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### **“BUSINESS SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS”**

Some years ago, the *Wichita Eagle* published my article “The Business of a Christmas Carol.” Editing and refreshing it for this year’s “Business Spirit of Christmas” in Wichita was fun.

My most enjoyable business movie is the 1951 “Christmas Carol” – best for acting, props, music score and content. When Fezziwig, Scrooge’s first boss, was approached by the M&A guys of 1820 with a buyout, he declined. Dickens wrote in 1843, “It’s not for money alone that one builds a (family) business . . . it is to preserve a way of life that one once knew and loved.” That spirit and business vision is alive and finding new strength in a resurgent Wichita mindset.

No, it’s not sunshine, lollipops and roses for all. It never was and it never will be. We have a start and a motivation with “Visioneering.” When pushed to “sellout” to the investment banker, Fezziwig ends the discussion with a closing remark that needs to be heard more often in business boardrooms today: “There’s more to life than money.”

Note Scrooge’s first words to Jacob Marley: “The world is becoming a hard and cruel place. One must steel oneself to survive it and not be crushed with the weak and affirmed.” Who and what is making our world a hard, cruel place? Which way of life is being preserved in America today? Scrooge’s?

My brothers and I, all with careers in business, often quote “A Christmas Carol.” One of my favorites: “We spirits of Christmas do not live one day of the year. We live the whole 365. So it is true of the child born in Bethlehem. He doesn’t live in man’s hearts only 1 day of the year, but in all the days of the year.” It is good to be a child sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself.

For years I’ve recommended to business clients, “No employee terminations between Thanksgiving and Christmas.” It is Scrooge-like, cruel and portrays in you a slighted view of humanity. Marley’s ghost cries, “Mark me, in life my spirit never roamed beyond the limits of our money changing hole.” Closely followed by Dickens’ most profound statement on business and humanity: “Business! Mankind was my business! Their common welfare was my business!”

We are all stakeholders in a moral business turnaround. Scrooge’s fiancée released him from their engagement stating, “A golden idol has replaced me in your heart.” As those 3,000 years ago bowed daily to a golden calf, we check our stock portfolios daily and the weight of our wallets to measure how good of a person we are.

Regardless of its marketing masquerades, greed and political lust will never be diminished in our culture until they are diminished in us. At the end of the movie, while speaking to his long-time, mistreated bookkeeper, Scrooge said, “I haven’t lost my senses, Bob, I’ve come to them.”

As we enter 2005, have you awakened from a myopic dream totally focused on wealth, the golden calf and your stock portfolio? As Scrooge did, have you wakened to realize just how fortunate you are to be an American business owner and manager? No one said it would be easy in America – but you can try. In our country, everyone can try.

In American business you can express ingenuity and market creativity as you move your business to greater productivity, performance and profitability. We have daily opportunities to express the qualities we most admire. We can express virtue, patience and compassion for everyone who has less than we have and yes, even for those who have more than we do. Demonstrate your gratitude and generosity in the communities you are privileged to do business in. Often, your time and talent is a more valuable gift than your dollars – and often your return on this investment will exceed every expectation.

Carry the Spirit of the Holiday Season throughout 2005. You will be better for it, your business will be better for it, and our world will be better for it.

From Tiny Tim, a toast to you for a prosperous 2005. “God bless us, everyone!”

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