BOTTOMLINE
DEVELOPMENT GROUP

THE STEWARDSHIP BRIEF

The Talents · Part I of IV

Buried

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The Stewardship Brief is a short monthly note from BottomLine Development Group — one pattern we see in real businesses, one biblical anchor, and a few questions worth sitting with. Written for owners committed to building businesses and the people who steward them.

Walk through most established businesses and you'll see good work everywhere. People showing up, doing their jobs, hitting acceptable numbers, keeping things from breaking. What you rarely see is great — the estimator who rebuilds the pricing model nobody asked him to touch, the ops lead who develops her replacement before anyone requires it, the team member who treats the company's money as if it were held in trust. The gap between good and great is not usually a talent problem. It is a culture problem. Most cultures quietly teach people that safe is smart — and safe never becomes great.

Jesus told a story about this. A master, leaving on a journey, entrusted his property to three servants — five talents to one, two to another, one to a third, "to each according to his ability" (Matthew 25:15). Then he left. No check-ins. No supervision. The first two "went at once" and traded, and doubled what they held. The third dug a hole and buried his in the ground.

Notice what the third servant did not do. He didn't steal. He didn't squander. He lost nothing — he returned every bit of it intact. And the master called him wicked and slothful. Safe preservation is not stewardship. The servant's own words expose the root: "I knew you to be a hard man… so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground" (Matthew 25:24–25). His failure flowed from what he believed about his master. The two who multiplied knew the master truly and went straight to work. The one who buried feared a caricature — and froze.

Here is the mirror for owners: what your people do when you are not in the room is a function of what they believe about you — and your culture is where they learned it. A culture that punishes honest risk produces buriers. Not wicked people. Just safe ones. Safe with their time, safe with their talent, safe with the company's money — everything entrusted to them, preserved instead of deployed. The Master's verdict on that posture should unsettle us: in His accounting, buried is not neutral.

Three questions worth sitting with this month — in forum, or in the mirror:

- Where in your business is "we didn't lose anything" being treated as success?
- What do your people believe happens to the person who takes an honest risk and fails — and who taught them to believe it?
- If the Master settled accounts on your business Monday morning — the time, the talent, and the money entrusted to it — what's still buried?