

- STRONG MARRIAGES MAKE GOOD BUSINESS SENSE

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CBN.com –Good marriages help grow strong families, but can they help the bottom-line at work? Anyone who has ever had a bad day at the office after a bad night at home may know what many business leaders know.

“We would like to say, 'oh, don't bring your personal problems to work. But that's not realistic and that's not natural,” said Jack Myrick, a marriage education consultant.

Myrick works for the state of Oklahoma, which has spent more than ten million dollars in marital education. And other states are following suit, recognizing that healthy marriages reduce the need for many social services.

But on the business side, it's much more difficult to find companies that want to invest in encouraging strong marriages.

“We really are stunned at how hard it's been to get corporations to see this is what they should be doing—that good strong marriages would be great for the bottom-line,” said Diane Sollee of the Smart Marriages Coalition.

Enter Truett Cathy—CEO of Chick-fil-A and maverick of the corporate world for closing his restaurants on Sunday.

It's been his marriage-friendly policies and programs that have earned him the spotlight. Smart Marriages, a national coalition of professional and lay leaders, recently presented Cathy with its first-ever business award.

According to Cathy, promoting marriage doesn't just line up with his Christian values, it makes business sense as well.

“If a person can't conduct their personal life, you can't expect them to be a high performer in his business,” said Cathy.

Chick-fil-A's commitment to marriage has grown out of a culture that supports the family and programs such as on-site daycare.

Cathy himself has been married for 58 years.

The well-known Christian businessman says his Sunday policy has made a big difference in his marriage and those of his employees.

But Chick-fil-A couples such as the Yokums also appreciate the \$30-million dollars he's poured into a marriage retreat center called Winshape.

Ty and Julie Yokum have been married, happily, for 18 years. But two years ago, a Chick-fil-A sponsored retreat took their relationship from good to "wow."

"What we discovered were that there were some holes in our hearts that were just there from growing up and relationships with parents," said Ty.

Julie added, "We've had a deeper, richer understanding. And it would not have happened—would not have happened—without that Winshape retreat. We probably would still be limping along, trying our best."

William and Amber Saunders are another couple that have embraced marriage education. William's financial consulting company in Richmond, Virginia has sponsored a class, and the Saunders have attended several retreats. Both say they've learned more about each other and how to express themselves.

"If there's an issue, you can go ahead and talk about what's bothering you, and the person has to repeat exactly what you said so that you know they heard exactly what you wanted," said Amber.

For William, the decision to seek marriage training grew out of his business philosophy.

He said, "We're always hiring consultants. We're always hiring some type of coach and so there is no stereotype to me. I see this as 'Look, I'm going to apply these same lessons that I've learned in my business life to my personal life.'"

For Ty, marriage training has directly affected his work.

"Since that retreat back in 2004, guess what? I mean I go to work and I can focus on work," Ty said,

One of the most important studies on marriage shows how fighting with your spouse affects the bottom line. Researchers found that men with the highest levels of marital stress will miss 30 more days of work a year than men with average stress.

That same study estimated that marital problems cost the economy \$6.8 billion a year. Such costs are a result of both missed days and poor

performance. And it's most significant among men in their first ten years of marriage.

“Women kind of roll with things better than men and there's this irony where we think of men as stronger and coping better with things, but it's really just in terms of brute strength that men are stronger. It's not in terms of emotional strength,” said Dr. Scott Stanley of the University of Denver.

Research also shows that kids and grown-ups are more likely to have mental and physical problems when there's marital stress. Those kinds of issues can end up costing companies.

“Things just go better when there's a marriage—a couple and they work together well. Everybody does better in every area of life,” said Stanley.

He argues that long-term research shows established marriage curricula have clear benefits.

By learning how to handle conflict and communicate well, couples can improve the chance that their relationship will survive. And that means a lot today, when newlyweds face a 40 to 50 percent chance of divorcing.

So why aren't more companies following Chick-fil-A's lead? Myrick says they fear offending singles.

“There may be people in there that are experiencing divorce or [who've] had a bitter divorce. Or maybe there's the group of single parents that don't want to be married or the singles that don't want to be married or they may have some homosexuals that are in their organization,” said Myrick.

Ty says workers also have fears—especially about what co-workers might think.

He said, “People go 'oh wow. What's wrong with them? Something's wrong with their marriage?’ And so you can be influenced by peers that way.”

But as Chick-fil-A has demonstrated, retreats and other perks have given them the edge in attracting new staff. The company's 3.5 percent turnover rate is legendary compared to the 73 percent national fast food average.

And with national recognition from its award, chick-fil-a says doors are opening. Leaders are asking Cathy how healthy marriages make good business sense.

“Possibly companies need to wake up to the fact that they need to spend the effort and money to help maintain a stability and quality of people who are performing well,” said Cathy.

Ty said, “If I was a business leader I'd have to say, 'This is an investment in people' and I think Truett's already understood that from a long time ago—that when you make that investment in people, the returns are amazing.”