

# *GOD, GUTS, AND GALLANTRY*

## Questions to Help Us Unleash the Major's Business Principles in Our Lives

*These questions are suitable for business training, mentoring, or business classes*

Leaders, students, or mentees who lack a copy of the book may obtain one: [www.willjoslin.com](http://www.willjoslin.com)

*To the Leader: Depending on how much time you allocate, and how much discussion you'd like to encourage, this material could last from one session to three or four sessions.*

*Many of these questions may be answered on the strength of this book's contents. However, to answer all questions adequately, participants will probably need to do additional study on Elon Musk, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, John D. Rockefeller, and Thomas Edison. As their leader, please take the time to read the questions ahead of time and consider pro-actively assigning preparatory study. This would not entail excessive preparation on the part of the class. In most cases, the background information could be found with a few Google searches and/or a good encyclopedia.*

*Along with that research, assign your participants to read Chapters 6 through 9 of the book, and to bring the books with them to your session(s).*

### Introduction

*The leader could begin by saying: "Major Coker became the wealthiest man in his state and made no enemies. He was universally respected. Surely we can learn a great deal from his life." Chapters 6 through 9 of God, Guts, and Gallantry describe the Major's incredible business odyssey as well as his business principles that led to his outstanding success.*

1. How many businesses did the Major found? What were they? How many succeeded?
2. Among those, how many different types of businesses were there?
3. What do you think made him so versatile?

4. What can we learn from his versatility to help us serve more people in our business(es)?

### Comparing and Contrasting Major Coker to Other Business Leaders

Steve Jobs, former CEO of Apple Computers was very successful in many ways. However, there are two sides to his story. The following testimonies given by some of Jobs' colleagues were taken from the *Business Insider* website:

He met with the team every other Monday, which many considered to be a perk. But it also meant the Human Interaction team was constantly under pressure to impress Jobs, and they had to work every other weekend to prepare for their meeting with him. Here's an account of what those meetings were like, which we heard from a former Apple employee who spoke with another employee on the Human Interaction team:

Every two weeks, we meet with Steve Jobs, and it's on a Monday. So that means every other weekend, I don't get off. No matter what's going on, whether it's a deadline or new ideas for the future. We have to work every other weekend all the time no matter what... And then you meet with him, and he craps on all of it. He might like one or two ideas, and usually, he wants you to redo those one or two ideas. And so that whole next week, you're redoing those one or two ideas plus coming up with new ones. That's all year, all the time, every two weeks.

Steve Wozniak, the co-founder of Apple and a close friend of Jobs, said that “given a chance, some of his best friends at Apple said they would never work with Jobs again.”<sup>i</sup>

1. How could you compare and contrast Major Coker with Steve Jobs concerning these characteristics?
  - Entrepreneurship and Business Vision
  - Solvency
  - Lifestyle
  - Approachability
  - Modesty
  - Listening to Others
  - Teamwork and Treatment of Co-workers
  - Concern for Building his Local Community

- Social Conscience
2. How could you compare and contrast Major Coker with Tesla Motors' founder Elon Musk concerning these same nine areas?
  3. Now compare and contrast Major Coker with Microsoft founder Bill Gates and his wife Melinda concerning the nine points.
  4. Compare and contrast Major Coker with John D. Rockefeller in these areas.
  5. And finally, how might you compare and contrast Major Coker and his son James Jr.'s trial-and-error approach to founding The Carolina Fiber Company with Thomas Edison's invention of the light bulb?

### **Major Coker's Business Principles and the Bible**

From the way he conducted business, it's evident Major Coker used Biblical principles of business leadership. Whether or not one claims allegiance to Christianity, these principles work.

6. Match the letter of the corresponding verse below with each of the Major's business principles listed here.
  1. Business Intent of Shared Prosperity \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Delegation to Trustworthy People whom He Mentored \_\_\_\_\_
  3. Open to the Ideas of Others \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Excellent Ethics in Business \_\_\_\_\_
  5. Thorough Planning \_\_\_\_\_
  6. Thrift \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Having a Team of Counsel \_\_\_\_\_
  8. Casting A Vision \_\_\_\_\_
  9. Making a Profit \_\_\_\_\_
  - a. Second Timothy 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."
  - b. Luke 14:28-31: "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe

it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

- c. Matthew 25:20-21a: "The one who had received five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me; see, I have gained five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done.'"
- d. Proverbs 10:9: "He who walks in integrity walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out." And Proverbs 29:4: "A king gives stability to the land by justice, but a man who takes bribes overthrows it."
- e. Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision [revelation], the people are unrestrained but happy is he who keeps the law."
- f. Proverbs 11:25 ISV: "A generous person will prosper, and anyone who gives water will receive a flood in return."
- g. James 1:19: "Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger."
- h. John 6:12-13: "When they were filled, He said to His disciples, 'Gather up the leftover fragments so that nothing will be lost.' So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves which were left over by those who had eaten."
- i. Proverbs 20:18: "Plans are established by counsel; by wise guidance wage war."

7. Address each of these nine areas above one by one. As you do so, identify the areas in which you think you are doing well. Why do you think you are doing well?

8. In which of these nine areas do you think your company can do better? Be specific.

9. In which areas can you as individuals do better?

### **Balancing Technology Wisely**

Charles W. (Charlie) Coker, former CEO of Sonoco Products, and great-grandson of Major Coker, has a favorite phrase rooted in Major Coker's character: "People build businesses."

When we get into the habit of sending quick text messages to customers, vendors, and co-workers, we can bypass authentic conversations. This works against active listening and people-building.

10. When you overuse technology, how might you be in danger of treating others badly?

11. How could you proactively show more value for and affirmation of people?

12. Share some personal examples of ways you have recognized the problem, and intentionally transcended automated processes to strengthen your personal communications with your colleagues and associates?

13. Share some ideas for how you can improve, beginning today.

Axis Ministries points out how the overuse of cell phones tends to hurt business relationships:

When we prioritize our devices over people, we remain relationally immature. We communicate to those around us that we care more about what's on our phones than we do about them. A few years ago, *Inc.* published an article titled "Why Successful People Never Bring Smartphones into Meetings." Whether in meetings or social interactions, continually looking at our phones communicates disrespect, disinterest, self-centeredness, and an inability to pay attention for very long. Even in this digitally motivated, information-oriented world, people still perceive personal contact as highly valuable, perhaps even more than in the past, because it is becoming increasingly rare.<sup>ii</sup>

The researchers of the *Inc.* company conducted a nationwide survey of 554 full-time working professionals earning above \$30K and working in companies with at least 50 employees. They asked a variety of questions about smartphone use during meetings and found, among other things:

- 86% think it is inappropriate to answer phone calls during meetings
- 84% think it is inappropriate to write texts or emails during meetings
- The more money people make, the less they approve of smartphone use [in meetings].<sup>iii</sup>

14. If cell phones had been around when Major Coker lived, and he had chosen to use one, how do you think he might have used it? How do you think he could have resisted misusing it?
15. What are some habits each of us can build into our business and family lives that will demonstrate to others we value them more than our phones? *Spend some time brainstorming ideas.*

### **Faithfulness and Business**

Financially, relationally, and in business, Major Coker lived by Luke 16:10: "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much." The Major was faithful when he had next to nothing after the war and was just as faithful when he became the wealthiest man in South Carolina.

14. How faithful are you to look out for your workers under you?
15. How do you view your per diem allowances? Even when you don't need to, do you spend them all up, or do you try to take less than allowed, in order to save your company money?
16. What different attitudes might that reveal?
17. What do you think unfaithfulness in the little things of business might lead to?
18. What impact do you think your faithfulness in the little things of business might make?

### **Manufacturing vs. Service Industries**

Major Coker ran a two domestic manufacturing industries.

19. Name some of the advantages and disadvantages of running a manufacturing industry versus a service industry in today's world.
20. What could be the advantages and disadvantages of domestic versus international manufacturing?  
-In general

- For your company
- For your city, state, and nation

### **Letting Workers Profit**

Major Coker steered clear of covetousness and tempered his prosperity with profit-sharing. He avoided the abuses of unsafe working conditions and child labor, which characterized many industries in the Gilded Age. His way of doing business could be considered a model of leveraging tempered capitalism to empower and prosper others.

21. Describe a possible vision for leveraging economic power to benefit others, as Major Coker did. How might that big picture be a positive influence to empower and prosper others?
22. If the Major's profit-sharing business model were to continue growing today, how might it affect how present and future generations of lower and middle-class citizens view the merits of capitalism for their own lives?
23. In terms of both results and public perception, how do you think a form of capitalism that truly and intentionally benefits workers and communities could influence national and world economics?

Unlike the Major, many in today's business communities assume the goal of capitalism is their own self-aggrandizement. This contributes to the perception that capitalism is a selfish economic model that only favors the rich.

24. If this concept prevails, how do you think that perception could influence the way middle- and lower-class people view capitalism? What kind of ripple effect might this have on national and international politics and economics?
25. What have you learned about business leadership from Major Coker that you can use in your life?

### **Spiritual Impact in Business**

This last section is for those who would like to further explore some Christian business perspectives.

The apostle Paul was not only a minister; he was a businessman who made and sold tents. I don't think he shared the gospel every single time he was in a business context, but there were certainly times when he did. In Athens, Greece, he reasoned, not only with the religious, but also with businesspeople about the gospel: "So he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present" (Acts 17:17). Paul also shared the gospel with a businesswoman named Lydia, a seller of purple fabrics, "and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." This was huge, because Lydia was the very first convert from Europe, and she immediately caught the vision for changing the world, for right away, she volunteered her house as headquarters for the ministry in Philippi (Acts 16:12-15,40).

26. If, in appropriate ways, we too are ambassadors for Christ in the marketplace, how do you think God might use us in the twenty-first century, based on how he used Paul in Lydia's life in the first?

27. Is it worth the risk?

Scottish minister George MacLeod, thought Christian businessmen should have a positive influence in the marketplace. MacLeod said:

I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the center of the marketplace as well as on the steeple of the church.  
I am recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified  
in a cathedral between two candles  
but on a cross between two thieves;  
on a town garbage heap; at a crossroad of politics so cosmopolitan  
that they had to write His title in Hebrew and in Latin and in Greek ...  
and at the kind of place where cynics talk smut, thieves curse, and soldiers gamble.  
Because that is where He died,  
And that is what He died about.  
And that is where Christ's own ought to be,  
And that is what church people ought to be about.<sup>iv</sup>

28. What you think Major Coker would have thought of this quote from McLeod?

29. What do you think of this quote?



---

<sup>i</sup> See [Lisa Eadicicco](https://www.businessinsider.com/what-it-was-like-to-work-at-apple-under-steve-jobs-2015-6)'s 2015 web article for *Business Insider* at <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-it-was-like-to-work-at-apple-under-steve-jobs-2015-6> (last accessed December 29, 2019).

<sup>ii</sup> Editor, Axis Ministries' 2018 article "A Parents' Guide to Smartphones," which also touches on business use of smartphones. Their website is <https://axis.org/product/membership-product-for-smart-phones/> (last accessed December 29, 2019). Quote from a purchased copy of this resource.

<sup>iii</sup> See Travis Bradberry's article "Why Successful People Never Bring Smartphones into Meetings" at <https://www.inc.com/travis-bradberry/why-successful-people-never-bring-smartphones-into-meetings.html> (last accessed December 29, 2019).

<sup>iv</sup> George MacLeod, goodreads, 2020 post "[George Macleod](#) > [Quotes](#) > Quotable Quote," <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1468095-i-simply-argue-that-the-cross-be-raised-again-at>.