

In my experience, *alignment* is one of the most under-discussed dimensions of life in general and organizations in particular. No, I'm not talking about getting your car aligned! No, here, "alignment" is when two parties with different roles get into agreement or alliance. My point here is this: the people who thrive best are those who execute really strong alignments in all their roles. In fact, I have come to believe that one of the deepest joys in life happens when alignments mature and bear magnificent fruits.

Well, duh, you say, that's no surprise—pretty much everyone knows that! That may be true, but a lot of folks don't show very much fruit from that being done in all the potential dimensions of their lives. For organizational stewardship, let's take a look at alignments we should address in three key dimensions.

First, employees. In your workplace organization, do employees have alignment with leaders? Have line employees and leaders agreed to a position where each employee's skills are very well utilized? And are employees aligned with the organization's values and practices such that they are eager to serve each day? For you as an employee, is your compensation aligned with the reasonable needs of your household ...that should be your pre-alignment goal. All that can yield a deep joy and a sense of gratitude for strong alignment between the organization and its employees!

Here's a sad but often observable truth. Many Christian ministries think that an employee's deep financial sacrifice by working for a low level of compensation compared to what their skills and gifting could earn at other workplaces is a sign of spiritual maturity and sacrifice for God. In so doing, the leaders often glibly and presumptively confuse a painful sacrifice for their organization with a wonderfully fulfilling sacrifice for God. But, candidly, are the best possible employees going to be from a pool of candidates forgoing the best stewardship of their families? So, how many times have you heard leaders try to ensure a good fit by saying something like: "is this package sufficient to address your stewardship of your family's needs?"

Of course, the other side of the coin is that many aspiring workers get their so-called "needs" tied in with some rather frivolous "wants," even while they often can harbor the idea that working at a Christian organization is not at all about being accountable for personal productivity. Hey, these types of alignment-differences are exactly why true alignment matters—if the two parties don't really align from the get-go, then, seriously, Christian leaders need to take responsibility for immature approaches and revamp them!

Second, customers. Have you ever gotten crosswise with someone who provided you a product or service that was misrepresented or clearly lacking in quality? Well, if you're like me, you probably don't confront such people routinely, because so many of our transactions are small enough dollar-wise that we simply blow off the selling enterprises and never return to buy from them again! Well, now, that's exactly what I'm talking about: if your company has a nagging deficiency in understanding how your product or service offering really meets the expectations of customers, then all those customers who decide not to return to shop at your enterprise can rapidly add up to spell doom for your company.

But, beyond that small-transactions scenario, many of us have had something both bad *and* big happen with a supplier sometime, somewhere. Like part of the delivery aspects of an important wedding. Or a car purchase gone wrong. Or a vacation contract shattered by the shocking reality of showing up to see the real deal. Whether you sell pencils or Porsches, just how good is your organization's alignment with its customers? Has the organization taken great pains to communicate and manage expectations to not only avoid disappointment, but to delight customers, every day, for years?

On the other side of the coin, there is little that's more gratifying than to have a customer you have served give you fantastic feedback about your exceeding their expectations! Now, that's setting up your enterprise for return business and good word-of-mouth impact that will feed directly into opportunities to serve others! That's simply great alignment! And there's a deeply satisfying joy that comes from that.

Third, owners. Should the owners of your enterprise be pleased with the return on their investment? Well, that's a pretty easy answer if we are talking about an original owner of Apple stock or Amazon stock! Can we safely say that there was fantastic alignment between the early investors and the stewarding leaders of both of those companies? Of course!

Closer to home, the goal of every organization should be to serve its owners well. But why? Because owners have duly invested resources in the enterprise and have every rightful *stewardship* expectation *themselves* of a well-stewarded return on investment (or "ROI"). That focus is justified and proper because no organization gets started without the original resources risked by investing into the enterprise, and quite often, also without later investors who risked significant resources needed to further core progress.

This long-standing practice of expecting fruitful relationships between stewards and owners is right in line with Jesus's well-known Parable of the Talents, where Jesus teaches that the owner of the funds should presumptively assess the performance of those entrusted to invest his funds...and also, if and when one of the stewards fearfully avoided even deploying the investment, the owner actually took the originally entrusted funds away from the bad steward. So, it turns out, Jesus takes astute financial stewardship very seriously! In fact, I believe that many of the most prosperous countries in the modern era are full of Christians because they had been faithfully applying this Biblical thinking in structuring their vocational lives! And note this: properly structured, both the owners and the stewards become more prosperous—a win-win! Now that's good alignment!

And, moving to the biggest "ownership" picture of all, we now recall who owns the very Kingdom that is the focal point of the Gospel! Of course, it's the Kingdom of *God*. We Christians are to eagerly serve God and His Kingdom—that's simple gratitude for all that God has done and continues to do for us! To that point, here's the closing of the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 25:21 (ESV): "His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'" OK, so Jesus teaches that great alignment to owners—great stewardship for the master—culminates in the act of "entering into the joy of your master!" And, the amazing thing is, even when our masters are merely human, we are to "work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." (Colossians 3:23) And, if and when we are rewarded for doing so well with here-and-now compensation, we are instructed that our giving to others be joyful! "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7)

But, regrettably, we're often taught that finance is really all about owners' greed. But as we have seen, the leader of the organization, the CEO, is to be a good financial steward for the benefit of owners, customers, *and* employees! It's short-sighted leadership that simplistically emphasizes just the owners. That's because real-world owners themselves want their leaders to be great stewards of customers and employees—all of that working together for the good of all! So, great stewardship astutely allocates resources to the optimal handling and treatment of customers, employees, *and* owners—a win-win-win!

When I first fully experienced this ironclad, tri-fold structure as a turnaround executive, I had to laugh. Many critics love to position that business is all about greedy capital. But the great CEO must serve all three key groups at once—Customers, Employees, and Owners. Yes, those initials *are* "CEO!" The CEO is steward for all three simultaneously, so that *all* come out as winners. I named this performance reality "Competing Stewardships," where the CEO must create that win-win-win. You can find out more about this key reality of Competing Stewardships in my *Lasting Greatness* video series found at whitestone.org.

In the workplace, there is *nothing* more gratifying than making everybody a winner all at once: customers, employees, and owners. Don't ever let anyone tell you it's either immoral or easy to do that. But the deep joy of executing our alignments very well is the "attaboy," the "well done, good and faithful servant." Yes!

A&A: Application & Action

1. How's your workplace organization currently doing as steward for all three parties—customers, employees, and owners? Which of the three areas is your organization weakest in and has created long-term vulnerabilities to competitors? Be specific.

2. How's your church doing as steward for all three parties—customers (unbelievers), employees (believers), and the Owner (God)? How does your church measure stewardship for God (e.g., commitments to Christ, baptism, discipling, missions, programs) and how is that stewardship reported to all your church's members? Be specific.

3. In your personal roles as a leader in your family, church, and workplace, would others say you are an excellent steward of the key stewardship roles you are appointed to both by God and by your organizational leaders, as appropriate? If appropriate, relay examples—either positive or negative—that others might say about you.