

“He said to His disciples: “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Mark 4:40

Relax... You're His Favorite!

When a storm on the Sea of Galilee threatened to swamp the boat carrying a sleeping Jesus and His disciples, Peter and his compatriots were terrified enough to wake the Lord and question His care and concern for them. Although Jesus quickly stilled the winds and waves with a brief command, the main lesson in Mark's recounting of this history isn't about the ease with which our Creator commands the weather and is sovereign over all worldly circumstances. Instead, it's that we can see ourselves mirrored in the fear and faithlessness of the disciples when facing the storms and trials of life... situations we don't understand or control. Jesus, the most powerful force in the universe, is the Lord over all, including the storms of life and business! No matter what difficulties we face at home, at work, or in the world, He is our rest, our peace, our comfort, our victory, and our glorious eternal future.

Unlike the disciples at this point in the gospel story, as believers we now have God's revealed Truth and the indwelling presence of His Spirit to guide us. And we still forget that our infinitely powerful, loving, and trustworthy God promises *“in all things”* to work for *“the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose”* (Ro 8:28). If we truly 'get' that His power, wisdom, and love are boundless, we can be comfortable and confident enough to serve others, even in the midst of personal suffering and serious business challenges, knowing both that He has reasons we can't understand and that He ultimately doesn't waste *any* of our trials! Elizabeth Elliot, wife of martyred missionary Jim Elliot, said:

“Since He is God, He is worthy of my worship and my service. I will find rest nowhere else but His will, and that is necessarily, infinitely, immeasurably, unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what He is up to.”

Countless C12 member testimonies over the years bear this out, as our Lord uses life-threatening illnesses, personal failures, economic recessions, and other storms to refine us and draw us into greater intimacy and dependence in our eternal relationship with Him. God is the perfect Father. He loves those of us in Christ with a perfect unconditional, one-on-one love, taking pleasure in having conceived and redeemed us, and enjoying deeply personal fellowship with us (Ps 149:4). He sovereignly plans our earthly 'curriculum' (Is 25:1, Eph 2:10); teaches, inspires, and uses us along the way (Ps 32:8, Ps 139:15-17, 1Cor 2:14, Eph 4:1-16, 2Tim 3:16, 1Jn 2:27); and yearns to draw us into the unfathomable love and eternal unity He has enjoyed forever (Eccl 3:11, Jn 17, Eph 3:17-19, 4:13).

In a culture that mistakenly characterizes Christianity as trite rules trumpeted by those whose faith 'walk' doesn't match their talk, what happens when we *actually* live and lead amidst the storms of life as the deeply loved sons and daughters of the King of the Universe? How might this impact those in our sphere of influence? Can you share a personal example?

MONTHLY TAKE-AWAYS

	Devotion	Working On My Business	Working On My Ministry	Core Presentation	General Discussion
What interesting new <i>THINKING</i> surfaced from our topic and discussion?					
Based on this answer, what are the most <i>CRITICAL ISSUES</i> facing me, my team, the organization?					
What is my biggest <i>CHALLENGE</i> in dealing with these issues?					
What are the <i>OPPORTUNITIES?</i>					
What <i>ACTION STEPS</i> can I take now, short and long term?					

Creating a Customer-Driven Team

You've probably heard the well-worn expression, "*Customer service isn't a department... it's an attitude.*" Actually, superb customer service is *more* than an attitude. It's the result of intentional listening, planning, team focus, targeted processes, and on-going reinforcement. Delivering great service to our customers involves routinely meeting or exceeding expectations in our interactions and in the delivery of our goods and services. This encompasses such service dimensions as the quality of our personal 'touches' with each customer; the precision, consistency and responsiveness of our processes; and the perceived value of our offerings (i.e., benefits received for the price paid, where 'price' isn't always just financial!). Today, we hope to begin a discussion beneficial to all C12 members, no matter the type or size of business, which will continue over the next two months.

Think about your many recent interactions with organizations providing services of all kinds: car dealers, grocers, retailers, dry cleaners, computer technicians, cable companies, banks, county government, etc. When was the last time you were 'swept off your feet' by surprisingly responsive and expert service? Although many try to portray customer service as a highly complex topic, it really boils down to understanding the needs of our target customers and consistently satisfying them in a way that exceeds their expectations. As retailer James C. Penney once said, "*It is the service we are **not** obliged to give that people value most.*"

Reviewing the Fundamentals

The stakes are high. We not only attract new customers with excellent service, we grow faster by retaining a higher percentage of previous clients since superb service results in loyalty, repeat purchases, and positive referrals. We've discussed the drivers of such growth in various C12 segments over the years.¹ A few compelling facts² underscore the importance of performing well in the customer service dimension:

- Improved service generates greater sales and a basis for more profitable customer relationships (financially *and* relationally), *no matter* our current cost position, the state of the economy/industry, or competition. The fact is that our current market share is generally *miniscule* compared to what's available!
- From a global perspective, companies in higher cost western countries *must* provide superior service in order to be perceived as an attractive value.
- Less than a third of defecting clients leave us for better or cheaper solutions. Two thirds take their business elsewhere due to a disappointing customer service experience.
- For every dissatisfied customer who stops to complain, 26 others 'stuff it' and 90+% take their future business elsewhere. These 'detractors' usually share their frustration with many others, especially via social media and web-based ratings.
- On the other hand, those who are highly satisfied by our service are likely to become 'promoters' and generate positive referrals that often produce incremental sales.
- Initially failing to satisfy customers is often fixable. A quick and satisfying response to customer complaints retains 85% of these clients, often cementing a new relationship. Remember, it costs 5-6X more to win a new customer than to retain an existing one!

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- Still, nearly 60% of small-to-mid-sized companies *fail* to systematically track how they're doing through their customer's eyes by objectively tracking customer satisfaction!

To thrive in an increasingly competitive business environment requires excellence in satisfying customer needs. Some firms have learned to do this well and we can benefit by studying them. It's also true that our goal of honoring Christ in the marketplace is enhanced as we 'go the extra mile' (Mt 5:41) in pleasing our customers.

Before launching in 1989, Toyota's Lexus division studied customer service leaders like Ritz-Carlton Hotels and Nordstrom. They coupled what they learned with Toyota's well-established discipline of aligning team efforts to the "voice of the customer" while minimizing waste and delays. Entering a U.S. luxury market already loaded with long-established brands such as Cadillac, Lincoln, Mercedes-Benz, and BMW, Lexus became the top-selling nameplate within a decade, a position it still enjoys. By basing its product and service efforts on a clear team mission – "*The Pursuit of Perfection*" – Lexus' success was fueled by setting new standards for initial vehicle quality, customer satisfaction, and sales/service 'process' satisfaction.³

The Lexus example may seem farfetched, given Toyota's global scale, so let's look at two very simple 'local' examples to consider *our* current standing in the eyes of *our* customers:

- **Prompt but Clueless** At an attractive mid-priced restaurant that's part of a well-known chain, the waitress enthusiastically greeted her party of three by interrupting their conversation to introduce herself and explain her intention to serve them well. They were in the middle of an on-going business discussion and hadn't looked at their menus after 20 minutes. After a series of three further interruptions by the waitress, who was anxious to be prompt and perhaps motivated to 'turn' the table quickly to maximize the night's tips, the three reluctantly paused to order before returning to their intense discussion. Within five minutes of serving the meals, the waitress interrupted them again to inquire, "How's everything?" Since they hadn't yet taken a bite, the guests were puzzled. This process was repeated five minutes later with the same results. Once the men did begin eating, the waitress returned to announce the dessert specials. By now, the three were quite agitated and said that they'd prefer to be left alone without interruption. The shocked waitress explained that she was just being attentive according to restaurant policy. The three later departed without ordering coffee or dessert, and left the waitress a disappointing tip.
- **Pinch Me!** Sam couldn't take it anymore. He fired his lawn service and called the guy who had left a flyer in his mailbox. When Mark arrived, he asked if they could walk the property together so that he could understand the overall landscape concerns through the eyes and sensibilities of the homeowner. This surprised Sam, as the prior lawn guy never seemed to care about anything other than prompt payment! After a 15-minute walk-around, Mark took Sam over to his impressive truck to show him his pro-line equipment and extol the advantages of weekly blade sharpening. He asked what level and frequency of service the prior lawn guy had provided so he could provide an apples-to-apples quote, but also made it clear that he preferred to maintain the property the way the homeowner would, himself, if he could do it personally. He then provided a verbal base quote and another expanded quote to include routine shrub trimming and replacement, annual flowers, and maintaining mulched, weed-free beds. Sam did the math in his head and realized that the second quote was less than what he was currently paying to three suppliers that he had to coordinate. Mark said that it was his

policy to come back two weeks after starting to ensure that he was fully meeting Sam's expectations. Mark printed out a formal quote from the portable printer and tablet computer in the console of his truck. Sam quickly signed it and looked forward to a stress-free summer!

Let's pause for a minute to discuss which of these examples – Lexus, the restaurant (and its harried waitress), or Mark's Landscape Care – your company most resembles... and why.

The Human Element

A company's overall customer service performance is the product of the composite experience of *all* our customers buying and using *all* of our offerings, and all their interactions with our people and processes. This involves many possible customer 'touch' points, aptly described as "moments of truth."⁴ Such a pervasive issue requires strong leadership and a 'tuned-in' company culture. Today, we'll focus on the people equation and return later to discuss process issues.

Having great people serving our customers is foundational to great customer service. As stated before, most lost business happens for 'emotional' reasons related to how customers feel about the way they've been treated by our company's systems and people. The reality is that great people can make up for poor systems, but great systems won't make up for poor people. Capable and motivated people are essential for achieving service excellence. In light of this truth, we've put together a self-assessment test, based on seven key factors involved in developing and leading a superb customer-driven team, to help us compare our current practices versus what's possible. This will help us in targeting improvements. We'll pause to rate ourselves between 1 (low) and 10 (high) in each category.

1. ***Talk about it, a lot!*** The beginning of great customer service starts in the leader's mind. When *you* become convinced of the advantages in being customer-driven, and begin making superb customer service a priority, it will begin to happen. As Steven Covey says, "*Every idea is born twice, first in the mind, then in the practice.*" The first step toward the goal is making topnotch service *real* to your team. Talk about it, brainstorm with them, recount stories to sensitize them to the possibilities, and benchmark top-performing companies. All-in-all, help your team by creating a vivid mental picture of superior customer service. You'll be sharing a vision – a desirable future state or worthy result. Superb customer service requires clear long-term vision.

Build customer service excellence into your company's core principles and be sure to review them during the hiring and new employee orientation process. This formative time is greatly beneficial for inculcating high standards before unhealthy habits form. Consider requiring new team members to recite these core company principles from memory and don't be afraid of beating the service drum often. Chances are *far* greater that you'll under-communicate rather than over-communicate! People must know what's really most important to you. If you don't tell them clearly and often, they'll adopt other practices by default. Write it, speak it, post it on bulletin boards, feature customer service heroes in your newsletter, and reward it. Have fun with it, but do it!

Where do *you* stand? Is customer service something that you wink at, but really aren't excited about? If so, you're probably a 1 and part of the problem. If your people are saying, "*Alright, we know, serving our customers better than anyone else is numero*

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uno!"... you might be a 10. Rate yourself.

Rating _____

2. **Recruit people who actually enjoy interacting with other people.** People who like other people have attitudes that demonstrate it and relationships that show it. Therefore, our hiring process should focus on attitude and demonstrated character at least as much as technical qualifications. Most employees who fail to perform well are 'qualified' based on education or experience, but fall short due to poor attitude. In fact, nothing determines an employee's long-term success in serving others well more than attitude. Renowned sales trainer, Zig Ziglar often asks people for the characteristics that make a successful sales person. The most popular replies are: *honest, hard-working, diligent, good with people, ready to follow through, high integrity, and product knowledge*. He then asks, "Which of these are skills that can be taught or absorbed by years of experience, and which are attitudes?" Obviously, most of these attributes reflect one's attitude or character traits.

In your hiring process, how much attention do you give to attitude and character versus knowledge? Think about the five people that you most recently terminated. How many failed due to technical shortcomings and how many left due to some form of attitudinal or relational issue? Rate your hiring process. If you make an effort to uncover character and attitude traits, especially related to serving to others, with as much emphasis as you place on technical abilities, you're a 9 or a 10. If you focus primarily on technical expertise, and treat attitude as an afterthought, you're a 3 or below.

Rating _____

3. **Refine your recruiting, screening, and hiring system** to emphasize key competencies and critical skills that differentiate excellent service providers from those less likely to perform well in serving the needs of others. Company environments can vary, so be sure to think critically about key success levers in your situation. For example, your environment might require clarity of speech, perceptive listening and investigative fact-finding, resilience, persistence, stress tolerance, empathy, mental alertness, focus in a noisy environment, a desire to build long-term loyalty through cultivating relationships, etc. Be sure to ask for relevant references and use questions designed to reveal relational success and positive attitude. Ask applicants about prior positions or relationships where serving or sharing were important. Scan their resumes for previous "other-centered" activities (e.g., being a 'Big Brother' vs. solo pursuits like kayaking or reading).

Have you established the criteria, questions and techniques necessary to uncover these critical personal characteristics, or do you 'wing' it? If you have a working system that routinely produces successful new hires and are improving your customer service because of it, take a 10. If your mantra is "Hurry up and fill the position... we can clean it up later!"... you might be a very frustrated 1.

Rating _____

4. **Profile what it takes to succeed in all of your 'customer-facing' positions.** The positions that regularly interface with customers are where the daily service game is played out. Identify how these positions interact with clients and the key metrics involved. Study the best performers among your customer-facing positions and determine what defines and sets them apart. Personality testing can be helpful (e.g., DISC, MBTI, Caliper, SIMA, etc.) in identifying certain 'types' that seem to be a good fit in specific roles. Find an approach that works for you and take personal responsibility for the fit of all new hires. If your firm is too big to allow you to interview each new recruit, make sure that you're holding those with this delegated responsibility to a high standard.

Do you have a profile established for each position in your business? Do you have a clue as to the ideal combination of character qualities, personality, training, and metrics for each

position? If so, you can measure prospects against this standard and assess operating performance as well. If your 'profile' is a warm body, fast, you're like a blind man playing darts; take a 1. If you're better than that, take what you deserve. Rating _____

5. **Use training to produce the best team in the business** Studies show that the initial weeks are critical in the development of a new employee. There's no second chance to get off to a strong start. Provide a good mentor to introduce the new associate to the business. Too often we go to the trouble and expense to identify great new team members and then carelessly 'buddy' them up with uninspiring employees for their indoctrination period! We should educate our team from the time they're hired as we can never learn too much or become too capable! Educate and challenge them with projects aimed at breakthrough levels of improvement in key areas. Teach them constantly while always asking them how to do it better. Send them to classes, provide books and tapes, and bring in expert guests to share new ideas. In today's digital age, information and training is so accessible. It's sinful not to use it! Things change so fast. Don't fall behind. Stay ahead of the curve.

Rate your process to introduce new team members to your business and culture. If you sign'em up, check their pulse, and toss them to the wolves – hoping they'll 'get it' on their own – just take your 1 without a whimper. If you consistently follow a thoughtful process in inducting hires, you're one in a million. Take a 10 and go to Disney World! Rating _____

6. **Provide an empowering environment** that breeds a sense of ownership for continuously improving customer service. Help your team feel excited and proud about their role by constantly helping them see how they support the company's vision and purpose. Let them become spokespeople for key company initiatives. Regularly celebrate performance and based on service goals and share customer testimonials and 'hero' stories. Pay attention to everything from the orderliness and attractiveness of the work environment, to how they're compensated and kept informed, what we recognize and reward, and even what we call them. Every big success is built by doing lots of little things well. Is your work environment conducive to creating the performance culture you seek? Rating _____

7. **Treat your team like customers.** Develop a workplace culture that focuses on internal customer service as well. This includes metrics, 'the voice of the customer,' objective assessments of internal service performance, and developing the ability to air differences and troubleshoot issues... all supporting team unity and overall company performance. It's vital not to allow turf wars or fiefdoms to exist. Interdisciplinary teamwork is essential to excel in delivering a seamless overall service experience for our customers! When we meet or exceed employee desires to grow and excel with the company, they'll respond in kind. It's a symbiotic situation. When we genuinely care for them, it feeds their ability to care for others and enables us to provide great customer service. Never 'serve' customers by demeaning team members. This doesn't mean coddling them or compromising company standards or cost competitiveness just to please them. There are relevant parallels in parenting. We fail our children by giving them too much money or freedom from responsibility, discipline, and timeless standards. Good parents don't encourage their child to expect something for nothing. Rather, they provide careful training toward worthy goals, constant vigilance against unhealthy outside influences, fair evaluations of progress wrapped in love and encouragement, and freedom to contribute and play an important role. Good parenting breeds a keen sense of family. Individual identity is acknowledged and valued, and individual responsibility is owned. It

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fits together wonderfully. Our families are *designed* to work this way, as is the Body of Christ. Our companies should be also! Individuals are uniquely gifted to contribute to the common good. As with families, success doesn't happen by accident, but through years of effort, replete with ups and downs, tears and joys, trials and errors, and perseverance in doing lots of small things right.

Think of employees as your first-line customers. If they 'buy' your vision, you're off to a great start in becoming a customer-driven company. If you can't sell *them*, you're beat. So, how do you think you're treating them? If we asked them, based on the above criteria, how would you rate? Rating _____

Total your ratings and divide by 7 to compute your average score. **Average Rating** _____
If you've averaged below seven, or are under six on any item, there is plenty to consider!

So there we have it, seven keys that are foundational to building a strong customer-driven team. If our foundation is solid, we'll withstand the inevitable storms of business and competition. Building a customer-driven team as our cornerstone isn't *completely* storm-proof... only Christ is! But it sure beats the slipshod alternative, built by happenstance over time. The hard work of delivering great service – one customer and transaction at a time, week after week – is challenging but immensely rewarding. It's especially fulfilling in the relational and ministry, dimension as excellent service builds trust with those we serve. Alternatively, when we're asleep at the switch and view service as an afterthought, everyone loses: customers, employees, suppliers, investors, and our communities. Mediocre service has no redeeming quality. Excellent, customer-driven service, on the other hand, is more profitable, fun, and vital to building *GREAT Businesses for a GREATER Purpose!*

¹For example: *Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing* (6/06), *Moments of Truth* (10/04), *Vision-Casting with Key Customers & Employees* (7/08), *Loyalty: an Engine for Healthy Growth* (8/09), *Generating Worthy Referrals* (11/10), *Capitalizing on Complaints* (1/00)

²Data from the following sources: U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs, Forum Corporation (www.forum.com), Technical Assistance Research Programs, Inc. (www.tarp.com) 2008 survey, *The Referral Engine* (John Jantsch, Portfolio, 2010), *The Ultimate Question* (Fred Reichheld, HBS Press, 2006), and www.chiefoutsiders.com 2011 survey of 108 small-to-midsized companies.

³Within two years of its launch, Lexus won first place in annual J.D. Powers surveys of luxury auto customer satisfaction with both their product and dealer network.

⁴Also the name of a best-selling book by Jan Carlzon (Ballinger Publishing, 1987) and a C12 business segment (October, 2004)

Application Worksheet

C12

1. Share this segment with your staff during a 'lunch-and-learn' session and record their feedback on the two interactive portions.
2. Compare their results with yours and present them at another team session, discussing any differences to gain better overall understanding and reach consensus regarding your current situation.
3. Be sure to discuss any differing perceptions you uncover and delegate assignments for individual staff members to report back after investigating specific performance areas further.
4. Develop plans to resolve areas of urgent concern and to improve any low ratings that you may have. If you've scored well in particular areas, congratulate those involved, reinforce the value of this capability, and encourage them to build further on this strength in growing the business. This brainstorming and goal-setting process may take more than one session.

KP

1. Answer the same questions above from your perspective, for your area of responsibility and for the company as a whole. Share and discuss your answers (and any follow-up action plans) with your sponsoring CEO, asking how you might assist with any follow-up sharing and goal-setting activities that follow.

*Priorities are what we do.
Everything else is just talk!*

Application Worksheet

*Priorities are what we **do**.
Everything else is just talk!*

Releasing God's Greater Work in Our Business

Last month, we discussed A. W. Tozer's nine hindrances to God's greater work in the Church and related them to corresponding limitations in what God desires to do more fully in and through our businesses. For most of us, this was a sobering look at the darkness present in all of our hearts and habits, to one degree or another. Many of us resolved to ask God to show us areas where we need to repent. Overall, it was a helpful exercise that left us knowing that there's much work to be done. Today, we'll re-engage this topic in a positive way by looking at how we can address each hindrance to enhance our walk, leadership, and ministry.

Applying the Antidotes

The inspiration for today's exercise comes from the teaching of Loren Cunningham, founder of Youth with a Mission (YWAM), who recommends "responding in the opposite spirit." This is rooted in the Biblical idea that for every 'ugly' action there is a godly response. We can overcome evil by returning good. Proverbs 15:1 says, "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*" We can generally disarm a hostile situation by answering someone who is angry or yelling at us with a soft and gentle voice. In this spirit, we'll briefly look at the nine hindrances we previously discussed and identify godly countermeasures for each.

- ***Unbelief*** It was easy to see how unbelief cripples our ministry effectiveness. But what quality can we identify as the polar opposite of unbelief? It follows that ***applied belief rooted in faith*** conquers unbelief. It is *by faith* that we're able to believe and live an integrated life, applying the same truths and principles to our businesses that we affirm during Sunday worship. By faith we believe that obedience to God always works to our long-term benefit and allows us to have integrity in what we say and do.

Scripture says, "*The just shall live by faith, but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him*" (Heb 10:38 NKJV). We are the just; justified by our relationship with God in Jesus. We're called to live accordingly. To shrink back from this is to act in *unbelief*. In fact, "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him*" (Heb 11:6). We come to Him by faith and we please Him by living in faith!

How do we live this out at work, and what difference can it make? We live it out by acting in-line with what we profess to believe, maintaining the same values throughout our lives, and not conveniently excusing behavior in work-related situations that we'd reject in church or family situations. Obviously, such countercultural behavior will manifest itself in many ways and arenas. Perhaps the most vivid contrast is when others see us dealing Biblically with money and relationships according to our faith and purpose at work. Our ministry is immeasurably enhanced when we react faithfully in situations involving money and people. Our testimony is strongest when it contrasts with conventional "me-first" norms in the marketplace. This is the "salt" and "light" Jesus refers to in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:13-16). While unbelief causes us to look to the world for methods and techniques to navigate this life, belief rooted in faith looks to God and trusts Him.

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- **Complacency** We previously discussed the 'difficulty' of living in the wealthiest nation in world history, as perhaps the most pampered people ever, while avoiding complacency. The danger is believing that we've arrived and are favored by God because we have it so 'all together.' Complacency is a subtle and very powerful enemy.

For Christians, the antidote for complacency is being eternally-minded. The **eternal perspective** of life grasps the truth that all that happens here, while living in the flesh, is temporary and brief (Ja 4:13, Job 7:7). We live in light of the fact that, no matter what this world seems to offer, our true home is with Christ in Heaven and that we're here as His Ambassadors (2Cor 5:20, Eph 6:20), temporarily, serving and representing our Lord for very specific purposes that He has uniquely planned for us (1Cor 5:10, Eph 2:10). The eternal perspective sees all things *here* in terms of their value *there*, realizing that everything that isn't done for Christ will ultimately burn up (1Cor 3:14-16). Our material possessions, reputation, and position are given to us solely to be leveraged for eternal purposes. Our true 'success' in this life is defined by how well we leverage our Kingdom gifts, not how much money or fame we leave behind.

In the eternal perspective, there's no place for complacency. Since we're here for a short time to do some very important things that God has designed for us to do, we need to be about them. The rest is just "stuff." When we have the eternal perspective we're able to live in the world, but not be shaken or derailed by it. The eternal perspective is what gave Christian martyrs the courage to sing as they walked *toward* the lions. The eternal perspective is what drove Paul to say that he counted *all* things as garbage compared to knowing Christ, and moved him to forget the past and to press on to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Php 3:8,12-15). Jesus had the eternal perspective as He willingly suffered on the cross to take hold of "*the joy set before Him*" (Heb 12:2). The eternal perspective lives in our hearts in the person of the Holy Spirit, and He is *never* complacent! When we have the day-to-day purposefulness and true serenity that can only be found in the eternal perspective, others are drawn to us. We're effective in this world by living our lives for the next.

- **Self-Righteousness** Self-righteous people are generally insecure and afraid that if their ideas or judgment aren't embraced as correct or best, they'll be rejected or found lacking. The opposite of self-righteousness is a humble, but firm, **meekness** manifested in openness to others. Our ability to accept others, and to be open to their input and abilities, is rooted in our deep understanding of God's acceptance and openness to us. We're eternally secure in Christ and His Truth. Meek Christians aren't threatened or diminished when we observe the uniqueness or differences of others. We know that they've been created as a complementary part of God's plan that He can use to assist us. Self-righteousness quenches the flow of God's creativity, while meekness helps to access and release it through others.

Meek servant leaders draw others to themselves based on a sense of safety and trustworthiness that gives them the freedom to grow and develop. Moses, described as the meekest of all men (Nu 12:3), is a great historical example. Jesus said, "**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth**" (Mt 5:5). This can be seen in the relationship between servant leaders and their teams. Others are energized and motivated by our meek, self-effacing hearts, which seek to give *them* credit and encouragement. In contrast, they're 'put off' by self-righteousness, which selfishly demands being lifted up at others' expense.

- **Fear of man** This crippling hindrance is offset by our **trust in God** and desire to

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please Him. The quality of our trust in God is closely related to having a clear eternal perspective that sees all things as they relate to God. This contrasts with having a temporal perspective which first perceives things as they relate to man-centered opinions and goals. Paul said, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Ro 8:31). This hugely rhetorical question challenges our fears. Should we fear man when we serve God? What can man really do to limit God and His purposes?

The word 'fear' has significance here. When we say, *"the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"* (Ps 111:10), we're referring to reverence and respect mixed with an appreciation for God's awesome power, holiness, and sovereignty. Trust in God is rooted in this healthy "fear" of the Lord. The fear of man is rooted in the mistaken belief that man can somehow do for us what, in fact, only God can do. As Christian leaders we must look to God for *all* we need, to do *all* He wants. He is our source, strength and portion!

- Closely related to the fear of man is the **love of luxury** which has its roots in the false perspective that the limited pleasures of enjoying worldly comfort are the source of our happiness. The spiritual opposite of the love of luxury is not a vow of poverty, but rather a **stewardship focus** on God's Kingdom which helps us see the eternal potential of the resources entrusted to us rather than mere temporal gratification. Jesus is again the perfect example. He said that He only did what He saw the Father doing (Jn 5:19) and used the temporal resources that came into His hand to promote eternal values and produce eternal fruit. Jesus focused on building His Kingdom in Heaven while living on earth. The ultimate countercultural 'radical,' He disdained worldly values. He used money, but was not tempted or used by it. Jesus stewarded His time wisely, maximizing it to do things that mattered for eternity without regard for earthly pleasures or luxuries. After leaving His heavenly home for us, He gladly gave up worldly pleasures while pursuing His mission to serve others and gather His bride, the Church, to Himself. He didn't love the limited luxury this world can provide (see Mt 8:20), but endured much hardship to invest in the infinite, eternal luxury of God's Kingdom.

This isn't to say that Christ didn't experience or use the 'finer' things of this world. But He clearly didn't seek or love them. To Jesus, all the "things" of this world were merely utilitarian and not worthy of notice except for how they might be useful in building up God's Kingdom. When we have Christ's attitude toward material luxuries, we're able to hold them loosely and share them easily. They don't rule us, we rule them and use them for a greater purpose. Paul said it this way, *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction"* (1Tim 6:6-9). Others notice our behavior in this area... big time! Our attitude here tells them more about what we *truly* believe than almost anything else we can say or do. This is consistent with what Jesus clearly taught us: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (Mt 6:21). Our attitude towards riches and worldly luxuries is one of the most powerful factors in determining our ministry effectiveness and readiness to allow God to produce eternal fruit through our lives.

- Loving luxury is often a symptom of the sixth hindrance, **secret sympathy with the world**, which basically believes that the world's ways are somehow preferable, and

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that it's a personal sacrifice to be God's children. The polar opposite of this thinking is ***openly embracing the way of the Cross***, or "the narrow path" (Mt 7:14). In order to walk in this spirit, we must settle in our own hearts that ***all*** God's rules and ways are drawn out of His perfect love and designed for our best and highest eternal good. God never denies you or me anything that's truly good for us. On the contrary, everything He asks or commands is directly rooted in His love for us and will ***always*** lead to eternal blessing and advantage. If He denies us something, it's only because granting it would serve a lesser end.

Once we've settled this issue, we can walk before others cheerfully, accepting whatever life brings as simply some more of the "***all things***" that God is working for good in our lives. This is the spirit that Mother Teresa's life demonstrated. Would that our lives and fruitfulness as leaders be as effective as hers! The way of the cross holds no secret sympathy with the world. Those who choose to walk this narrow path do so knowing that they've chosen the best way. While we're still tempted by the world, the world has lost its power over us. We're able to see it for what it truly is; the 'shined-up' illusion of our deceptive adversary. Everything in life that has true eternal value may only be found in Christ and obedient submission to His Way.

- The closely-related seventh and eighth hindrances are ***self-confidence*** and ***pride***. The countervailing spirit to them is ***humility***. Self-confidence and pride try to gather all the credit and glory to ourselves, while humility redirects all credit and glory to God. Humility naturally results from accurately seeing who God is, who we are, and then relating to Him and to life's realities appropriately. When we walk in humility we're able to appreciate His grace. Apart from Christ, our righteousness is but "***filthy rags***" (Is 64:6) and on our own merits we all fall short and are hell-bound (Ro 3:23). By seeing what our perfectly holy Lord sacrificed to redeem us, it's not hard to be humble. "***God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble***" (Ja 4:6).
- All the previously listed hindrances ultimately manifest in our lives through the door of the ninth: ***unholy thoughts***. Every sin, disobedient act, and offense to God and our fellow man begins as a single thought. Such thoughts may originate in the pit of hell, but they are retained as we allow them to remain unchecked and beget further unholy thoughts. Our minds are the battlefield within which the spiritual warfare of our lives is fought. Eventually what we dwell on manifests in our desires and actions. No one losing the battle for his mind wins the battle with his actions.

The ***mind of Christ*** is the antidote for unholy thoughts. The mind of Christ is available to us through His Spirit who lives in us. As believers, our access to the mind of Christ is unlimited if we desire to pursue it. The practice which engages Him on our behalf in this battle is to "***renew***" our minds (Ro 12:2) and "***take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ***" (2Cor 10:5). Paul said: "***For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ***" (2Cor 10:3-5).

Jesus is the Word. We bring Him into our minds as we read, study, meditate on, and memorize Scripture. The Living Word says, "***I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you***" (Ps 119:11) and, "***Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path***" (Ps 119:105). We can ***never*** have the Mind of Christ apart from God's

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Word. Filling our mind with His Word gives us the Mind of Christ. This is the main reason that beginning each day in the presence of the Living Word is so important. As we consistently do this, we enjoy a hedge of protection and godly standards to measure our thoughts against. Those that fit with the Word are of God; those that don't aren't! When we're unsure, God provides guidance by His Spirit or other believers. Allowing Christ's Spirit to monitor our thoughts is vital.

Looking Forward

So there we have it; eight positive qualities to counterbalance nine hindrances. Review the list below and note where you have issues – and opportunities – to grow in Christ:

HINDRANCES	GODLY COUNTERMEASURES
Unbelief	Applied Belief Rooted in Faith
Complacency	Eternal Perspective
Self-righteousness	Meekness
Fear of Man	Trust in God
Love of Luxury	Stewardship Focus
Secret Sympathy with the World	Openly Embracing the Way of the Cross
Self-Confidence	Humility
Pride	
Unholy Thoughts	The Mind of Christ

We should see our opportunities to embrace these God-given countermeasures as Christian ideals to strive toward, not just projects to be accomplished. If we're diligent in this pursuit, we'll gain the strength, focus, and intentionality to lead our businesses as lights in the darkness of the marketplace, and battle victoriously with the world, the flesh, and the enemy!

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Application Worksheet

C12 & KP

1. Take this segment to a quiet place where you can talk to God and ask Him to show you what, if anything, from the list of eight qualities He might want you to work on with Him. Read each point and stop and ask, *"Father, is there anything here for me that You want me to see?"* Wait at least a few moments for his Spirit to speak in your heart. If you hear (sense) nothing, go on to the next attribute.
2. If He tells you anything, jot a note about it and go on.
3. At the end of your time with the Lord (possibly multiple sessions), take your notes and make a plan to deal with each item as He leads you.
4. Share what you've heard and what you're planning to do with someone else (C12 Chair, spouse, peers, accountability group, etc.) and make specific To-Do items to follow-up on.
5. Watch for God to faithfully act on your behalf!

*Priorities are what we do.
Everything else is just talk!*