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Enhancing Yield

Peter Drucker on the impact of Christian nonprofits

By **Bob Buford** | posted 7/31/2008

John Pearson, former Christian Management Association president and a friend and colleague of 40 years, has been a lifelong student and practitioner of management applied to the growth of Christian organizations. We share loyalty to the thinking of Peter Drucker, often called the "Father of Modern Management," whose work has been both profound and useful to many Christian ministries.

John traces his Drucker devotion back to Drucker's debut 20 years ago at a 1986 Leadership Network Summit Conference for church and parachurch leaders. These vital organizations have not only advanced God's kingdom, but have also been central to the stability and moral foundation of American culture, still admired by much of the world.

Drucker often emphasized that churches and parachurch organizations like us were spiritual and moral enterprises at the core, instruments for serving God's purposes on earth. Drucker was quoted in *Forbes*, whose cover story called him "still the youngest mind," as saying, "The pastoral megachurches are surely the most important social phenomenon in American society in the last 30 years."

A former winner of the Christian Management Award, Drucker said that those of us thinking of religious organizations need to consider three factors:

1. The Eternal: things that never change. In what was probably his last media interview three months before his death, Peter expressed his view of the eternal (OnPointRadio.org/shows/2004/12/20041208_b_main.asp):

Tom Ashbrook: Peter, I have a final question and I hope you will humor me and not consider me too greedy. You've lived a long life and focused intensely on life and how it's lived. Now you're 95. What about an afterlife? What about God? How do you think about the moment of transition that you are inevitably approaching?

Peter Drucker: Well, I happen to be a very conventional, traditional Christian. Period! And I don't think about it. I am told! It's not my job to think about it. My job is to say, "Yes sir."

2. The Culture: always and forever changing. Different from one continent to another and from one time period to another, making it critical for religious organizations to change the form while preserving the essence of their message and work.

3. The Tools: Peter said the best tools are almost always developed in the secular culture, but then become useful in the Christian culture. He then told me, "Religious organizations have a tendency to eternalize the tool."

Drucker always said, "The purpose of management is not to make the church more businesslike, but more churchlike." The mission of God's church on earth is, of course, distinctive from that of an entrepreneurial business organization, but most of the tools are the same. Drucker uses French economist J. B. Say's definition of an entrepreneur as "one who takes resources from a state of lower to higher yield and performance." That feature of management is the same for Bill Hybels (another participant at the 1986 meeting with Drucker) as it is for Bill Gates.

John's new book, *Mastering the Management Buckets*, gives Christian leaders so much in need of a 101-level course in management, a wise distillation of the practical tools they need to help their organizations grow and serve God's purposes from a sea of management material. (Drucker alone produced 10,000 book pages.) This is one of the first books a Christian leader should read. John speaks from the perspective of 30 years as a ceo—the perspective one often has as a Christian leader. This is a supremely useful book. It deserves a wide audience.

There's also a remarkable new edition of Peter Drucker's classic *Management* just updated and revised (April 2008). I couldn't recommend it more highly as *the* text for the 21st century. Jim Collins, probably the preeminent successor to Drucker, sets the tone in the book's new foreword:

Business and social entrepreneur Bob Buford once observed that Drucker contributed as much to the triumph of free society as any other individual. I agree. For free society to function we must have high-performing, self-governed institutions in every sector, not just in business, but equally in the social sectors.

So the three of us agree: The church not only has a religious role, but also an indispensable social role to play in the health of a free society.

Bob Buford is chairman of the board of the Buford Foundation/Leadership Network. Bob has authored four books: Half Time, Game Plan, Stuck in Halftime, and Finishing Well. Buford was founder and first chairman of the board of the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management, now known as Leader to Leader Institute.

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