



Business heroes don't tell us what to do – they show us

BUSINESS HEROES ARE ALL around us. We recognize them in the little things they do that make a big impression. They teach, mentor, and inspire us to become better people. Their example in doing little things well makes them heroes in our lives.

When I think of business heroes, three people come to mind: First, there's the company president who demonstrated that individual performance "above and beyond the call of duty" doesn't get you extra pay, just the opportunity to do it over again. Second, there's the entrepreneur who showed me how to "turn the other cheek" when dealing with an irate customer; and third, there's the sales manager who demonstrated how friendship in business can often overcome weaknesses in product or service.

But my first important lesson in business ethics came from my father. He served in the Marine Corps during World War II, and applied much of that good Marine training to my development. Marines are intensely loyal. My dad demonstrated that loyalty by giving me, his first son, the first name of his commanding officer.

Dad owned a residential heating and cooling business, and I, an impressionable

teenager, remember accompanying him on a service call. Dad examined the customer's heater to determine what was wrong, then told him, "The thermocouple is shot. We'll replace it and get your system back in order in no time."

The homeowner then asked how much Dad would charge for a new heating and cooling system. "But you don't need a new one," my dad said.

The man replied, "Well, I replace my car frequently, why shouldn't I replace my furnace?"

My dad explained that furnaces and air conditioners have fewer moving parts and are built to last much longer than a car. He assured him that buying a new system wouldn't be cost effective. And he refused to give him a price.

On the way home, I asked Dad why he wouldn't sell the man a new system. "It's not right to sell someone something they don't need," he explained. "That furnace of his will last another

15 years, and the money it would cost could be put to much better use now. He could save it for a rainy day, take his wife on vacation, or pay for his children's education."

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Whenever I tell this story, listeners often say that if a customer wants to buy something, that's his or her business, not the seller's, and that my dad was out of line in discouraging the transaction.

But imagine if many townspeople spent their money foolishly on new furnaces every year. Buying un-needed products can impoverish consumers, and also the community in which they live.



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My dad's explanation impressed on me that a good business person should not pursue every opportunity that earns a profit, only those that make good sense for *both* buyer and seller. That's the essence of "win-win." By following this regimen, Dad earned a sterling reputation that helped him attract repeat business year after year. People knew he would give them a fair deal, and they knew he wouldn't sell them something just so he could fatten his own wallet.

Pope Benedict XVI explored this idea in his apostolic letter, *Caritas in Veritate*. First, he noted that all businesses should focus on offering truly good products and services that not only help the purchaser, but improve the common good. Then he wrote, "But should profit become the exclusive goal of the enterprise, the business risks destroying true wealth and creating poverty for all concerned." My dad was able to make this idea very memorable.

Business heroes don't just tell us what to do. They demonstrate how to do it through witness of their lives.

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