

THE CHRIST CENTERED COMPANY

DARREN SHEARER

A generally accepted definition of a mature company is one that is “well-established in its industry with a well-known product and loyal customer following.”¹ Yet, when a Christian business leader (or influencer) stands before God one day, the Almighty is likely not going to ask, “What percentage of the market did you control?,” “How many employees did you have?” or “What was your gross (or net) revenue?” God’s question will perhaps sound more like this: “By the standard of my Word, how mature was the company I entrusted to you?”

To help individuals and organizations become mature in a biblical sense, God’s Word teaches His people to be faithful managers of everything that He has entrusted to them. God has called his people to “be holy in all respects” (1 Pet.

1:15), to “please Him in all respects” (Col. 1:10), to “grow up in all aspects” (Eph. 4:15), and ultimately, to “prosper in all respects” (3 John 2).

If a Christian business influencer truly heeded the biblical counsel to “acknowledge Him in all your ways” concerning the company (Prov. 3:6), seeking to discover and apply His will in every aspect of the company, how might that company’s habits, culture, and impact look different?

In this article, I will suggest that individuals and organizations become more mature as they become increasingly Christ-centered. I will define the term Christ-centered company, offer an assessment tool for gauging the extent to which a company can be considered “Christ-centered,” present findings from the companies that have already taken the assessment, and address possible objections concerning the

idea of cultivating a Christ-centered company. More in-depth discussions of these issues can be found in Shearer.²

▶ CHRIST CENTERED COMPANY DEFINED

Indeed, a for-profit company cannot be considered as “born-again,” for that unspeakable joy and privilege is reserved for human beings who possess a spirit, soul, and body. However, we often refer to certain gospel-promoting charities and church institutions as “Christian” organizations despite that not every person involved in or eagerly receiving the services of these entities is truly a born-again follower of Christ. In the same way for-profit businesses may also be labeled as “Christian.” Theologically, it is perhaps more consistent to use “Christ-centered” instead of “Christian” to describe a business or, for that matter, any organization.

A Christ-centered company is a “value-making, profit-producing, and law-abiding organization dedicated to spreading the awareness of God’s glory through exhibiting Christ-centered, biblical business habits.” Companies cannot be a sustaining business if they are not creating value, producing profit, and abiding by the laws of the land.

Being “dedicated to spreading the awareness of God’s glory” is the key differentiator between a Christ-centered com-

pany and those that are centered on something (e.g., profit maximization, etc.) or someone else (e.g., the owner’s ego, etc.). This dedication requires that Christian business influencers recognize and seek to reveal the glory of

God through every aspect of the business they manage. This is what it means to be “acknowledging Him in all our ways” (Prov. 3:6).

In the definition above, what is meant by God’s “glory?” The writer of Hebrews said, “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being” (Heb. 1:3). Jesus Christ is the glory of God. Thus, Habakkuk 2:14 can be interpreted as follows:

A Christ-centered company is a “value-making, profit-producing, and law-abiding organization dedicated to spreading the awareness of God’s glory through exhibiting Christ-centered, biblical business habits.”

For as the waters fill the sea, the earth [including the marketplace] will be filled with an awareness of the glory of God [Jesus Christ].

In the verse above, Habakkuk has prophesied the fulfillment of the “Great Commission” Jesus entrusted to his disciples in which he charged them to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Notwithstanding their strategic significance in the primary mission of God’s people, Jesus’ mandate wasn’t merely to “go and make profit,” “go and plant churches,” or “go and make a difference.” Rather, it’s to “go and make disciples.” Collectively, Jesus’ disciples are called to disciple entire groups of people. Their mission is to reveal Jesus (i.e., “the glory of God”) throughout all spheres of all cultures in all societies.

▶ CULTURE AND THE DISCIPLE-MAKING MISSION

Corporate culture “refers to the values, beliefs, and behaviors that determine how a company’s employees and management interact, perform, and handle business transactions.”³ A company’s culture is the primary thing the com-

pany is marketing. The products, services, operations, values, and policies of the company flow from that company’s culture.

Team members come and go, but the culture of the company will remain. A company’s culture will be influenced and defined by each of its team member’s behaviors for as

long as the company exists. To carry out the Great Commission by “making disciples” in the world, the company’s culture must be increasingly centered on Christ.

Culture is undergirded by the habits of a group of people. Team members’ habits shape the culture of the companies in which they work. If those habits are Christ-centered, the culture will make disciples of Jesus Christ. As this corporate dis-

ciple-making happens in a company, the company becomes increasingly Christ-centered.

In a Christ-centered company, Jesus is revealed through the beliefs, actions and habits of the leaders of the company. Ultimately, the leaders' behaviors influence the entire culture and shape the habits of the (corporate) community. When aligned with this disciple-making mission in word and deed, Christ-centered companies can be used as tools to help individuals, communities, industries, and nations recognize the glorious image and character of Jesus.

The process inevitably begins when one person of influence in a company decides to partner with God in his disciple-making mission. From the biblical perspective, this is how true leadership is defined.

▶ A PROPOSED ASSESSMENT TOOL

To aid leaders in gauging the extent to which their business conforms to the character of a Christ-Centered Company, a self-assessment tool is developed which refers to thirty-seven habits most aligned with the definition. Shearer offered detailed Scriptural support and real-world best practices from Christ-centered companies with respect to each of these habits.⁴

The tool has been developed as a resource for Christian business influencers (free access at www.TheologyofBusiness.com/CCC). It evolves from the cumulative experience of more than a decade of research on Christ-centered companies, best practices of biblical integration in business, and interviews of hundreds of Christian business influencers, thought leaders, and academic researchers active in the faith integration movement. The author has also implemented these habits personally to varying degrees as an entrepreneur owning and operating multiple small businesses since 2013. For influencers engaging with intention their business as platforms to reveal God's glory within their sphere of influence, the habits enumerated in this tool comprise the most consistently applied best practices.

Each habit in this assessment tool is categorized into one of the following seven parts:

1. Corporate Purpose and Culture
2. Marketing, Sales, and Customer Care
3. Accounting and Accountability
4. People Management

5. Business Law and Conflict
6. Risk Management
7. Philanthropy

The assessment tool was applied to 106 companies where the leaders have publicly indicated that their companies exist in alignment with God's purposes. Users of the assessment were asked to rate their companies—and, in a few cases, themselves, as influencers within their companies—on a scale of one to five. A score of five indicates that the person and/or the company always demonstrate adherence to that particular habit. A score of one indicates the person and/or the company never demonstrate adherence to that particular habit. The summary result and the ranking on the list of habits are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively.

▶ OBSERVATIONS

Only four "habits" were consistently rated above 4.5, which would designate the respondent as a mature, Christ-centered company. Two of these habits relate specifically to honesty in business (Habits 9 and 16). These habits may have been consistently rated higher than the others, in part, because there is more legal and regulatory accountability in the marketplace to enforce honesty-related behaviors. While we expect most law-abiding companies meet these expectations, the Christ-centered company exhibit these habits as a part of its intrinsic character. The other two "habits" (Habit 1 and Habit 25) that are rated above 4.5 present the nature of our business transactions as an act to honor the *imago Dei* ("image of God") in all stakeholders. It is what gives motive to enrich human flourishing and the collective good.

The two lowest rated "habits" (Habits 14 and 22), which both registered below 3.0 in the assessment score, are likely indicative of an aversion by leadership to the potential misallocation of scarce resources. The reluctance to provide in-house pastoral care (Habit 22) likely reflected a lack of understanding of the benefit of such services in relation to the projected cost. Company leaders may feel the firm is not responsible for the mental and emotional wellbeing of employees, or they may assume pastoral care is solely the responsibility of local church pastors and/or mental health professionals. The Scripture is clear about the need for care within a community that values the physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of its members. Paul reminds Christians

TABLE 1
CHRIST-CENTERED COMPANY ASSESSMENT
SUMMARY OF RESULTS

ITEM	RESULT
No. of respondent (firms)	106
Rank or position of assessor	Mostly Vice President level or above
Average size of company (employees)	58
Average rating across all habits	3.91 (out of 5) or 78 percent
PERCENT OF COMPANIES RATED THEMSELVES	
4.5 or higher (a mature, Christ-Centered firm)	22 percent
Between 4 and 4.5	29 percent
Between 3.5 and 4	27 percent
3.5 or lower	22 percent
Total all companies	100 percent
HABIT CONSISTENTLY RATED AS	
Highest	#16: Our company honestly reports financial information to shareholders and to the government
Lowest	# 22: Our company offers pastoral care to our employees and their families

TABLE 2
CHRIST-CENTERED COMPANY ASSESSMENT RATING BY HABIT

HABIT	CHRIST-CENTERED COMPANY HABIT (SORTED FROM HIGH TO LOW AVERAGE RATING)	AVG RTG (1-5)
16	Our company honestly reports financial information to shareholders and to the government	4.64
25	Our company treats our suppliers and contractors with respect	4.55
09	We prohibit all manipulative marketing and sales tactics while empowering our customers with the truth necessary to make wise purchasing decisions	4.53
01	As a leader of my company, I choose to work for Jesus Christ and recognize He is on the receiving end of every action taken in my company	4.51
12	Our company declines to engage in business opportunities that would violate our ethics	4.47
27	Our company compensates customers sufficiently when they have been wronged	4.41
11	Our company goes the "extra mile" for our customers	4.40
34	As an influencer of my company, I demonstrate that God is the source of everything my company needs by tithing at least 10% of my personal income to the Lord	4.29
07	Our company has clearly defined our target customer, and we focus most of our resources on reaching and serving this target customer	4.27
31	Our company is proactive about guarding our company's reputation	4.21
33	Our company maintains a conservative debt-to-equity ratio	4.20
36	Our company ensures that the needs of our team members are addressed before giving profits away outside the company	4.19
20	Our company pays our workers at least a livable wage, pays them on time, and pays most of them above market rate for their positions	4.18
08	We advertise and price our products and services based on the positive outcomes our customers say they experience from them, and we encourage our customers to share those positive outcomes with others	4.14
35	We keep our corporate charitable giving Christ-centered rather than giving as a means of branding, advertising, or public relations	4.12
24	Our team members are encouraged and publicly honored much more than they are criticized	4.10
32	Our company has a diversified product/service offering and a commitment to innovate so we can succeed in changing environments	4.10
10	Our company constantly improves our customer communications to minimize our customers' uncertainty and stress related to their purchases	4.03
26	Our team members pursue peace when conflicts arise, confront directly when there's an offense, and have zero tolerance for gossip	4.01

HABIT	CHRIST-CENTERED COMPANY HABIT (SORTED FROM HIGH TO LOW AVERAGE RATING)	AVG RTG (1-5)
28	Our team members are quick to forgive those who have wronged us	3.98
21	All our team members trust each other and assume the best about each other	3.97
02	As a leader of my company, I invite God's presence, power, and wisdom into my company through praying continually, worshiping the Lord, and meditating on Scripture	3.95
23	Our company prioritizes rest and family time for workers by limiting work hours, ensuring every worker gets at least one day off from work each week, and providing adequate paid time off from work	3.94
06	Our company focuses on maximizing/fulfilling our current production capacity rather than focusing obsessively on growth and expansion	3.85
04	Our company has a clear and Christ-centered set of core values to express our core purpose that is well-understood by our company's team members	3.79
17	Our company hires, promotes, and demotes team members based on a thorough assessment of their core values and ability in relation to God's values as expressed in the Bible	3.68
19	Our company's workers are expected and encouraged to make decisions at the lowest level possible	3.66
03	Our company has a clear and Christ-centered statement of purpose that explains why we exist as a company and is well-understood by our company's team members	3.55
13	Our company has clearly defined indicators for evaluating the health and performance of our company	3.54
05	Our company pursues its mission with clear, noble, and measurable goals that are pleasing to God plus a plan of action to accomplish each of those goals	3.54
15	As a leader of my company, I choose to be accountable to a peer advisory group of other Christian business leaders concerning decisions affecting our company	3.53
18	Our team members understand what offenses will result in the termination of their employment if found guilty through due process	3.52
29	If/when legal disputes are encountered and cannot be resolved between the opposing parties, we hire a reliable Christian mediator and/or arbitrator to assist in resolving the matter	3.19
30	Our company has conducted a thorough assessment of our company's risk exposure	3.05
37	Our company operates a vocational training program for those who need first-chance or second-chance job experience and mentorship	3.05
14	We quickly establish deadlines by which underperforming areas of our company must either start producing fruit or have our company's God-given resources withheld from them	2.86
22	Our company offers pastoral care to our employees and their families	2.72

to “carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

For Habit 14, leaders may be unwilling to abandon an initiative due to what is commonly known as the “sunk cost” effect (i.e., an unwillingness to give up an endeavor as a result of previously invested resources or ongoing commitment) or they may choose to be more forgiving if they suspect unexpected intervening circumstances in causing the underperformance. In either case as a good steward of God’s resources a leader needs to discern proper priority of allocating scarce resources so as to maximize the award-to-risk ratio. This habit speaks to the faithfulness of stewardship and is important for productivity in God’s economy.

▶ POSSIBLE OBJECTIONS

For truly purpose-driven Christian business leaders the Christ-Centered Company is a worthy goal for life’s mission. The assessment tool offers a useful metric for gauging progress towards this goal. There are, however, well-meaning Christian business influencers who harbor legitimate concerns regarding the employment of such a tool. In the following paragraphs I will offer a response to some of these common concerns. The goal is to dispel doubts about partnering with the Holy Spirit to transform one’s own company into one that is Christ-centered.

1. “MOST OF OUR TEAM MEMBERS AND CUSTOMERS AREN’T CHRISTIANS”

In today’s post-Christian society, it is inevitable that the typical company’s team members and customers aren’t followers of Jesus Christ. They may consider God as fictitious, irrelevant, and/or counterproductive to their lives. There have been enough discrimination lawsuits filed against Christian-influenced companies to strike fear in the hearts of anyone seeking to use a for-profit company as a platform for evangelizing or simply honoring God in any observable way.

Fortunately, a Christian business influencer can work toward implementing all the indicated habits across the company without publicly announcing the intention of transforming the organization into a Christ-centered company. In fact, it’s perhaps more effective and winsome not to take that publicity approach.

A Christ-Centered business does not need to put a Christian fish or cross on the company’s logo to be identified as such. Verbally announcing such a commitment at the out-

set does not facilitate, and in fact could be counterproductive to, the effort. A shrewd and discerning approach could just be a systematic yet unadvertised implementation of the Christ-centered company habits. There is tremendous power in simply applying God’s Word in the process of stewarding what God has entrusted to us.

The list of the habits in the assessment tool, if presented to team members without being explicitly labeled as biblically informed, would for the most part be the unlikely cause of any objections. The exceptions are the few where “God,” “Jesus,” “Christian,” or “Bible” is mentioned, but then perhaps these are less of a surprise if the leader(s) is known to be a person of the Christian faith. As the habits are implemented and incorporated into the culture, stakeholders by and large will likely appreciate the effort and the intention regardless of their faith orientation.

The Christian faith might even be illegal where a Christ-centered company operates. Again, discernment calls for a non-explicit approach to cultivating these habits and a Christ-centered culture. Just as the preponderance of history witnessed to the faithfulness of God, so His blessings will prosper (spiritually or materially or both) all who choose to make it a central mission to honor Him.

2. “MY BUSINESS PARTNER ISN’T A CHRISTIAN”

If one’s business partner is truly against the commitment to apply the Christ-centered company habits, it’s likely that the Christian business partner is “unequally yoked with an unbeliever” (2 Cor. 6:14). It might be time to part ways.

If the business partner is not actively resisting efforts to apply these habits, it would be better to assume, as Jesus said, “Whoever is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:40). A non-believing business partner’s lack of devotion to God ought not to impede the work God wants to do in and through the company. This could be a great opportunity to show one’s business partner that God knows and cares more about the success and health of the company than anyone.

3. “I’M NEITHER THE OWNER NOR THE CO-OWNER OF THE COMPANY”

For the most part, it’s easier to apply these habits when the implementer is the company’s sole owner. However, not being in a top position of leadership does not excuse the Christian leader from shirking the responsibility to influence positive change for the glory of God. Every employee has some degree of influence in the company. For this reason, I

generally refer to the implementer as an “influencer,” so that we are not speaking only of top leadership in this context. Even an entry-level employee has the God-given authority and responsibility to pray for the company, advocate for positive changes, and demonstrate directly or indirectly the power of these habits to their superiors. A faithful and competent Christian employee is a much sought after asset in most firms. Their influence in and ultimate contribution to the success of the company cannot be understated. It would not please God if the employee does not leverage his or her influence when it is possible to help transform the company into one that honors Him.

4. “MY COMPANY IS TOO SMALL TO DO ALL THESE THINGS”

In God’s Kingdom there is no community that is too small for influence. The Christian church emerged as the greatest spiritual movement in history from a tiny group of believers. Individual talents may not be replicable, but faith is infinitely scalable. Every habit in the assessment tool is equally applicable to a startup or a large corporate entity. Most if not all of these behaviors improve processes and outcome independent of size limitations. With that said, growth (or maturing) in each habit is a long-term proposition that requires frequent recalibration in order to stay on track. Like the maturing in our faith, perseverance and learning from the process are necessary ingredients to success. In the end, the commitment to the process itself, and the willingness to surrender ultimate control of their companies to the Holy Spirit, constitute the essence of what it means to cultivate a Christ-centered company.

► CONCLUSIONS

At a pivotal moment in Israel’s history, God and God’s prophet (Elijah) were put to the test. The question in everyone’s mind that day was this: Is the God of Israel real and more powerful than all other gods? Only the one true God

could answer by sending fire to set the altar ablaze.

The prophets of Baal were so convinced of their god’s superiority that they “cried out with a loud voice” and began cutting themselves “with swords and lances until blood gushed out on them” to demonstrate their conviction, hoping their god would display his power by igniting their altar (1 Kgs. 18:28). Elijah would have none of this. He vanquished the false prophets just by invoking the name of God.

Today, a similar culture war is waging in the world. Business as an institution is at the center of it. Given that more than 85 percent of working-age people spend much of their waking hours in the workplace, there is no doubt the marketplace is the battleground for competing ideologies that would steer our culture in a particular direction. The world of commerce profoundly influences workers and other stakeholders, and by extension their network of families, communities, and whole nations.

The prophets of Baal were convinced that their self-obsessed, godless value systems reigned supreme in all human institutions, including the marketplace. They mutilated themselves with values and practices that suggest God is dead or irrelevant. Unfortunately, many professing Christians also conduct themselves, through their business practices, in this manner.

Many marketplace Christians acknowledge that: “You don’t have to leave the business world to do work that glorifies God”; “God cares about business”; or “The Bible is the best handbook for business.” The proof of these beliefs lies in the willingness to dedicate the practice of business to the one true God and plead with Him to send the fire to sanctify the sacrifice. This is the meaning of a Christ-Centered business. As God has defeated the Baal prophets in Elijah’s days, so He will defeat the detractors today if we are committed to redeem business for the glory of the Creator.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DARREN SHEARER is the founder and CEO of High Bridge Books & Media, founder of the Theology of Business Institute, host of HCU's Christianity in Business Podcast, and author of five books including *The Christ-Centered Company*, *The Marketplace Christian*, and *Marketing Like Jesus*. A former Captain in the US Air Force, Darren earned the United States Air Force Commendation Medal for his meritorious service in Kuwait during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Darren holds a M.A. in Practical Theology from Regent University (Virginia Beach, VA) and an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Management from Pace University (New York, NY). Visit Darren at www.TheologyofBusiness.com.

NOTES

- ¹ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/mature-firm.asp>
- ² Darren Shearer, *The Christ-Centered Company: 37 Biblical Business Habits to Build a Thriving Company That Honors God and Blesses the World* (High Bridge Books, May 2023).
- ³ <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/corporate-culture.asp>
- ⁴ Shearer, *The Christ-Centered Company*.