

Christian Nonprofit CFO Podcast

EPISODE #43 TRANSCRIPT

The Essential Need for Both Financial Expertise and Customer Service

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Intro:

*Welcome to another episode of the **Christian Nonprofit CFO Podcast**. This is the place to enhance your insight as a CFO in order to expand your influence and optimize your ministries impact. Content on this show is to inform, instruct and encourage your strategic development. It is not to render specific financial or legal advice for your organization. Now here's your host, David Beroth.*

David Beroth:

Hello, my friends. And welcome to this October episode of the Christian Nonprofit CFO podcast. It is good to be with you again here today. It's been a while since I've had a chance to record an episode. I've been thinking about different topics I've wanted to cover, but with the business and responsibilities of life, I've not had a chance to record some episodes recently. However, I wanted to get one to you today. Recently, I was in Dallas, Texas for the Missio Nexus conference. It was really encouraging to connect with some of the listeners to this podcast there. And I do hope that it continues to be a blessing to those who listen, because my heart's desire is to bring you true, genuine lessons in life that I've learned in the CFO space to help you in your journey as a financial leader.

Today we're going to talk about the topic of the essential need for financial expertise and for customer service. And you may think, Why would that be a relevant topic for a podcast such as this? Well, I have found through experience and through observation that those two different qualities— though they are related, they are very, very different. And I would like to unpack that for you today. So my proposition is this, That there is a distinction, a very clear distinction between financial expertise and customer service. And I believe you're going to see that as we go through this episode.

This initially dawned on me when I was in public accounting. Many years ago, I worked for a local CPA firm and I just reflected upon, I could do all of this diligent, high quality accounting work for my clients. I would make sure that all the accounting entries were done correctly. I'd look to make sure I was optimizing different depreciation and other expense options. I would look for what would be most optimal to help save their taxes and make sure that their accounting needs were being met. However, I could do a great job on the backend, but if my client did not fully understand what I was doing at an appropriate level for which they would

need to know, or if it was not clearly communicated to them, they wouldn't really have an appreciation for it. They wouldn't know, Wow, David really did work hard to come up with some creative ideas to save me on some taxes or he really worked hard on how he timed things to optimize my business opportunities. So I began to formulate this thinking in my mind: My, there is a difference. There's a difference between what I do and what is informed of to the client of what I have done for them. This was further clarified to me when I was at Seed Company.

I remember sitting in one of the senior leadership team meetings and our head of IT—his name was Sean Ring—at the time he started to talk about this whole notion of UX/UI, and I didn't have a technical background. So he's talking about, Well, this UX/UI is really important and this is why we need to deliver these types of services. So I remember going back and trying to Google, Okay, what exactly is UX/UI? And why would that maybe be important for me to understand more extensively? Well, of course, UX is that whole user experience and UI is the user interface. And that's important when it comes to developing websites and portals upon which you start to complete information. But I started to think about those concepts in light of a financial lens. It really was solidified in my heart: I need to seek a good, optimal user experience for those that are on the other end of what I do in my role as a financial leader.

If I want to serve those around me, well, I need to package what I do in an optimal user experience that they can appreciate what's being done and know that what I am doing is to help them succeed in their role, whatever it might be. This is essential. I recently finished the book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. And it was good for me as I was processing what the author was discussing that book. He was making the point that the higher you go up in an organization, your challenges will generally be behavioral and not technical. Most of us are become technical and proficient in our space. You know, as accountants, or maybe your background is a different area, we get pretty good in that space. But we need to think about what are the behaviors we're doing in our role that will help us to succeed and thrive in assisting those around us, or are those behaviors inhibiting us from truly serving those around us like we should be serving them?

So that behavioral element is really, really essential. Let's take a couple of examples outside of our space. Let's say you have a great doctor. This doctor is a very, very wise, we'll call him a general practitioner. Really knows their stuff. However, if they come in and they're not polite, if they're not really interested in you as an individual, if it's just bad bedside manners, do you really have a good user experience with that doctor? Unfortunately, no, you don't. What happens if you go to your local car mechanic and need to have the alternator changed in your vehicle, and you go in and you think, Okay, this person I've heard, they're pretty good. And they seem knowledgeable on changing alternators. But if you go into pay your bill and maybe the man is swearing away, or the counter is full of grease when you're to make your payment for the car repair, do you have a good experience with them, even though they might be great at changing your alternator in the garage, if you go in and as you interact with them, if it doesn't go well, is that going to motivate you to want to continue to use their mechanical services? Probably not. How about situation of a preacher? You can have a preacher who does

really well in the pulpit. But as a pastor, if they don't seem to connect with you, if they're not concerned about your family and your family's needs, do you really have an experience in your local church of saying, That man is one that I want to follow, because maybe just doesn't seem to care about me as an individual, as my family... even though he's a great preacher, the user experience doesn't sit well with you.

So as a financial leader, we need to think about the entire customer experience of what we're trying to do in our role. Financial expertise and customer service are two essential qualities that have to function side-by-side to succeed. Long-term they may be related, but they are different. And you need to think of them in different ways in order to succeed.

I am using the term customer loosely here for the sake of this episode. But when you think about who are the key folks you're trying to serve in order to allow your financial function and your responsibilities to thrive, for instance, it could be external folks. It could be key donors with whom you're interacting. It could be some of the main vendors you use for your goods or services. It could be your bankers that you're working with things such as those types of folks, or it could be internal people with whom you work. For instance, it could be the staff and your finance team. It could be the staff around the organization. It could be other key leaders. Maybe it's board members with whom you interact, could be those internal folks that you need to function well with in order to thrive. It's how you deliver your financial services to these external and internal individuals to allow them to have that optimal user experience.

So going forward, I think we could call it here in this episode, not just customer service, but we can actually call it stakeholder service, because it's these critical stakeholders that need to be served well. So here's my basic proposition. For this episode, we need to seek to have each interaction be a meaningful interaction, where one of your stakeholders with whom you're interacting feels valued and that their needs have been considered. Let me say that one more time. We need to seek to have each meaningful interaction be one where your stakeholder feels valued and their needs have been considered. Not just your needs, but that their needs have been considered. It doesn't mean you don't ever disagree with folks, or you have to process difficult news, or you have different opinions, but it does mean that they feel that you have respected them as a person, and you've heard their concerns and their perspectives in order to help you best meet their needs and serve what they need from your financial field.

So let's turn and talk about seven different ideas for you. I'm going to share three with you in this episode. And then in the next episode, I will share with you the remaining four things in which you can serve in this way.

My first recommendation to provide optimal stakeholder service is first, Show concern for them as people, not simply as those on the other end of a transaction. This is really important when you're talking with them, always connect first as people before discussing business, because what people want to know is, Can you enter their worlds and engage with them at an

appropriate personal level to actually have a true, genuine discussion? Not just simply, Hey, I'm calling you about this quick transaction. Let's deal with it. Move on. Now, there are times you can perhaps do that when the relationship is solid, but do your best, as brief as it might be, to connect at this personal level. You know, my dentist does a great job to spend a lot of time doing this. When I go in for my dental appointments, he'll come in and just briefly say, Hey, how are the children doing? And how's the ministry going into the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association? He's cheerful and interested. And so we just chat for a minute or two, and then he goes on to do his dental services. But in doing that, he's connecting with me as a person, not simply one who is going to look into my mouth and take care of my teeth. And that allows my dental experience to be better than it might be if he would just simply come in and quickly do his dental work.

You can do this as well. Think about this. We'll just take your staff for instance, let's say that one of your staff members—we'll call him John—you know that John and his wife have some children in school. So you just asked him briefly sometimes, So, hey, how are your children doing as you cope with this COVID difficulty? Have you had to bring the children back home and do stuff there? Or are the children doing all right, actually functioning in the classroom? Maybe, you know, one of your team members enjoys camping, and they were going to go out camping one weekend. And so after that weekend, you stop by and say, How was that camping experience for you? Did you do okay in the rain or did you have nice weather? What was it like? You just asked them how their camping time was. Maybe, you know, one of your team members has a son by the name of Ben going off to college. And so as Ben's going to college, you say, Hey, how's the first semester for Ben? And what classes did he enjoy? Or what challenges did he experience there? You're connecting with them as people. Maybe you have a team member that has an ailing mother going into an assisted living home, and you say, Hey, how they'd fare? How are they holding up there?

You're trying to enter their worlds and show interest in them as people before you have to handle the financial discussions. Periodically follow up with them about even special matters in their lives. So things that are outside just the normal experiences... Maybe you have one whose daughter's getting married. And so you stop and you say, Hey Sarah got married last weekend. Love to see a few pictures when they're done. Just to say, I'm interested in you and in what's happening in your family. Maybe even do this, and I've tried to do this when I hear a team member getting married, or maybe even a special team member whose child's getting married. You ask, Hey, can I get some information about their registry and provide a gift for them? Once again, connect with them as people, not just those in business.

Also, you can connect with people when they accomplish a certain objective. Maybe you know that one of your team members is trying to get the CPA license. Make a big deal of it. When they pass each test along the journey of getting that license, connect with them, encourage them as they're about ready to sit for the test. Say you're going to be praying for them and absolutely celebrate when they pass the test or if, unfortunately, they don't pass a test, try to empathize with them and encourage them along that way. Maybe there's some other pursuit

they have... you know they're going to be preparing to run a half marathon. So encourage them, inquire about it. Certainly when they run the half marathon, ask how it went, what their time was. I think you'll find that you bind those strings of relationship that transcend business matters, and that does help with that user experience and stakeholder service for them.

Another idea: if you know that there's going to be a son or maybe a granddaughter that's going to be born in a couple of months, put a reminder in your calendar. It's so simple to do. Put a reminder in your calendar and follow up as that time is approaching, or maybe after the baby's born say, Hey, just interested. How did it go? How was the birth of your granddaughter? How did your son and daughter-in-law do during the process? And, I'm going to be praying for you and hope things are going well. For instance, in my situation, I heard of a colleague over in Europe whose son was going to be getting married a few months. So I intentionally flagged it in my system that I wanted to make sure that that next connection I had, I wanted to ask, How was the wedding? How did it go? And I do believe that the individual felt valued and appreciated when I had that interest in them as an individual and in their family.

One of the ideas along these lines would be for a select group. Of course, you can't do this quite extensively, but for a select group, make sure you're remembering their birthdays. It doesn't have to be a big gift, but maybe do a card and at least make sure you're giving birthday greetings. And one thing we do remember, of course, is the administrative professionals day. That is one thing that is unfortunate when people do forget that, because those that are perhaps serving you as an assistant or as a admin professional, they do work hard and they're not appreciated enough. Remember those special things. And I think that you will get people feeling valued and appreciated, and it will help you to function well in your space if you remember those things that occur.

One of the ideas around remembering individuals, those people... Is there a unique way in your own space, in your organization to remember and celebrate the people with whom you work? For instance, I used to work in the Bible translation world in the financial space. Now I can't say I did this, but I think it's a pretty neat idea. So it might be something that you could do in your space, but how neat it would be. Let's say you worked in a small Bible translation organization. If you were able to connect with Bible translators. And if you heard that they've just completed the book of John, for instance, or maybe they just finished some really relevant, critical stories of Abraham they were trying to do in book of Genesis, send a quick email and say, Hey, I heard the good news about you completing this translation work really encouraged about it. Keep things up and I'll be praying for you. Well, what a blessing that is to hear from a financial leader of your interest and awareness and encouragement in handling some Bible translation work. So when they hear from you, it's not simply, Oh, here's David again as the financial leader. He has another problem with my financial reimbursement request that I submitted. No, he's actually interested in my world. He wants to know about what's happening with my efforts and Bible translation. That really helps.

Maybe one of the ideas if you work with folks that are deputized fundraisers— send a quick note of encouragement. When you hear they reach 50% of their support, say, Hey, I'll be praying for you this week. Really encouraged to hear you reached 50% of your support, and keep it up. I look forward to having you on the mission field in the months to come. Something like that, just a way to connect with people in a meaningful way.

The second main idea is as you're interacting with your stakeholders, make sure and let them know that you are regularly looking out for their interests too often. We think, Well, I am looking out for their interests. Why do we need to communicate that to them? Well, they don't know that. They're busy doing their work. And when you take that time to intentionally communicate, Hey, I'm interested in your work. I'm letting you know that I'm looking out for your interests. That helps to solidify that relationship and really build the connections that you have with them. As an example, we've had a medical issue in my family over the last couple of years, and recently one of the practitioners whom we've been working, contacted us just to check in. It wasn't around an appointment. It wasn't around lab results that were being submitted, but the practitioner said, Hey, just want to see how you're doing. I've been praying for you. Hope you're doing well. You know how meaningful that was to us? That this medical professional was not just there to get a fee and just to check a box and just say, we've done an appointment, but they were interested in us as people, and how grateful we were for that. And it solidified that relationship we had with them. And I know it seems odd to say, well, put something on the calendar to remind yourself, to follow up with people. I mean, don't tell anyone you're putting them on the calendar of course, but put on the calendar to remind you, because you can't remember, Oh yeah, I want to make sure I reach out to John and follow up about this particular item, and Suzanne, over here, I want to ask about how the birth of her granddaughter goes in two months. But if you flag that and you put it in there, when the time comes, it can be done in a way that's not time intensive, but still very, very meaningful to them.

So affirm to them when interacting together that you are out for their best interest. Let's take that back into the financial space. If you see a financial matter that might impact them in a challenging and problematic way, connect with them to say, Hey, I know that you've been really working hard to stay within budget and we have this anomaly of an expense coming through. And I want to know that I'm trying to evaluate this. And maybe in this situation, I realize you might be going over a budget in this one area, but I'm trying to stay connected with your financial needs and making sure that we handle things appropriately for you. So we'll stay connected in the weeks to come about this, but I'm on it. And I'm thinking about how it can best serve you and your space. Wow. That's, that's really appreciated. People will be grateful that this person didn't just call to slap my hand on what they thought I didn't do. Right. But they wanted to connect with me because they saw something and they were concerned about how this might impact my financial space.

Another example: Insurance premiums. If you've dealt with insurance at all, you know, that premiums are going up. There's just a rise in costs for property insurance and liability property or general liability insurance needs... Things like that. So if you see that happening, call and

explain to a budget manager, Hey, we see what's going on. Likely there's going to be an increase in premiums. I know this is going to impact your budget area, and let's think through it and work through it together of how to absorb this increase and what are other ways maybe we can adjust, modify things to make this increase work as well as possible in your area. But make sure you let people know you're looking out for their interests.

And this goes all the way back to my public accounting days, where I could do all the work on the backend, but unless I or someone else would pick up the phone or stop over and talk with other clients about what we're seeing or what we did and how we were concerned for them, they would not know that we worked hard to understand their needs and to meet their needs. And until they knew that, they did not feel valued as a client of ours.

The third and final thing, which we'll talk about in today's episode is do this: Please, please meet the deadlines you give to your stakeholders or inform them that you're going to be late. This is unfortunate when this doesn't happen, because when you put something out there of, I'm going to get back to you next Friday. If next Friday comes and goes and you never get back to them and you never tell them why it's going to be delayed, it can provide frustration and a lack of trust and confidence in you as a financial leader if you don't follow through with the deadlines that you establish for yourself.

Here's an example. Let's say you're working on a budget allocations. And so you tell the budget managers in your organization, By next Friday, we're going to have the allocations done. We're going to have the information uploaded ready for you to populate the information in your budget worksheets, and it should be ready for you by next Friday. So you go to work and you're working through things. And there are basically three ways this could unfold. The first way is you've said next Friday, but optimally, if you're done by next Thursday, you can go on and send an email out and say, Hey, the allocations are done. Things are ready for you for your review and uploading your information before we submit the entire budget, and have it ready to go. Communicate that and say it is ready, you can now take next steps. Now the best way of saying it is to even incorporate in your email, not just the information's ready, but to say, I said that the information will be ready by Friday; the good news is we are one day ahead of schedule, and you will be ready to go with your information. Just by mentioning that you are letting them know you not only met your deadline, you actually came in before the deadline to meet their needs and to serve them in the best way possible. That's optimal. Of course, realistically, what's acceptable is that the information is done on time.

If you say it's going to be done by next Friday, you better make sure by next Friday you've sent the information out, you've sent the email and said, The information is ready as we said it was going to be ready by next Friday. It is now ready for you to take your next steps in this budget process. What is a problem is if you get held up, maybe you've been held up because you haven't gotten enough information to do your allocations. And so next Friday comes and goes. It's into the following Monday, the following Tuesday, you finally sit down and email late on that Tuesday afternoon about what is to take place that breaks the trust that people have in you as

a financial leader. So if there is a problem, and of course problems do rise, but make sure that you send that email out on the day you said you're gonna have the information ready and say, just briefly, I want to you know, we said the information will be ready by this Friday. And we ran into some challenges trying to get information. So we're going to try to have it out to you by the next Wednesday. Well, tell the people, let them know that you knew what was communicated to them. You knew what was your responsibility. You knew what was taking place. You want to make sure you inform them that it was going to be late. And here's the basic reason why I was going to be late. But if you want to have that optimal stakeholder service, you've got to communicate if you can't meet the deadline that you've put forth. Make sure you handle deadlines wisely and carefully. And I think that will help in your striving for optimal customer and stakeholder service.

Those are a couple ideas. Hopefully it gives you some thinking to do around how you can work with your internal and external stakeholders, to try to help them to have and to feel that their needs are being heard, considered and met. First of all, show concern for the stakeholders as people. Second of all, let them know you are regularly looking out for their interests. And thirdly, meet the deadlines or inform them if the deadlines are not going to be met.

So my friends, thank you today for joining me for this episode. It is good to be back with you. And I look forward to connecting with you again, Lord-willing, next month to share the next four ideas around providing optimal stakeholder service, and in the months to come, to explore even further insights of how we can expand our insight and expand our impact. So now I'll close in the words of Jude, where Jude writes, "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to God our Savior, Who alone is wise, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen."

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