

Mockler Memo Interview

Interview: Tom Phillips, Retired CEO of Raytheon

Tom Phillips is a legendary American business leader. He was born in Istanbul in 1924. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 1947 and 1948. In 1948 he began a long and distinguished career at Raytheon. In 1960 he became a vice-president and the general manager of the missile and space division. In 1961 he became Executive Vice-President, President in 1964, and added CEO to his titles in 1968. He retired as CEO in 1991 and as a director in 2000.

Tom has served on multiple corporate boards, including those of Digital Equipment, SRA International, John Hancock, Knight-Ridder, and State Street. He has served on boards of trustees and boards of advisors for Gordon College, Massachusetts General Hospital, and the Salvation Army, among others. He has received honorary degrees from many distinguished schools such as Gordon College, Babson, UMass, Northeastern, and Suffolk.

In an extremely complex and challenging industry, Raytheon, under Tom Phillips's leadership, became an exemplar of the highest possible ethical standards and practices. Tom's exemplary ethics were the counterpart to his deep faith in Jesus Christ. Tom played a key role in Chuck Colson coming to know the Lord. For the past several decades Tom has been a major force in the faith at work movement, especially in the Boston area. He has taught countless classes in churches, seminaries, business schools, hotels and conference centers on how to bring faith and sound ethics into our working lives and our businesses. He has personally mentored, generously supported, and unfailingly encouraged most of the faith at work leaders and movements in this region. He has personally hosted a monthly business leaders' breakfast for decades.

David Gill: At what age did you become a Christian?

Tom Phillips: At age 45 I attended a Billy Graham Crusade in New York City and responded to the call. A man took me aside to counsel me after I went forward and I really felt Christ was in that conversation. I knew it was all different from that point on. I walked out into New York City and it was raining slightly and everything was beautiful. It was just an amazing experience. I was going to church before then but I didn't have the personal relationship.

Gill: And then you began to really get serious about your faith and grow.

Phillips: Yes, I started reading the Gospel of John and then Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Philippians. Those were the first three parts of the Bible I read and they were all very meaningful to me.

Gill: Were there other Christian writers who you read a lot and who helped you?

Phillips: Yes, the writer that helped me the most was C.S. Lewis, especially his *Mere Christianity* which I have read half a dozen times now.

Gill: How was your work at Raytheon affected by your conversion? Did it change the way you managed people, for example?

Phillips: Before my conversion, I was interested only in our work projects and how to get them done. I assigned people to these projects but I didn't really think about their growth and advancement. But now I became much more conscious of people's career objectives. I thought of our employees as people much more than I did before and I wanted their jobs to be meaningful for them.

Gill: Did you meet other Christians at Raytheon? Did they notice that you had changed?

Phillips: Yes, they did notice some. Actually I hadn't broadcast my faith too loudly within Raytheon but then when Chuck Colson came to Christ my Christian faith became widely known.

Gill: Yes, tell me about you and Chuck Colson. He was born again on your driveway as I recall!

Phillips: I knew Chuck before he went to the Nixon White House. He had consulted for us early on and served us as a sort of a lobbyist. When he went to the White house I lost track of him but when he got out he wanted to regain Raytheon as a client. After he came back to us I became close to him and was able to tell him, "you know, Chuck, something wonderful happened to me while you were at the White House: I met Jesus Christ." He didn't know what to make of that at first but he wanted to talk more about it. The Watergate story started breaking and it became obvious that he would be implicated in it. One evening he came to my home and I witnessed to him from the Bible and from C.S. Lewis and out on my driveway, right there, he committed his life to Christ. As it turned out, he was convicted and had to spend seven months in prison. When he came out he created Prison Fellowship. Anyway, as a result of Chuck's book *Born Again*, I was out of the closet as a Christian for everybody to see at Raytheon and it worked out just fine.

Gill: Let me come back to the faith at work question. What would you say are some of the key ways in which your faith has affected the way you manage the company? You mentioned caring more about people and their growth and not just about getting the project done. Is there any other thing that you'd say about, say, your approach to leadership or any other aspect of business management?

Phillips: Well the fact that Christian faith is by grace, and not because of anything we have done or deserve, that makes me very humble about anything I've done or could do as a leader. I also became a much more generous and intentional philanthropist after that. I didn't have a lot of money to give, but what I gave I gave willingly and gladly with joy, so it was a very meaningful transformation for me.

Gill: Let's talk about church for a minute. Did you ever wish for more help from your church on integrating your Christian faith and values with your business practices? I think the Gillette CEO Colman Mockler was the executive often quoted bemoaning the fact that he never heard

anything positive about business or work from the pulpit. What has been your experience in terms of how the church relates to the workplace?

Phillips: Not all that great. I had a pastor who was a pretty good speaker but he felt that as long as people came to church and listened to his sermons, that was sufficient. He also communicated a kind of self-importance that turned me off; since he was my pastor he liked to claim that he was the spiritual “grandfather” of Chuck Colson which certainly wasn’t true. So, no, my church experience was not directly relevant to my business life in the sense you are asking.

Gill: At some point, you began working with the Boston-area Marketplace Network parachurch organization and for several years taught classes and courses on Christian values in the workplace. How did that happen?

Phillips: I got involved in that because of the Marketplace Network leader Dan Smick. Dan invited me to join his board. After I joined his board I became aware of a course Dan was creating and planning to teach. Dan was very good theologically but didn’t have much business background so I volunteered to help him by providing the business pieces. As we were preparing the course his health deteriorated and before long he died. A very sad loss in every way. But then I felt led to teach it myself --- first at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, then at Northeastern University, then to the Gordon College business school, then to the Sloan School of Management at MIT. So I taught it in four or five places.

Gill: What was the basic content of the course?

Phillips: I was teaching that our work is important to God. We studied several cases, some of them developed by Dan Smick, others by Will Messenger, or by me. Will often helped me with these courses and we would have twenty-five or thirty people in each class. I also participated in a series of Marketplace Network monthly or bimonthly meetings, sometimes as a speaker. This was all part of my own edification as much as that of those we were working with.

Gill: If you could give some advice to younger Christians coming up in the management ranks, whether at Raytheon or other companies, what would you advise them to do to really honor God in their management careers?

Phillips: First of all, do the very best you can in the job you have been given. Second, become aware and appreciative of what other people and job specialties are contributing to your success. Third, learn to trust the Lord in everything you do.

Gill: As you were going through your career, did you feel the need for any kind of personal “kitchen cabinet” or support and accountability group to serve as your confidants, prayer partners, and informal counselors --- or did you pretty much feel like it was just you and God?

Phillips: I have always had three or four close associates -- people I could pray with and talk with about the big issues and challenges coming up. It is very important.