

Foundation Anchors for Management as a Calling

Marcia M. Hardy
Northwestern State University of Louisiana

To determine what factors lead to a calling in management, the author explores the definitions of calling and management. The question “Does business management expertise mean that management is a calling?” is addressed. A case study in ‘management as a calling’ is presented. The foundational anchors leading to management as a calling are identified. They are: honesty, integrity, promise keeping, loyalty, fairness, caring, respect for others, law-abiding, commitment to excellence, leadership (honorable and ethical), reputation and morale and being accountable. The characteristics of a professional called to management are cited. Managers who are called are compelled to discuss issues, are intentional during ethical discussions, introduce innovation, and engage in the pursuit of excellence while moving colleagues to a higher moral standard. Lastly, five questions to determine if management is your calling are presented for consideration.

INTRODUCTION

Once upon a time, long, long ago in the far away land of ‘soon to be retired’, a small business co-founder and CEO pondered the question, “What do I want to do with the last third of my life?” She expected at the end of this career, she would have ample time to devote to serving others in her church and community. And so she did. And time marched on. Although retirement offered an opportunity to “give back” to her community, it was too loosely structured and did not provide a rigorous enough framework for her to be as productive as she knew she would be if engaged in the serious work of the business world.

So she re-thought her retirement decision. After a bit of soul-searching and a re-read of her old dog-eared, all exercises completed copy of *What Color Is Your Parachute?*, she decided that the life of an academician in the School of Business might be her next calling. Would this life’s work prove challenging enough, engaging enough and provide the required vital outlet for sharing business ideas, management talents, experiences and time? She read the LATEST version of the very same book, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* After a great deal of research, prayer and pondering, she quietly made her decision and heeded the call. The entrepreneurial spirit found her applying to several business schools in the region. She was soon hired as Strategic Management Professor and continued her life long journey toward fulfillment. She was intent on pursuing her calling in the field of management.

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS A “CALLING”?

The first known use of the word “calling” was in the 14th century. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary standard definition of calling is “a strong desire to spend your life doing a certain kind of work (such as

religious work). I believe this definition carries with it a principled component to the “calling”. There is a greater good or a common good that is important to the action. A calling will take you on a journey up on the high road seeking moral high ground.

The second definition is “the work that a person does or should be doing”. It is not a hobby dabbled with occasionally. It is not an after-thought or work performed on a whim. A calling is a personal, directed, purposeful part of life’s mission or career that is carried out on a daily basis.

I believe the three-prong full definition of “calling” cited in Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary best defines the term for our purposes. First, it is “a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action especially when accompanied by conviction of divine influence”. Secondly, it is “the vocation or profession in which one customarily engages”. Lastly, and perhaps the most visually descriptive definition of calling is “the characteristic cry of a female cat in heat”. This best describes the required commitment to the profession. If you have a “calling”, you wait in great anticipation, for the opportunity to present itself. When that moment arrives you move intentionally like the principled, resourceful feline you are. You confront the situation head-on and take the necessary actions to restore harmony and good will to the universe. This is your life task. This is your mission and purpose. This is your Call to Action!

And... What Is Management?

After reviewing several sources defining the term “management”, I settled on the generic Free Dictionary by Farlex definition and Business Dictionary.com’s definition with an added twist. Farlex defines management as “the act, manner, or practice of managing, handling, supervision, or control; a skill in managing; executive ability”. Business Dictionary.com defines management as “the organization and coordination of the activities of a business in order to achieve defined objectives”.

I also discovered that ‘manage’ was once a noun meaning “age at which one becomes a man”. This implies to me ‘executing’ management was once viewed as an age dependent rite of passage carrying with it great responsibility, privilege and power. Google defines management in much the same way adding that management is the process and responsibility of dealing with and controlling people or organizations. I found the minor archaic definition of management, “trickery; deceit” presented by Google the most interesting. The example given reads, “If there has been any management in the business, it has been concealed from me”. This definition leads me to believe unsavory behavior and untruthful business transactions are not new to this century.

Anchors Are Signs A Management Calling Is In Play

Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson (2013) state: “when making decisions related to using the strategic management process, managers (certainly top level ones) often use their discretion (or latitude for action)... How managers exercise discretion when making decisions is critical to the firm’s success and affects or shapes the firm’s culture.”

In everyday decision-making when dealing with people and business matters, managers are in the unique position of decision-making. Managers are deciding whether to employ ethical guideposts such as honesty, justice, forthrightness and reverence for others OR unethical behaviors such as fraud and deceitfulness. It is a conscious decision made by managers routinely. A manager will consciously or unconsciously ask this question, “Will I use a sliding scale of ethical behavior as the situation presents itself or act in a manner that is “right and true and pure” no matter the circumstance or consequences?”

Managers deprived of a robust set of ethical rules and guidelines easily sliding along the scale, find decision-making more difficult and variable with each new situation. Schermerhorn, in his textbook *Introduction to Management*, points out “managers with strong ethical frameworks, ones that provide personal rules and strategies for ethical decision-making will act more consistently and confidently. The foundations for these frameworks rest with individual character and personal values that give priority to such virtues as honesty, integrity, fairness and respect. These moral anchors can help us make ethical decisions even when circumstances are ambiguous and situational pressures are difficult.” Michael Josephson, identified 12 ethical principles for business executives. I include them in this list of moral or ethical anchors. They are: honesty, integrity, promise keeping, loyalty, fairness, caring, respect for others,

law-abiding, commitment to excellence, leadership (honorable and ethical), reputation and morale and being accountable.

Moral anchors provide the foundation, the underpinning, for our ethical frameworks. These anchors make managerial decision-making more consistent across each new situation that arises in the workplace. These anchors also allow managers to act more confidently in their decision-making roles. We owe it to colleagues and future business partners to identify and demonstrate moral anchors so there can be no doubt what these values should be while conducting business as usual. It is our responsibility to support our fellow management team and future managers in recognizing the value of moral anchors within the ethical framework. It is our obligation to assist them with sound business judgments in their critical decision-making roles.

If Management is a Calling, you WILL DO THIS.

Does Having Business Management Expertise Mean that Management is a Calling?

As a business consultant, business owner or manager, you can instruct on the business skills associated with organizational behavior and design, human resource management and policy management. You might dispense the Tools and Rules for Engagement in strategic management in a world marked by intense competition and globalization with ease. Operational management formulations and computations are possibly child's play for you. You may have countless case studies and practical experiences to share related to executive and corporate leadership. *Characteristics Associated With Entrepreneurial Success* might be found resting on your bed stand for nighttime reading. You may be qualified to disseminate information and work according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Beginning at recall working through to comprehension, practical application, analysis, synthesis and up to the very top of the critical thinking spectrum: evaluation and creating, you might dispense business knowledge. You can engage in critical thinking with students, colleagues and business leaders alike. Does having this level of business management expertise mean that management is a calling? No.

A CASE STUDY

I arrived at my Human Resources Management Lecture Hall with an ethical personnel management dilemma weighing heavily on my mind. It goes like this:

Professor: "So Class. Class! Are you ready?! Ok. Ok. This morning I had an unbelievable event happen to me and it really did happen!"

Class: Laughs.

Professor: "I feel compelled to share it with you. I still can't believe it really happened! But it did. This morning at 5:35 AM I am waiting in my car in a long line at a familiar fast food restaurant waiting to order my egg muffin hold the cheese and diet coke. I am snaking my way slowly toward the order monitor. I can see there were some very intense people up ahead waiting to collect their much needed coffee fix. Being unfamiliar with this early morning crowd, I am not too sure of the accepted protocol for splitting into Lane 1 or Lane 2."

Class: Laughs and leans in to listen.

Professor: "It appears one lady is guarding the entrance to BOTH lanes and she is not about to relinquish her position. Not wanting to be rude at 5:45 in the morning and unable to get her attention, I wave down a young employee hanging out behind an old car in the parking lot. As I roll down my passenger side window, I say, "Excuse me sir. Excuse me sir."

He approaches my car. I explain my dilemma. I smile and say, "Can you please answer my question?" He moves closer. "I'm sorry but I don't know the accepted protocol here for Lane 1 and Lane 2 and I certainly don't want to cut in front of anyone, especially at this early hour. Am I okay sitting here and waiting for the next order monitor to come available?"

Class: Laughs louder, harder, leans in and waits for what is going to happen next.

Professor: He walks over to the side of my car, looks at me, smiles, and says, “Yes, mam. This is the right spot. I am sorry I am backing away from your car but I’m smokin’ weed and don’t want to blow smoke in your car and disrespect you.”

Class: Laughs hysterically and hangs on my every word!

“What happened?!” the class shouts.

Professor: “I am stunned. I am in early morning disbelief and shock! Did he really just say what I thought I heard him say?! I re-wind the discussion in my head and decide he really did say what I heard! He just admitted to me he is smoking marijuana in the parking lot of his place of employment! And this is a Marijuana in a ‘Not Legal for Sale or Consumption State’ in the Deep South! I don’t know what to do! I don’t know what to say! I don’t know what to do next! I mean what do you do?! What do you say?! Here is this very nice young man assisting me with my very inconsequential situation and he presents me with this hugely, “OH NO! What do I do now?” dilemma!

Class: Hysterical!

Professor: “So Class: I’m the customer. I think this young man is telling me the truth! It sure SMELLS like he’s telling me the truth! He sure is HOLDING THE PRODUCT like he is telling me the truth! What DO I do!? What would YOU do?!”

Class: Laughter and Excited Discussion.

Professor: “So Class, What do you think I DID!? ...” (Honest Answer Given.) “What could I have done?! What would YOU have done!? What would I do or what would YOU DO NEXT time?!”

Class: Laughter and Honest Discussion takes place.

Professor: “What if I am the manager and know the policies of the restaurant? What if there are no policies? What if this is a multiple offense situation at the restaurant? What if I am an employee and not a customer and see this happening? What if I am a police officer?”

Class: Honest Discussion.

Serious discourse on remedies and actions for consideration takes place. Students are riveted to their seats. The discussion is lively, funny, real, honest, and relevant. The multiple consequences of action related to this young employee, his family and community, his employee buddies, the employer, and the establishment are examined.

Professor: “Yes!” she says loudly to herself.

The students heard the message revealing the moral anchors of the situation. A visible ethical awareness, perhaps a moral value shift, takes place in the Lecture Hall. The entire incident and forthcoming discussion has elevated the calling of management to gratifying and an opportunity to make an ethical difference in the lives of students who are world citizens and our future business leaders.

MANAGEMENT IS A CALLING WHEN....

Management is a Calling when as you are compelled to discuss the sometimes difficult aspects of a dilemma such as personnel issues, management policies, principled values, organizational behavior and the law. There is intentionality and purpose to the discussion that leads to a recognizable positive moral values shift. As manager/leader practitioners or academicians, we have a calling when we introduce innovation and engage others in pursuing excellence within our workplace, community and beyond. This pursuit or calling will most importantly look to move business colleagues to higher ground. A calling will involve engaging others in discussions requiring morally sound, ethically principled business practice decision-making.

We may begin to see new behavior, morally sound judgments taking place before our eyes. If YOUR honest discussions lead future managers to face real challenges and share mistaken perceptions, judgments, and decision-making rules for review and resolution in the pursuit of excellence, Management is your Calling. If YOU explore ethical ways to resolve dilemmas and discover how to act ethically given a similar set of circumstances, Management is a Calling. When moral anchors and ethical frameworks weave seamlessly through assigned readings, ethical behavior and management challenges appear in

critical essays, and Bloom's Taxonomy is at work at every level of engagement in the classroom, Management SHOULD BE Your Calling.

The dilemma was a very real life learning experience. This was an ethical and moral dilemma across multiple management levels for each person in the Lecture Hall. I was given an opportunity and a platform to share, discuss and help shape the life choices of each member in the Lecture Hall managing their personal and professional lives.

"Halleluiah! Management is MY Calling!"

IF MANAGEMENT IS A CALLING YOU WILL KNOW THIS

Management faculty has the responsibility to deliver a path and process to aid future managers in making right decisions even when outcomes may be unpopular or perhaps financially less advantageous. These are the tough decisions being made every day in management and their impact may be long lasting and super-cede decisions related to operational management or strategic competitive advantage. We might be responsible for guiding a socially responsible corporate manager toward ethical decision-making or by omission, spawn a self-serving Ponzi-schemer.

The future businessmen and women in the Lecture Hall that morning were challenged to address multiple issues requiring strong character qualities in making a right choice. It is my belief this shared experience will positively influence future management decisions they are called to make during the life of their careers. Should a similar circumstance present itself, these students are equipped to recognize the dilemma and confidently respond with appropriate, ethically sound, professional behavior.

It is our role and responsibility, our Calling, to share not only our principles of management expertise. It is our duty to present ethical frameworks for consideration as well as our successes AND failures dealing with moral dilemmas. These are lessons learned in the pit; some wins and some losses. With moral anchors, ethical foundations in place, managers will be less ambivalent and more confident in making critical life and business decisions. Failures and successes seen through a moral filter serve to embolden ethical decision-making and remind managers of the impact their decisions will have on people's lives and the company culture. Remember, if Management is a Calling, you will KNOW THIS.

Success Is Measured Differently

Michael Novak (1996) in his text entitled, *Management is a Calling* points out that a "strictly economic business language had grown up without including within itself the moral, religious, even humane language appropriate to its own activities...The virtual monopoly on ways of thinking about business life...has an unfortunate affect upon on the moral and religious dimension of economic life. It has tended to focus exclusive attention on material things, on the bottom line, on instrumental matters, on means and methods rather than on ends and purposes."

In business school Lecture Halls across the country, experts tout the advantages of winning at all costs. What is being neglected in this dialogue is the understanding that the cost may in fact be too high. Deep personal and spiritual satisfaction is part of the equation for happiness and success. Success is not always measured in terms of the bottom line. Ask teachers, community volunteers, successful businessmen and women who have conquered the landscape with their ethical-moral standards still in place, still walking on the high road. They would tell you the measure is a much different scale. They would tell you the path is a much different path and the everlasting outcome is not the same.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROFESSIONAL CALLED TO MANAGEMENT

When you are willing to consider placing the higher good and wellbeing of people and values equal to or above the financial bottom line of the company, you have a true calling in management. Most professionals eagerly share and mentor the next generation of leader managers with tested recipes for operational success. However, professionals who experience Management as a Calling go beyond this role. These professionals are willing to risk exposure and seek a higher road. 'Management as a Calling'

professionals live and teach the moral anchors of the ethical framework. They will develop the character of the next generation of leader managers through modeling by example and by demonstrating moral and ethical value judgments. A “Management as a Calling” professional will explore ethical challenges. They will invite discussion into the Lecture Hall and explore ethical solutions to potential dilemmas in the workplace and within the community.

Management consultants, business leaders, and academicians with ethical anchors in place who shape the future of potential and newly minted business leaders have a Calling to the field of Management. Those who are willing to lead by example and dedicate their business practice and teachings to ethical business management and excellence in the field demonstrate the character of Management as a Calling.

FIVE QUESTIONS TO ANSWER TO DETERMINE IF MANAGEMENT IS YOUR CALLING

Do you have a Calling in Management? Ask yourself these five questions to determine if YOU have a Calling in Management.

1. Are YOU willing to pursue excellence and tackle the great challenge, the important role, of shaping the ethical and moral judgments of young and maturing minds?
2. Are YOU willing to step out and honestly share ethical dilemmas you have faced; some tackled triumphantly and others lost?
3. Equipped with greater conviction, moral resolve and a possible arsenal of ethical solutions, can YOU face down a dilemma when it once again raises its ugly head?
4. Are you willing to share the experience and move forward with a greater sense of urgency knowing this is the work YOU should be doing in the classroom or in the business workplace?
5. Lastly,
6. Do YOU let out a characteristic cry of “Yes!” and recognize the difference you have made when you meet the mark and accomplish the task? That is, when your intentionally principled, resourceful self finds the courage to confront an unethical situation and gently guide a wayward soul to foundationally anchored action.

This is a life task. This is a mission and purpose. If your answer is yes to these five questions, YOU have a Calling in Management.

REFERENCES

- Bolles, R. N. (1990). *What Color Is Your Parachute?*. Berkeley: TEN SPEED PRESS.
- Bolles, R. N. (2013). *What Color Is Your Parachute?*. Berkeley: TEN SPEED PRESS.
- Calling. In Merriam-Webster’s on-line dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/calling>.
- Hitt, N. A., Ireland, D. R., & Hoskisson, R. E. (2015). Strategic Leadership. In 11e, *Strategic Management Competitiveness & Globalization* (p. 374). Canada: Cengage Learning.
- Josephson, M. (2010). *12 Ethical Principles for Business Executives*. Retrieved from <http://josephsoninstitute.org/business/blog/2010/12/12-ethical-principles-for-business-executives/>
- Management. In the Free Dictionary by Farlex on-line dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/management>.
- Management. In the Business Dictionary.com on-line dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/management.html>.
- Management. In the Google on-line dictionary. Retrieved from <http://google-dictionary.so8848.com/meaning?word=management>.
- McLure, M. L. (1990). *Characteristics Associated with Entrepreneurial Success*. Retrieved from <http://phdtree.org/pdf/24683207-characteristics-associated-with-entrepreneurial-success/>.
- Novak, M. (1996). *Business As A Calling Work And The Examined Life* (p. 4). NY: The Free Press.
- Schermerhorn, J. R. (2013). Ethics And Social Responsibility. In 12e, *Management LearnISucceed* (pp. 64-65). Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc..