

PRIORITIES

The June 12th issue of FORTUNE in 1995 announced top management changes at Sony in Japan. The company's senior officer said: "(Nobuyuki) Idei's job responsibilities (as President) boil down to one priority. 'Our biggest asset is four letters: Sony. It's not so much our buildings or our engineers or our factories, but our name. Idei-san will have to do things his own way, of course, but a new president must above all else preserve and build our reputation because that determines the value of the company in the 21st century. ... If Idei-san can't do that, I'll just have to fire him.'"

Referring to the co-author of The Myth of Excellence, on August 16, 2001, Toronto's *Globe and Mail* said, "Mr. (Fred) Crawford said where retailers often go wrong is in not recognizing and concentrating on one or two core strengths. All consumer transactions can be reduced to five elements, he said -- price, product, service, access and experience."

And Kenneth Strachen of Latin American Mission writes: "The success of any movement is in direct proportion to its ability to mobilize its entire resources, money, manpower and influence toward one common objective."

One four-letter brand, two core strengths, or one common objective -- they all boil down to one word: PRIORITIES.

Certain things, we're told, must take precedence or preeminence over all others due to their overriding importance. Ergo, priority mail, preferred customers, core competencies, red carpet service....

Some say we need balance in our lives -- work less, play more, eat less, exercise more. But if 40 hours of work is good, 60 is better. If three shots of espresso is good, jet fuel is best! With *options overload* today, we're drowning in choices. Patrick Morley writes in *The Man In The Mirror*, "To have any control

over our lives whatsoever, we must decide in advance what we will give our lives to.”

He adds, “Most men have not settled the issue of what their priorities should be. Among those who DO know, too few LIVE according to those priorities.”

So, here’s tonight’s **BIG QUESTION**:

“What are your top three priorities, and why? And grade yourself on how you’re handling each of them.”

(DISCUSSION)

If God is the Supreme Being, the Creator who made us and everything else, the One to whom each of us is accountable, doesn’t it follow that He has some purpose, some priorities He wants us to know and live by?

In *The Man In The Mirror* Morley asks, “What is important to God? The answer reveals what our priorities ought to be. Priorities help us narrow our focus. What are God’s priorities for a man’s life? ... Simply stated, God wants us to live by Biblical priorities, to be Biblical (not cultural) Christians.”

“If the Bible is clear on anything, it is clear on the subject of our top priority. One day (a Pharisee) an expert in the law of God tested Christ with a question: ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy. He said, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength’ (Matthew 22:35-37).”

QUESTION: How would you look while loving God with all your heart (will), soul (mind) and strength (body)?

Jesus continued his answer to that Pharisee: “A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the

other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:39-40).

QUESTION: How could Jesus say that loving others was as important as super-sizing our love for God?

QUESTION: Aside from making her husband very mad, how would your life change if you loved your neighbor as much as you love yourself?

Long before Christ’s birth, the old Jewish prophet Micah spoke about priorities: “The Lord has already told you what is good, and this is what He requires: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8).

QUESTION: What revisions would you make, if any, to begin making a priority of (a) doing what’s right, (b) loving mercy and (c) walking humbly with God?

While on earth Jesus told His disciples, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me. If you try to keep your life for yourself, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me, you will find true life. And how do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul in the process? Is anything worth more than your soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)

QUESTION: What point is Jesus making here?

In Paul’s letter to believers in Rome, he relays this message from God: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

Earlier, John the Baptist, Jesus’ hairy advance guy, declared about Jesus, “Those who believe him discover that God is true. For he is sent by God. He speaks God’s words, for God’s Spirit is upon him without measure or limit. The Father loves his Son, and he has given him authority over everything. And all who

believe in God's Son have eternal life. Those who don't obey the Son will never experience eternal life, but the wrath of God remains upon them" (John 3:33-36).

QUESTION: How could believing in God precede discovering that He is true?

QUESTION: What priority is John suggesting here?

Aside from Christ, few have shaped history as positively as has Paul, a man whose priority was clear:

"... I am still not all I should be, but I am focusing all my energies on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven. I hope all of you who are mature Christians will agree on these things. If you disagree on some point, I believe God will make it plain to you. But we must be sure to obey the truth we have learned already" (Philippians 3:13-16).

*** *The Man In The Mirror*, Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., Brentwood, TN, 1989**

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