

For many centuries, doing business was mostly pretty straightforward. Butcher, baker, candlestick maker. You often just did what your family did for generations in your local area, typically learning the craft or the skill that passed from one generation to the next. Sure, major disruption could happen in your vocation, but that often was political when one king's regime replaced another or maybe a very radical weather event happened. You just kept doing what you always had, farming or baking or blacksmithing. Economies were usually local and quite basic and rudimentary, with relatively little complexity as compared to the present day. And, for sure, hardly anybody but kings actually got to live like kings!

Crazy how much that has changed in the lives of several billion people around the world! An ordinary family in America can take their wages, load up at a Walmart Supercenter every week, and live like the kings of several hundred years ago. Fresh fruit and vegetables. Seafood. Chocolate of many varieties. Spices. Meats. Affordable clothing. Lots of kinds of chocolate. Amusements packaged to last for years. Beauty products. Electronics. And did I mention chocolate? Most of this was not even available to those kings! Oh, and how about deodorant...aren't you glad to be living in this era? But why all this great, inexpensive availability? Well, we can identify four specific, meaningful enablers. Let's talk about those.

The first enabler is *invention*. That has really ramped up the last couple of centuries. Let's look at an example. In the U.S. in the 1830s, Cyrus McCormick is credited for inventing the McCormick mechanical reaper, a machine drawn by horses that significantly changed how grain reaping was done....moving from lots of labor to far less human labor required. Nowadays, one person drives what's called a "combine" at harvesttime...that is, the machine "combines" reaping, threshing, gathering and winnowing—processes you likely don't even know or care about, as long as some tasty bread shows up in your Instacart delivery.

And that's the point—it's inventions like the McCormick reaper and the combine that have fostered a mass exodus of laborers out of agriculture. About 50% of Americans were directly involved in agriculture in the 1870s as compared to 1% to 2% today. Wow, that's disruption that has helped create great prosperity, as the efficiencies of modern agricultural inventions make meeting basic food needs to now be a much smaller percentage of a typical person's budget or work effort.

A second key enabler is the *integration of technological innovation*. Now integration of tech is not quite as concrete as individual inventions like the reaper, but it's *very* powerful—because the world of technology functions like an integrated organism of multiple dimensions. Really, do you want to do without the internet, cell towers, or a connected mobile phone? Yeah, you get it...just how much different is your life now that it would be without recent major technological innovations and change! Nowadays, we can take an Uber ride to the airport that we scheduled on our mobile phone, fly across the country in a few hours while we watch movies on our tablet. Or we can yearn to go back in time and take our scythes to cut the wheat and earn some hard callouses on our hands. Again. "Ah, *the good old days...*"

A third enabler is *free markets*. And free markets are very key. It's deceptively easy to take generally free markets for granted in the golden era of several decades starting in the 1950s, at least for countries like the United States and Canada; key players in Asia like Japan and Hong Kong; and a number of non-Communist countries in Western Europe and the United Kingdom. The consistently increasing betterment of citizens in those mostly free-market countries came to dwarf the standard of living for both the Communist and Socialist nations and the personal fiefdoms of dictators in sadly destitute countries around the world. Look up the recent history of poor Venezuela, once the proud leader in living standards in South America, now under the boot heel of a socialist dictatorship that has created economic devastation.

Astute communicators about free-market economics during these decades like the pioneering Friedrich Hayek, the charming Milton Friedman, the folksy Walter Williams, the persuasive Diedre McCloskey, and the legendary Thomas Sowell all have made eloquent cases for the amazing betterment fostered by

motivated people participating in free markets. Broadly free markets and free trade around the world are a relatively new phenomenon, especially when powered by great inventions and exceptional technology.

And, now, the most important enabler for all that to come together fruitfully—a *relentless pursuit of sincere, great stewardship* on behalf of those to be served. Sure, let's start by acknowledging there are plenty of immoral people who use invention, technological change, and free markets to screw people over. No surprise there for the astute Christian...bad motives turned into bad actions are simply sin. Free markets don't automatically mean that everyone acts morally.

But free markets are a key vocational framework by which billions of people *can and do* act morally on behalf of many others, especially when there are few unnecessary restrictions. You see, markets that are *not* free due to onerous government policies and practices lend themselves to structural corruptions of all sorts and restrict the best, fullest stewardship between two willing parties who are competently making and happily consuming goods and services, like local honey and denim jeans and dental services.

Now, let's be clear here. For millennia, people of goodwill certainly have been excellent stewards for others in eras with few inventions and virtually no technology...and doing that in highly restricted markets. Yes, good children have always taken care of parents, good villagers have served their next-door neighbors well, good business people have served their customers with distinction. But in these bygone eras, their productivity, their fruitfulness, their output, their impact was *inherently* quite limited compared to current times and places that enjoy generally free markets.

So here's the other side of the coin, the opportunity, the enablement! While people of goodwill indeed have been excellent stewards for others in eras with few inventions and virtually no technology, and doing that in highly restricted markets, we can have much better soil for the most amazing stewardship. Our task as Christians is to be the very best stewards for the people we can impact in all our spheres in life—our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces. And that means efficiently and morally using every invention, every tech innovation, and every marketplace opportunity to be great stewards of our relationships—with God, with fellow believers, and with unbelievers. In every generational baton-pass, we must work to diligently teach others the huge value of competent stewardship...rejecting the defeatist and unfruitful ideologies of victimhood that scapegoat others.

Yes, the enablers in this era of amazing inventions, incredible technological integration, and generally free markets we find in some countries are clear to those who have an ear. But if we Christians are not active as good stewards of the people we are called to serve because we neglect leveraging these amazing tools, others will step in and do it all better instead. And then we will have lost the opportunity of Christians being the most competent, up-to-date, fruitful producers of all the marketplace participants. Or are you willing yourself to concede that unbelievers are better stewards than we are?

Make no mistake, today's marketplace can be tough sledding. But compared to what...working the same rice paddy for decades? These four enablers foster impressive impact by people who engage the challenge—companies like Apple and Amazon touch countless millions of lives because they take up the stewardship challenge of inventions, technological and process mastery, and free-market opportunities.

Here's the key point. The dynamics of these four enablers are much different and much more challenging, than, say, fifty years ago. Yes, the inventions, the tech integration, the competitive landscape are changing rapidly—but that can and should help foster your great stewardship. How exciting: Christians are called to be stewards not only of Christ's incredible gospel, but also of all of these smaller gifts and opportunities God gives in their time and place. And when we as Christians steward these modern enablers well, that stewardship is a witness for Christ in the workplace. After all, everything we do of worthiness inherently points to Jesus, who, after all, is the greatest enabler and steward the world has seen or ever will see!

A&A: Application & Action

1. Astute stewardship is the fourth enabler. When it comes to your workplace, what would you estimate to be your % effectiveness at taking advantage of inventions, integrated technology, and generally free markets to legitimately claim better stewardship than your company's competitors? What actions can you take to increase your percentages?

2. Again, astute stewardship is the fourth enabler. When it comes to the Kingdom, what would you estimate to be your % effectiveness at taking advantage of inventions, integrated technology, and generally free markets to legitimately claim better stewardship than others? What actions can you take to increase your percentages?

3. How do you specifically educate and disciple others in these key areas of leveraging the enablers? Be specific.