Restoring People, Changing Businesses, Transforming Societies

A Case Study from Indonesia

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Heru was a professional building contractor at the peak of his career when crisis hit Indonesia in 1998. Thus, in 2004, he decided to partner together with his wife in her restaurant business, which was picking up slowly. But through various situations, chaos arose in both business and family life.

Let me describe two of the major issues:

Leadership: Mr. Heru is a process-oriented type of person—very strict, procedural, a perfectionist who demands high work standards. Mrs. Swan, his wife, is a relational type of person—easy going, creative, a strong marketer, who has a tendency to be quite reactive in handling issues. When they began to work together, a big issue developed: both of them led the team in different directions. There was no agreement on leadership and business practices, which created clashes.

Business: Both husband and wife worked hard to upscale their restaurant and increase revenue and business branding in their area. Money is no longer a big issue for the family, but as the business grew, the people and the systems were not growing.

Their daily working life seemed to be filled with more frustration, especially when dealing with staff. Staff issues ranged from lack of discipline to lousy service, lack of trust, dissatisfied workers, inefficiency, and poor attitudes. Can you imagine how Mr. Heru felt when he found out a client tried to place a significant take-out order by phone, and his staff answered back: “We are sorry sir, there is not enough time to prepare your order today…”!? The staff didn’t want to work harder and faster. The staff was clearly in the mood to “work as little as possible to get paid as much as possible.”

Mr. Heru sat down in his valley of frustration under piles of tough decisions: pull out from the business to save his marriage; fire all the so called "dumb staff"; keep his ego and separate from his wife; close down the business; start a new business and not involve his wife, etc…

In this "dark hour" of his life, someone called him and invited him to join a business camp held by the Kingdom Business Community (KBC). He decided to take a break in his hectic life and join the camp, with little expectation of finding a way out. He had been a Christian for quite some time, even involved in serving as an ordained preacher in his local church. But it just never occurred to him that he could involve God in his business.

A personal breakthrough happened for him while attending the sessions in the camp. He opened up his mind to repurpose his business in God's ways, rebuild his "wheels of life/life balance" (balancing family, spirituality, finances, relationships, etc.), and answer the call to be an agent for change in the marketplace by leaving a good legacy in his leadership role.

Heru then let himself be surrounded by accountability partners who challenged his way of seeing business as a "money-making machine" to seeing it as a "value-creating tool" to glorify God. They encouraged him to practice Kingdom Values in family and work.

Two years after the first camp, his business and family were very different. I visited his restaurant and experienced a "wow moment," observing what God has done and is doing through his family and business.

First, both husband and wife are learning to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses and are working together in God's grace for the betterment of their common future.

When Heru surrendered his business to God, stepped down (in faith) as a Boss to let God be the Owner, and opened up himself to be directed and to think of himself as a good steward, he learned that he didn't have to fight an unnecessary fight with his wife because he is no longer the owner. He committed to yield his rights day-by-day and to submit to God's authority.

Second, the business is not just growing—it is booming! Sales picked up very fast upon their act of faith to transform their workplace into a God-centered workplace.

Living in the biggest Muslim country in the world, the majority (95%) of his staff have a Muslim background—and yet the staff now show great respect to him as a leader. Staff morale is strong, discipline is now a "selfawareness" initiative, service culture is a way of life, and the work mentality is changing from "paid staff" to an "owner mentality"— which brings them a deep sense of ownership in what they do. Happy staff will produce happy customers, which will ensure business sustainability.

Amidst this great workplace transformation, we discussed with Heru and his family what important milestones brought about these changes.

I'll summarize these milestones in four key steps that can be practiced in workplace mentoring:

1. "I Do – You Watch": After returning from the business camp, Heru understood that change starts with him. If he demands changes from his wife and his staff, he needs to set an exemplary life of godly values that speak stronger than words. He started simple things at home and workplace: learn to listen to his wife, control his temper, greet and smile to his staff when he enters the office (which he previously never did—he tried to put a "heavy-look" and unfriendly boss face on to all of his staff). He began to lead morning briefings for the first time—he told all his staff that he is no longer the boss, but that he surrendered the business to God and would try his best to help his employees succeed in their work. At the end of the meeting, they pray together. At the end of the day, he thanks everyone for their support in serving the customers, and he affirms some staff for their good work that day.

Lesson learned: When is the last time we STOPPED demanding, and STARTED doing the things we expect others to do?

2. "I DO – YOU HELP": Before his personal transformation, he hardly wanted to share his knowledge and skills with his employees and he tried to solve problems by himself, which led to very tiring workdays. Now, he is committed to coach his team and avoid "judging/pointing fingers to find a scapegoat." Rather, he avails himself to "hands-on" help to solve the problem and involves his team to find the best solutions for their business.

Lesson learned: How can we involve our team more in the process of solving problems and creating the values/culture in our company?

3. "YOU DO – I HELP": "This was a key step in showing my support to build trust and confidence in my wife and my staff," Heru told us. "I let them do the things that they have strengths in, carefully observe, and proactively offer my help to make them

succeed. In this part, a strong supportive role as a leader is needed."

Lesson learned: What kind of support do I need to offer to help other members of my team succeed?

4. "YOU DO – I WATCH": Surely, this is the best part. Have you ever dreamed—as a leader—that your team could perform all the given tasks excellently, even without your presence, and that you could spend most of your time and energy in more strategic thinking, expanding the business and having time to balance your life? We should always work towards this step, trusting our partners/team to do their very best in the work, allowing them to make mistakes and learn from them, becoming their cheerleader to motivate them, and releasing them to reach their full potential.

Lesson learned: When is the right time to step aside and let the team assume bigger responsibilities—to trust them, give them room for failures, and to celebrate their successes?

The writer serves on the board of leadership The writer serves on the board of leadership in Abbalove Ministries, a dynamic and mission minded cell-church with more than 17,000 members in Jakarta, Indonesia. He also co-founded the Kingdom Business Community, a ministry which is dedicated to help marketplace leaders instill Kingdom Values in their workplace. KBC has been a strong catalyst for the marketplace movement, with more than 1500 business owners and professionals trained and equipped to be agents of change in each of their respective fields.

His life motto is: "No days without improvement"

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