

Navigating Business with Purpose: The Legacy of Bill Pollard

Sebastian Vaduva holds up Bill Pollard's life to us as an example of Christian business practice - not only conducting ethical business practice but also cultivating personal spiritual development, supporting the local church, educational institutions and public speaking.

In the contemporary business landscape, many of us feel as though we are in a pressure cooker. We are confronted with global economic instability and a constantly shifting regulatory environment. Unprecedented technological advancements, ranging from robotics to artificial intelligence, are transforming industries. Inflation and unstable public finances are reshaping our retirement portfolios and tax structures, while fierce global competition and workforce challenges add to the strain.

For Christian businesspeople, these challenges are compounded by our commitment to uphold biblical principles in our businesses. We strive to remain faithful to our values and our families, desiring to contribute meaningfully to our churches and ministries. Yet the relentless demands of our businesses can make this seem nearly impossible. At times, even within our own Christian communities, we may encounter discouragement, feeling disillusioned like Asaph in Psalm 73, where he expresses “disillusionment” at the arrogance of the wicked. We too may even be “jealous” and feel like our purity was “in vain”.

We can take inspiration from the life of Bill Pollard, a man who, despite his imperfections, “served the Lord in his generation”¹. As the former CEO of ServiceMaster corporation, which achieved over \$5 billion in annual sales with over 230,000 employees across more than 40 nations, Bill was a formidable leader. He wrote a best-selling book about his experience, *The Soul of the Firm*, published by HarperBusiness in 1996. He served on the boards of Wheaton College and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

and collaborated with Peter Drucker to promote values-based education worldwide. Above all, Bill was a devoted husband to Judy and a loving father to their four children. In this article I shall explore his personal, professional, and ministry journey for insights that might encourage us in our modern business world.

A Commitment to Spiritual, Personal, and Professional Excellence

In navigating the complexities of the contemporary world, Christian businesspeople need, I suggest, to prioritise the basics, with long-term success hinging on our spiritual well-being, family relationships, and professional development.

Bill Pollard exemplified a commitment to nurturing his soul through spiritual practices and disciplines. He cultivated the fruits of the Spirit, and that gave him wisdom, which he defined as “the capacity to notice differences, to see nuances in a situation and to imagine 15 or 20 solutions to a situation where most people may only see one or two.” This enabled him to share his faith boldly in diverse settings, from Wall Street to Windsor Castle and even in front of communist leaders in the Soviet Union and China. Like Pollard, focusing on the basics of spiritual disciplines as well as making ourselves accountable to trustworthy individuals can be foundational for us.

Bill Pollard also serves as an inspiring example in being attentive to family responsibilities. According to his son, Charles (Chip), “*Mom was his constant confidant, gracious counselor, gentle corrector, and loving partner.*” Pollard creatively



Bill Pollard

integrated business and ministry trips with opportunities to disciple his children and grandchildren, turning family vacations into “classrooms” for imparting principles of faith. Prioritising family time requires intentionality and creativity.

Lastly, Bill Pollard excelled in his commitment to professional excellence and staying in touch with current technology and industry innovations. He was dedicated to lifelong learning and surrounded himself with mentors such as Peter Drucker and peers such as Brian Griffiths who challenged and held him accountable. Achieving professional excellence resulted from commitment, determination, creativity, and accountability.

A Commitment to Business Excellence

Some individuals start their own companies, while others serve as intrapreneurs, supporting someone else's vision. Many are faithful managers in firms, not-for-profits, or governmental organisations. Regardless of our role, I believe we are called to be God's “*gardeners*”, multiplying his creation through our efforts, which entails delivering superior products and services for our customers, providing well-paying jobs for our employees, generating above-average returns for investors, contributing taxes to our governments, and supporting charitable endeavours.

ServiceMaster, under Bill Pollard's stewardship, is a prime example of business excellence. The company served 10 million customers worldwide and maintained positive quarterly earnings for 26 consecutive years. It is in the business of residential and commercial services with a focus on property maintenance, disaster restoration, cleaning, and moving. Its guiding principles were:

- To honour God in all we do.
- To help people develop.
- To pursue excellence.
- To grow profitably.

Businesses like ServiceMaster contribute to their sectorial ecosystem. This can involve participating in industry associations, promoting values, supporting educational initiatives, and advising governments. Given the rapid pace of technological change, it is surely crucial for Christian organisations to engage in shaping these developments. Bill Pollard and ServiceMaster exemplified this commitment by supporting Peter Drucker's work and collaborating with various associations and universities, ensuring they remained relevant and influential in their field.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Bill and his generation navigated a landscape marked by globalisation and communism. Today, we are witnessing a disruption of globalisation, a trend toward reshoring manufacturing, and the challenges posed by artificial intelligence in the hands of totalitarian regimes. I believe Christian businesspeople today are called to bring a biblical perspective to these contemporary challenges. How will we address the implications of AI? How do we respond to high tariffs and immigration issues? What contributions will we make to education? How will we uphold our values?

A Commitment to Strategic Ministry

While secular businesspeople may pursue economic activities for personal gain—such as higher pay or social status—Christian businesspeople like Bill Pollard work from a higher calling, just as much as pastors, missionaries, or social workers. Our areas of focus could include local churches, Christian education, evangelistic outreach, and international humanitarian efforts.

The local church can be the foundation of our ministries. However, like our families, it may seem challenging. Some perceive the church as wasteful or hypocritical, or they may struggle with difficult members. Yet, just as our families shape our character, so I believe the church tests and refines us. Bill Pollard's commitment to his local church, Christ Church of Wheaton, served as the foundation for his ministry, whether teaching Sunday school, serving on the elder board or hosting students and missionaries.

Jesus commanded all Christians to “go make disciples.” Christian institutions of higher education play a vital role in this mission and are excellent settings for Christian businesspeople to serve. During his career, Bill Pollard was heavily involved with a number of Christian universities and institutes throughout the world. He recognised that businesspeople have unique opportunities to share the Gospel in places like boardrooms and conferences. People who might never enter a church are often receptive to the message from a Christian leader in their field. Pollard's success with ServiceMaster allowed him to speak to communist leaders in both China and the Soviet Union, showcasing how

business can serve as a platform for evangelism.

Finally, I suggest that a crucial aspect of ministry for Christian businesspeople is engaging in international humanitarian efforts. With the global population projected to reach 10 billion, many will be born into poverty. The development models of the past are fading, presenting a unique opportunity for Christian businesspeople to create well-paid jobs in developing regions. After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Bill and his associates established the Integra Network of Microfinancing and initiated the Griffith School of Management with Emanuel University of Oradea in Romania, demonstrating how business can be a force for good.

In navigating the complexities of today's business landscape, the life of Bill Pollard serves as a beacon of inspiration for contemporary Christian businesspeople. His commitment to spiritual, personal, and professional excellence exemplifies how we can honour God while succeeding in our careers. If we prioritise our spiritual well-being, nurture family relationships, and pursue continuous professional development, I believe we align our business practices with our faith. Moreover, Pollard's dedication to service—both within the church and the wider community—highlights the vital role we play as stewards of God's creation. As we face modern challenges such as technological disruption and economic volatility, Bill Pollard provides an impressive example of integrating our faith into our professional lives. Such a holistic approach could enrich our personal journey and also allow us to impact our communities positively. 🙏

1. Acts 13:36



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