

Promoting a higher purpose

Christian 12 Group members use Scriptures to guide them in business practices, ethics

By Karen Owen-Phelps

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Do nice guys and gals have to finish last in the rough-and-tumble world of business? Chuck Frary and his friends don't think so.

They believe Christian ethics actually can enhance their businesses.

It all belongs to God anyway, members of the Christian 12 Group said recently at their monthly meeting at a private dinner club in Owensboro, Ky.

"We're trying to view leadership of our businesses through the lens of Scripture," said Frary, who is the organization's chairman for the Tri-State.

C12 is a for-profit business and peer-mentoring group with 75 franchises across the country and more than 800 Christian business owners and chief executives as members. The Owensboro chapter has been meeting for about a year. A new chapter is organizing in Evansville.

The Owensboro group includes people in agribusiness, insurance, industrial chrome plating and mechanical contracting, among other fields. They worship at Baptist, Methodist, Catholic and independent Christian churches.

At C12 meetings, they tackle both practical business issues and the ethical dilemmas that can test a believer's character.

It can be lonely at the top, C12 material says.

"This has given me an accountability group," said the co-owner of an Owensboro business, which doesn't have a board of directors. "These people will ask me tough questions."

C12 members believe following the Bible's guidelines for interacting with others — even if their competition doesn't play by the rules — can only help their businesses in the long run.

C12 also encourages members to think of their company or firm in terms of a higher purpose.

"The Lord owns it all, even our business," said Bill Barron, who has a commercial real

estate business in Owensboro. "It's a mission field."

C12 helps participants explore that mission "without stepping on people's toes and getting in trouble with the law," Frary said.

"You don't have to be a Christian to work at my place," Barron said. He and other members of the Owensboro group said they still can have a big spiritual impact through their business practices and through interactions with co-workers, customers and vendors.

Frary discovered C12 after he sold a successful paving business here in 2002 and moved to Florida, where the organization started. He was only 50 years old, and soon decided he was too young to retire.

Now he is a one-man screening committee for his local groups, which are open by invitation only. He makes sure none of the members compete against each other in business.

He also facilitates the discussions, which can include everything from the spiritual dangers of greed to dealing with the quirks of Generation X employees.

"Half the people you hire, their resume's a crock," one group member said at a recent meeting. "They're filled with accolades."

The devotional for the day at this meeting examined the New Testament story of a man who offered the Apostles money if they would give him their ability to convey the Holy Spirit by laying hands on people.

Frary said he has been guilty of trying to "bribe God" in the past by pledging to do something for his workers or to support a Christian ministry.

Perhaps, a C12 member suggested, Frary was just trying to use wisely the gifts God had given him.

"It's just human nature to give with expectation to receive," Frary said. "This is a really gut check here on motives and character."

C12 members commit most of a day each month to attend the meetings and also pay between \$550 and \$900 a month in dues. Secular consultants charge more and don't offer the benefit of advice from 11 other experienced business people, members of the Owensboro group said.

Frary explains the payback for members this way: "What's the value of one good idea to a company?"

