

BGCT president urges Baptists to learn from failed businesses_72604

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By Marv Knox

Editor

HOUSTON-Lessons learned from failed businesses can spur the Baptist General Convention of Texas to success, BGCT President Ken Hall insisted.

"We must change the way we carry out our stewardship of ministry for the Lord," he warned at the Texas Baptists Committed annual convocation in Houston.

Hall, president of Buck-ner Baptist Benevolences in Dallas, based his challenge on research presented in "Why Smart Executives Fail," a book by Dartmouth College professor Sidney Finkelstein.

Ken Hall

Hall pointed to seven "spectacularly unsuccessful" habits of these business leaders, as well as implications for Texas Baptists:

- ◆ The illusion of personal pre-eminence.

In failed businesses, the executives often think they're "more important than the product," Hall said. Such thinking is absurd, since consumers buy the product, regardless of who heads the company.

The seduction of personal pre-eminence can cause Texas Baptists, and particularly their leaders, to forget God calls them to lead by serving others, not by dominating the spotlight of fame and recognition, he said.

"What we do is not about us," Hall added, acknowledging: "As Baptists and as Texans, that goes against our pathology. ... But we're to be servants of the Lord and of others."

- ◆ The company is mine.

Some CEOs begin to view their companies as extensions of themselves and lose their sense of accountability to others, he pointed out.

Similarly, Texas Baptists can be tempted to see their cause as their own, and even if their cause is worthy, their perspective is skewed, he said.

"Texas Baptists are workers in the field of the Lord," he explained. "The work of Texas Baptists doesn't belong to the churches, the denomination, the Baptist Building or to Texas Baptists Committed. It belongs to the Lord."

- ◆ We have all the answers.

"No one has all the answers," Hall said of business leaders as well as Texas Baptists.

"We believe in the principles of our movement, such as religious liberty, soul competency, the authority of the Bible and the separation of church and state," he reported. "But that didn't prevent Baptists from supporting

slavery, segregation, male supremacy and other such sins. ...

“Baptists thought they had all the answers. That's how fundamentalism gained root in our lives. Christian humility demands we seek the Lord for our strategy and our methods.”

- ◆ My way or the highway.

Execs who take this approach to business not only eliminate dissent, but they also “cut off their best chance for survival,” Hall said.

“My greatest fear for Texas Baptists has its roots in this habit,” Hall admitted. “It is a kind of reverse fundamentalism that says every church must take the same action, every institution must follow the same course.

“We must allow dissent ... on practical issues. Our tent must be larger if we're going to win this world to Christ.”

- ◆ Obsessed with image.

Company heads who obsess about their image try to “spin” every issue to make them look good but fail to deal with substantive challenges to real success, Hall explained.

This is a condition that afflicts Texas Baptists and is illustrated by how they report their size, he claimed. “We say we have 2 million constituents. But we can't find half of them.”

He affirmed the ministry of the Baptist Standard. “We need the Baptist Standard. We need somebody to tell us the truth—that we have warts as well as roses.”

While Texas Baptists love to trumpet their successes, “the truth is every day we're losing this state to the devil,” he said.

- ◆ Underestimating major obstacles.

Too many business leaders overlook challenges and refuse to admit failure, while they need to recognize reality, he said.

“Texas Baptists need to admit some obstacles are bigger than our intellects and our ability to overcome,” he urged. “But the difference between us and the business world is that Jesus is our advocate.

“Some problems are out there ... that only God can overcome. It's time to fall on our knees and ask God to rain down his power.”

- ◆ Stubbornly relying on what worked in the past.

This habit is so seductive, because it tempts CEOs to trust in the methods, products and programs that gave them success before, Hall reported.

And it's seductive for Texas Baptists, because the temptation to look back on their era of booming growth and productivity is strong, he said, insisting such an approach would be disastrous.

“We're at the defining moment of this generation,” he said. “We can't keep score the way we did in the 1950s and '60s. The world is changing. It is beyond time for us to change.”

Issues of aging leadership, changing ethnic demographics, gender inclusiveness, missions support and methods of theological education “are just some of the questions we have to ask ourselves,” Hall urged. “Right now, we are not fulfilling Jesus' commission to reach the world.”

Consequently, a process designed to reorganize the Baptist General Convention of Texas and focus the convention's strategy for doing its work is vitally important, he added.

The process began early this year, led by BGCT Executive Director Charles

Wade and the convention's officers. Four teams worked throughout the spring to provide ideas for how the convention should arrange its priorities and shape its strategy.

Now, a special committee is working on specific suggestions for reorganizing so that the convention's structure will match its priorities and strategy. The committee will present its report to the BGCT Administrative Committee Sept. 2-3 and the BGCT Executive Board Sept. 28.

The committee's proposals will “radically, dramatically change the way we do business as Texas Baptists,” Hall predicted.

They will start with how the BGCT is governed and emphasize accountability and efficiency. They also will help the convention emphasize missions, church starting, Christian education and welfare, he added.

Hall told the group he has a prayer for his convention presidency: “I want to have set a stage for change, but my selfish prayer is I want our Texas Baptist family to be ahead of addressing these vital issues.”

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