A Man of Understanding

“Seek to understand before being understood” is a phrase I’ve heard repeatedly in my 12+ years as a Christian Business Owner. It’s good advice, frankly, because when you can understand what the other person is saying or understand the “why” behind their actions, the root of the problem or the core issues can be more clearly understood.

In Proverbs, the Bible refers to a “man of understanding” several times in relation to several key scenarios that all of us as business owners encounter. I will submit that becoming a “man of understanding” will make you a better person as well as a better Christian Business Owner and it will have spill-over, positive effects into other areas of your business. Let’s take a look at these passages.

- Proverbs 1.5: A wise man will hear and increase in learning, And a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel
- Proverbs 10.23: Doing wickedness is like sport to a fool, And so is wisdom to a man of understanding.
- Proverbs 11.12: He who despises his neighbor lacks sense, But a man of understanding keeps silent.
- Proverbs 15.21: Folly is joy to him who lacks sense, But a man of understanding walks straight.
- Proverbs 17.27: He who restrains his words has knowledge, And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.
- Proverbs 20.5: A plan in the heart of a man is like deep water, But a man of understanding draws it out.
- Proverbs 28.2: By the transgression of a land many are its princes, But by a man of understanding and knowledge, so it endures.

The Hebrew word for “understanding” means “skill, intelligence, understanding”; a capacity for discerning a
right course of action and then having the self-discipline to follow through on that action.

In these seven verses, we find seven distinct characteristics of a “man of understanding”:

1. **Get Wisdom (1.5):** A man of understanding pursues the acquisition of wise counsel. In this vein, not just anyone will do. A man of understanding is careful and discerning about who he learns from. He will sometimes shy away from the latest fad of teachers, knowing that many times, these teachers come and go swiftly and don’t have lasting value to the mature Christian.

2. **Enjoys growing in understanding (10.23):** Most Americans enjoy one type of sport or another. By comparison, we learn that a fool enjoys committing acts of wickedness as a sport if for no other reason. So to, a man of understanding enjoys acquiring and growing in wisdom. In this usage, wisdom means rightly applying all that God has said in the Scriptures to my situation.

3. **Silent when given the opportunity to talk bad about another person (11.12):** A man of understanding keeps his judgment to himself and abstains from arrogant criticisms. He knows that he is not infallible, that he is not acquainted with the heart of the other person and he possesses too much self-knowledge to raise himself above his neighbour as a judge, and thinks that contemptuous rejection, unamiable, reckless condemnation, does no good, but on the contrary does evil on all sides. (Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). Commentary on the Old Testament (Vol. 6, p. 171). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson).

4. **Focused on Highest Value Activities (15.21):** The sense of this comparison is that folly – that which is buffoonery – draws the fool away from his core duties and highest value activities, wasting time and strength. The man of understand perceives and rejects the vanity
of such nonsense and keeps his path straight without being drawn aside. He stays focused on his call, his duty, his highest value activities.

5. **Mature control on his emotions (17.27):** what is not in view here is some type of emotional repression where the man stuffs his feelings in order to get along with others. Instead, a man of understand has, in contrast to inconsiderate and untimely talk; the equanimity of spirit, in contrast to passionate heat. It isn’t that the man of understanding doesn’t feel intense emotions. It is that these emotions don’t drive his words – a lesson that all of us should learn.

6. **Discernment of Others (20.5):** Many have secret plans for their lives that they tell few about. A man of understanding has the discernment and capacity to penetrate into another person and draw out their plans and visceral thoughts and emotions. The sense of this version is that this activity is mean to help the other person, so the man of understanding is a counselor, perhaps helping the other person understand themselves better.

7. **Provides stability in his community (28.2):** The New International Version translates the first line “When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers”. A man of understanding holds the community together. Rebelliousness leads to unstable communities as they fracture and follow different leaders. But a man of understanding provides a righteous leadership to which the community may tether itself and thus endure the fracturing that results from rebelliousness.

Think about it. Would you like to be a man of understanding? Then let the Holy Spirit transform you into such a man. You won’t be sorry that you did this and you’ll likely transform your business as you find yourself holding your tongue, being focused on your highest value activities, drawing out the visceral needs and dreams of your employees and providing
stability and wisdom for your business.

May God richly bless you today as you pursue this worthy goal.

Bill English
CEO, Elevate
Associate, The Platinum Group