 'the way we respect and treat others.' As he has witnessed our values working in the lives of others and in his own life, he has concluded that the ServiceMaster objectives transcend differences and cultural backgrounds." (Pages 123-124)

This book is one that I will keep on my desktop, and refer to on a regular basis as a way of reminding me to keep my priorities in their proper order. This little gem of a volume comes with my highest recommendation. Whatever your religion, reading the thoughts of this successful business leader may help to restore your faith in the ability to succeed while maintaining ethical standards. We can all profit from such a vision and approach!

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