

Soft Skills – Hard Skills

Key drivers for success

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Introduction

Success!? What does that have to do with Christians? The Christian life is not about success – or is it?

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:2, “... lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” and in Philippians 2:16 “, ... that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain”

The Lord Jesus tells a parable in Luke 19:12–23, “He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?”

It seems that Lord has given us gifts, skills and resources so that we might be able to “generate revenues” for him. But why do we not see “success” very often? We might think that the idea that believers uses their gifts, skills and resources to “generate revenues” for the Lord only applies to people like the apostle Paul or our brothers and sisters who have a fulltime ministry in the kingdom of God. But we do not recognize that we are all servants of our Lord. He has saved us and has left us in this world, so that we work for Him.

In this article we are going to assume that every one of us has the desire to be a successful worker for our Lord. But why does it happen that quite often we fail and do not see any success?

In companies – and our Lord speaks in this parable about something like a company – the human resource departments invest a lot of effort to figure out which attributes an employee must have, to become a successful employee, who contributes to the company’s goals. It has shown that individual personalities with all their aptitudes and capabilities (which are called soft skills) are often more important than professional qualifications. Every sector requires different skills: communication skills or teamwork, sensitivity, sociability or the gift to motivate others to reach a shared goal. In business it has shown that three soft skills are elementary and crucial, which are also crucial for the success of our “business” for the Lord:

Soft Skills – The traits

1. A specific goal – the motive is the key

Many cars have navigation systems which determine the fastest route for the driver to get to his destination. To activate the navigation system, first you must enter your desired destination. Satellites locate the position and instructions to reach this destination will be generated. The more accurate the input values are (street, house number), the closer the navigation system guides the driver to the requested place. Even when we miss a turn, the software computes a new route based on our current position. It does not matter if you take a wrong route. There is only one thing we should not forget: To enter the correct destination.

Our heart and our brain are our navigation systems in real life. It works admittedly without any data input but is difficult to reach a destination without data input. Destinations, targets or goals (in German we use the same word for these three terms) are like a compass. Goals show us the direction to go. Goals are like a signpost. The vision to reach a goal gives us the right motivation to start. And motivation (from the Latin word *movere* = to move) is, as we know, the driving force in our life, which strengthens us in our feelings and helps us to act successfully. Motivation affects our action. The motive is the key. We know it all from criminology. What is important when detectives are investigating a murder? What puts them on the right track? Yes, the answer is: Who had the strongest motive to do this crime? Therefore, our motivation is dependent on our motives, our accurate goals.

How do goals look for Christians? For example, if we pray that many people might find Christ, it might look like a goal, but it is too generic. It is like typing into the navigation system: “Where it is beautiful”. No navigation system would find such a destination. Also, we will never see the “success” of this prayer because we have nothing to measure the success against. Here a measurable goal is missing. It is different if we pray that someone in the street where we live might find Christ. Then we might have 10 potential people the Lord can work with. If we see that one of these 10 people has found Christ, we know that He has given “success” and we are able to give thanks to the Lord very specifically.

If we think about church, which goals do we have in mind? Maybe that in 10 years we still gather in the same way? The answer shows that we do not have any specific goals. If we had specific goals (For example: To talk with 10 believers from another denomination about our Christian blessings, to bring three people who are not believers to our church meetings, to start a Sunday school for children, to learn 15 new hymns) then we actually would know what to invest our efforts in. But because often we do not have any goals, not only does everything stay the same, rather we get so stuck in our routines, that we do not recognize that nothing has changed for years. Sometimes we do not even notice that everything stagnates and even is declining – because we have not defined any new goals. It is necessary, that responsible church members get together to ask the Lord: “Lord, we understand that you have given us responsibility for your church. Please show us which plans, and goals you have for your church.” I am confident the Lord will answer this prayer and will reveal His goals before our eyes and hearts.

2. Personal responsibility – no excuses

Of course, it's always the others who are wrong. Someone or something is always to blame: Our boss, the employees, the tasks, the government, the weather, the economic recession, or our parents, in other words our upbringing or our genes. That is how things are in business. And in our Christian lives? We blame our job, our family, our children and – last but not least – the brethren in our church... However, those who always blame others and miserable circumstances, take the easy way out. You shrink from your responsibility. You get an alibi; you do not have to change anything, and you do not need to put any effort into it. But consequently, you will not see any change, and everything will stay same. Excuses are convenient, popular, convenient and of course so normal. Very often they help us to maintain our reputation, which is important. "Actually, I should...", "Maybe I could...". Could and should. At the end of a life, these words can become missed chances. If I had enough money ... If I just had more time, then ... If the brothers in my church were different ... then ... if, if, if ...

"Passing the blame" is a popular game everywhere. Even the servant in the parable, which was mentioned above, who had not traded anything, had his excuses. However, that means that we put the tool away which we could use to change things. Excuses are comfortable backdoors, but also evil traps, into which we might fall ourselves. Often it is uncomfortable to take responsibility. But very often it is the only opportunity to bring about change or to start something. Stop making excuses! Take responsibility for a specific task!

The most dangerous excuses are the pious ones:

"We are living close the end times, everyone is weak, it is the time of little strength. Also, Philadelphia was characterized by having only a little strength."

Of course, we only have a little strength, but that does not mean that the Lord could not use it to do great things, if we were only willing. Gideon had very little strength. However, his strength was intentionally reduced further by God:

- His inheritance is the smallest in the whole tribe of Manasseh (Judg 6:15)
- He is the youngest in the house of his father (Judg 6:15)
- He feared his father's household and the people of his town (Judg 6:27)
- He wants to get rid of his doubts by a miracle (Judg 6:36–37)
- Even after he saw a miracle, he still had doubts (Judg 6:39)
- His army was decreased from 32,000 to 10,000 men (Judg 7:3)
- His army was decreased again from 10,000 to 300 men (Judg 7:7)
- In the beginning his weapons were trumpets, lamps and pitchers (Judg 7:16)
- He experienced envy and squabbling from the Ephraimites (Judg 8:1)
- He is exhausted (Judg 8:5)
- He does not receive any support, rather derision by his own people (Judg 6:15)

Do you know of anyone else with so little strength? This man – Gideon, the "*barley bread*" (Jud 7:13–14) – with a small army had a big victory above an army like "*grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number*" (Judg 6:5). Do you know of a larger army in the time of the Old Testament than the one described in this passage? This large army was not defeated by the powerful Samson, rather by the weak Gideon! "Little

strength” is nothing other than an excuse! It is exactly that which the Lord will use, so that we are not proud of ourselves afterwards. By the way, the story of Gideon shows us that even then there is a risk that we may become proud.

But very often we have the next excuse: *“First the Lord has to show me, that I am the right one God wants to use for this ministry”*.

Yes, of course, we should receive our ministry from the Lord, but is it not very often that he puts the ministry right before our feet and we excuse ourselves, just by saying that we are not sure if that is really our ministry. *“Do business till I come”* (Lk 19:13 NKJV). Afterwards there will be no time to do anything.

There are more excuses: *“The Holy Spirit must bring this about; I cannot do it in my own strength anyway”*.

Yes, this is also true. But when I just do nothing, the Holy Spirit is not able to use me. It is much more important that all our activities are accompanied by intensive and dependent prayer. Then, when I see the success, instead of thinking I managed it by myself, I should give thanks to the Lord for what He did through His Spirit and that He has used me.

Often changes are just annoying for us and secretly we are happy that we have these pious excuses. Many might have noticed that our hymn book does not cover all relevant topics in a suitable way and because we have sung the same songs hundreds of times, they no longer touch our hearts. Now we might want to increase the number of hymns for our church meetings, but we know it would take a lot of work before we are able to sing the new songs in our meetings. Maybe it is necessary to buy new hymn books: “O man, that would cost a lot of money, maybe we will have to compose new songs and print them; that is too much effort”. Maybe we will have to spend some time together beside our regular church meetings to learn the new songs. Because this is inconvenient for many of us, we are happy that we have some pious excuses – “We have to respect the older brothers and sisters in our church” – so that we are never going to start. And once again, we do not obey the biblical call: *“O sing unto the LORD a new song”* We just stick with the old songs, they will do.

3. Self-discipline – a key driver

Self-discipline, although it is mentioned as the last of the nine characteristics of the Fruit of the Spirit, is one of the most important factors for success in the workplace. Self-discipline is the ability, as a result of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, to control our own will, thoughts and behaviors. Only with enough self-discipline do we do everything that is needed for success; and then we do so, even if we do not feel like doing it. Steffi Graf said so aptly: “Many girls are gifted to become a professional tennis player, but only few are self-disciplined enough”. Even the apostle Paul realised that when he wrote: “Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable” (1Cor 9:24–25, NASB).

We waste our time or energy on many other things rather than staying focused on our ministry for the Lord, the church, and the Gospel. For our flesh, for our natural sensations more comfortable activities might exist. However, “no man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2Tim 2:4).

Certainly, not everyone can fight against nightly tiredness with a bucket of cold water like the Dutch Bible teacher H.L. Heijkoop, can wake up every morning at 3:30am like R.C. Chapman, can bring thousands of names before the Lord in prayer like A. Winterhoff, can remain single voluntarily like J.N. Darby or can give up accommodation and move into the most forbidding areas of this earth like many missionaries have done or currently do. But one thing is certain: Without sacrifice in our personal lives, then also the Lord will not give success.

One of the important aspects of self-discipline is to be patient – “not to give up” even when we face opposition. Everything takes time. To wait for the right moment and timing in these fast-moving times is often not considered or seen as “uncool”. To be impatient is one of the most common human weaknesses. Do something now and enjoy the result. Not even close! Success in life requires persistence and discipline. Sometimes that might not be seen from outside. Who knew that Walt Disney had to visit 302 banks for his first loan or that the German TV host Stefan Raab had to wait for two years to get green lights for his – in the eyes of the world – very successful late night show “TV total”? To be patient and self-disciplined has always been required. The path to be successful in life is not just a lift where you push a button rather a stairway you must walk up step by step. Everything takes time. This is a natural law (see Ecc 3). The apostle Paul says in 2. Timothy 2:6 “The husbandman must labour before partaking of the fruit” (JND). And many missionaries have experienced waiting for years before the first person is converted to Christ. In that way we should continue and always keep in mind that 1. Corinthians 15:58 encourages us: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord”.

Hard Skills – knowledge

The key drivers which are mentioned above are profitless in real-life without a foundation of knowledge, like a stable house needs a solid foundation. Knowledge is like light which shines into the darkness. Knowledge means to be able to distinguish between essential and unessential. Knowledge also means to be able to define the right goals. Therefore, Paul is saying to Timothy: “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim 3:14 –15).

Could he say in the same way about *us* that we have really learned from Scripture and spiritual fathers? In the first chapter of this letter Paul is saying “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (2Tim 1:13). “Keep, by the Holy Spirit which dwells in us, the good deposit entrusted” (2Tim 1:14, JND). Do you have such a picture of sound words and not just a few puzzle pieces, a good deposit which you can preserve? For example, how will you define goals for your local church if you

have no clue what God thinks about His church? How will you preach the Gospel if you have never studied at least the first part of Romans where the Spirit of God explains what the Gospel is?

The source of our strength

Above we discussed several business-related soft skills. However, when we discussed these soft skills, we did not mention the source of our strength. What makes a person take responsibility, be self-disciplined and stay focused? In the business world of course, it is all about recognition, salary increase, fame and career. Usually, these are the incentives which motivate people.

However, for a Christian it is different. The strength to work for an invisible Lord and to accomplish goals, which will not provide us any income, fame or recognition by other people while practicing strict self-discipline, taking responsibility and being proactive – this strength can only be love. The servant and coworker in the kingdom of God acts because he loves his Lord, who has died for him and has given everything for him. He also acts because he loves his brothers and sisters for whom Christ died as well. Only love leads me into a sanctified (self-disciplined) life, only love lets me “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14). “The love of God” is also “shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5).

And even if we had all the soft skills, so that we were willing to give all our possessions to feed the poor and to surrender our body to be burned and at the same time we had all the hard skills; if we had all prophecies, knew all mysteries and had all knowledge but do not have love, than all this would be profitless for us (see 1Cor 13:1–3). We want to keep in mind the period of grace is almost done; the time we have to act is very limited or like Paul describes it in 1. Corinthians 7:29 (JND): “The time is straitened”. If time was already straitened when Paul was living, how might it be today?

“Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Eph 5:14–16).

We also recommend C.H. Mackintosh’s article “The Book and the Soul”.

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