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Second Edition

DAVE KAHLE



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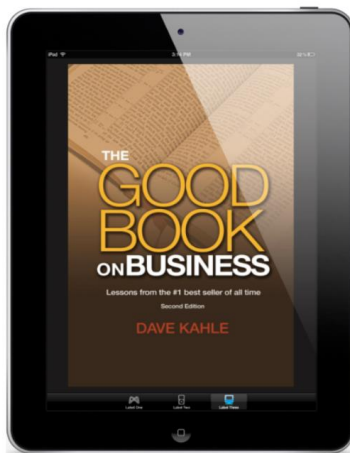
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Published by The DaCo Corporation P.O. Box 523; Comstock Park, MI 49321 1.616.451.9377 | www.thegoodbookonbusiness.com Published in the United States of America

ISBN: 9781719840095; 0-9890008-8-5; 978-0-9899998-8-8

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FOUR

Abraham: A Biblical Business on Steroids

As the population increased, work necessarily morphed into a more sophisticated version, which today we call a “business.” The Bible refers to these emerging organizations as “households.” Households were formed as a result of individual families struggling for economic security. The head of the house found some work to do, and naturally, the whole family helped with that. As is the case today and ever since, some people were better at their business than others, and they inevitably attracted servants, slaves, and employees to expand the family business. Generally, these folks—the servants, slaves, and employees (the equivalent of today’s employees)—lived in the same compound as the head of the household, and their families were considered to be part of the business as well.

One of the most successful of these early business people was Abraham, who, by no coincidence, was chosen by God to become the father of the special people group that he set aside to be dedicated to him—the Hebrews.

We get a glimpse of how large Abraham's business was in this passage, which describes a story in his life. Abraham was close to his nephew, Lot. Lot and his household had been captured by the enemy, and Abraham (then known as Abram) is going to go after them:

When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his *household* and went in pursuit as far as Dan. (Gen. 14:14, italics added)

Let's think about that. If there were 318 trained men who had been born in his household, how many untrained men must there have been in that household? How many boys who were too young, men who were too old, how many women and children? The size of Abraham's business would have incorporated thousands of people—a massive enterprise. Imagine the logistics involved in employing, organizing, and caring for thousands of people.

There would have been layers of management and specialization. Who selected and trained that fighting force of 318 men, for example? Someone probably was tasked with identifying the most likely candidates, acquiring the weapons, developing the training routines, and sharpening the skills of that group.

Abraham: A Biblical Business on Steroids

So, we get a glimpse of the first really big business in the Bible—Abraham’s household.

For those who hold that households are just another name for families, notice that Abraham had built a huge household and had no family beyond his wife, Sarah. He was, at this point in his life, childless.

The story of Abraham adds to our understanding of biblical businesses as we discover a powerful business principle. Let’s call it “preparation for contingencies.” How did those 318 trained men come into existence? Abraham must have identified the need for a fighting force to defend the business and its people in the event of an attack from outside. He was incredibly wealthy and ran a business with thousands of people who were dependent on the business for their livelihood. His holdings in crops, cattle, sheep, vineyards, etc. must have been extensive. As his business grew, so did the likelihood of a raid by an outside group, intent on taking some of what belonged to Abraham. Thinking ahead, Abraham would have decided to prepare for that eventuality and train and equip a fighting force to defend the business and its people.

This brings us to another biblical principle: specialization, which we see for the first time in Abraham’s business. Those 318 men were specialists in some aspect of the business—in this case, soldiering. Abraham, the first really big biblical businessperson, knew that some

folks were better at some things than others and organized them to specialize in those things—a decidedly modern strategy.

Today we have lots of tools to help us assess a person's skills and aptitudes in order to put them in the right job. While Abraham did not have the sophisticated tools we employ today, he understood the principle and created this special force of 318 warriors.

In the bigger Bible story, God chose Abraham to be the father of his nation because of his great faith. The depth of that faith is revealed in one of the famous stories of the Bible. Here is the story:

Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were childless. Sarah grew beyond childbearing age and had given up on having children. But God, in fulfillment of his promise to make Abraham the father of a great nation, had miraculously intervened; and Sarah, in her old age, became pregnant with Isaac. The child was born and was destined to inherit both his father's business as well as the promise from God. As an only child of the couple, the bloodline would necessarily proceed through Isaac, and the promise that was made to his father was then extended to him.

In a test of Abraham's faith, God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, in the same way as he would sacrifice an animal. Abraham obeys. He leads Isaac off into the wilderness, builds an altar, places his only son on that altar, takes out his knife, and prepares to kill his son.

Abraham: A Biblical Business on Steroids

God intervenes and stops Abraham, and Isaac lives and goes on to be another pivotal person in the Bible narrative. Abraham has passed the test and proven his faith and obedience.

The biggest lesson to add to our understanding of biblical business has to do with the intertwining of Abraham's business with the development of his faith. Clearly, he had an enormous depth of faith that expressed itself in his obedience to God's command to sacrifice Isaac. But how did he come to that level of faith?

Faith, in most people, grows over time. We generally begin our relationship with God with a small degree of faith (as large as a mustard seed) and over time add to our level of faith. It is interesting to note that God did not put Abraham to this incredibly difficult test of his faith until he was an elderly man and had developed a powerful faith.

How did Abraham, over the course of his life, develop such a legendary level of faith?

Often, people develop faith as they live through the successes and calamities of raising children. As a father, adoptive father, foster father, and grandfather, I can attest to that. But Abraham did not have children until his later years when his faith was well established.

Nor did he have access to any of the accouterments of modern-day religion, which we expect to be the mechanism to instill and develop faith: no churches, no Scripture, no pastors, and no church services. How, then,

did he come to this legendary faith? Could it be that the venue in which he encountered God and grew to depend on and obey him was the same venue in which God showed himself to Adam? God set a precedent in the first few chapters of Genesis—it would be in work that God would interact with mankind. Understanding that, would it not be reasonable to expect that Abraham encountered God in the context of his business? Was it in Abraham's work, expressed in the more sophisticated version of his business, that Abraham encountered God, grew to know him, and came to a level of faith and obedience that is legendary?

God set the precedent in the first few chapters of Genesis – it would be in work that God would interact with mankind. Understanding that, would it not be reasonable to expect that Abraham encountered God in the context of his business?
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With no children in his family, running an enterprise of this size would have occupied the majority of Abraham's time. And it was there—in the relationships with his servants and slaves, in the countless thousands of conflicts he had to negotiate, in the myriad decisions he would have had to make, and in the thousands of conversations and interactions—that Abraham encountered God and developed his legendary faith. Abraham probably did what generations of Godly business people have done since -- and that they still do

Abraham: A Biblical Business on Steroids

today -- when confronted with a problem, he would have gone to God for direction. It is not hard to imagine him in a scenario like this, praying to God: "God, the sheep in the north pasture are sickly. What should I do?" Or, "Lord, one of my shepherds has been lazy and not taking care of his sheep well. Should I fire him?" In the ebb and flow of problems and opportunities that define every business, Abraham went to God. And, in so doing, came to know God well and develop his historic faith. God showed up in Abrahams's business, just as he did with Adam.

Thinking about this chapter...

1. How big do you think Abraham's business must have been?
2. Since God set the precedent that he would give mankind tasks and then work with them to complete those tasks, is it reasonable to understand that God worked with Abraham to build the size of his business?
3. How did Abraham grow his faith? What was the venue for the testing and developing of faith?
4. What significance is there to the fact that Abraham grew a huge business and a legendary faith before he had a family?



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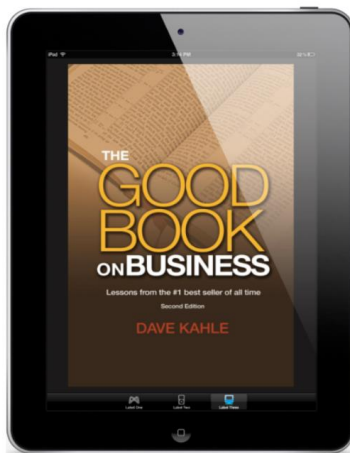
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Obtain a new level of peace and tranquility regardless of the turbulence.



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Other Books by Dave Kahle

All books are available from the websites listed, or wherever business books are sold.

Is the Institutional Church Really the Church?

In the last 20 years, the institutional church has spent \$530 Billion on itself, and not increased the percentage of Christians in this country by even one percent. Isn't it time someone asked some questions? Dave Kahle does. This book will change your views of the church forever. <http://www.davekahle.com/wordpressblogs/institutional-church-really-church/>

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- Handelsblatt, the biggest German-language
- business and finance newspaper.
- Named one of the top Ten English Business books in Austria by WirtschaftsBlatt, Austria's only business daily.
- Translated into Malaysian English, and available in Malaysia.
- Translated into both Complex and Simplified Chinese, and available throughout China.
- Translated into Latin American Spanish, and available throughout Latin America.
- Available in Malaysian English in Malaysia and Singapore.

- Available in a Kindle edition in Germany.
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<http://www.davekahle.com/wordpressblogs/sell-anything-anyone-anytime/>

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- How do I maintain my perspective when some of the professional Christians around me are so much more manipulative and deceitful than any secular acquaintance?
- How do I maintain my Christian ethics inside a company that supports just the opposite?
- How do I grow a consulting practice with no resources and no network?

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www.davekahle.com/wordpressblogs/heart-christian-sales-person

For other books by the author, visit www.davekahle.com

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