

# REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW

ISSUE 11

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## Building a Great Commission Company

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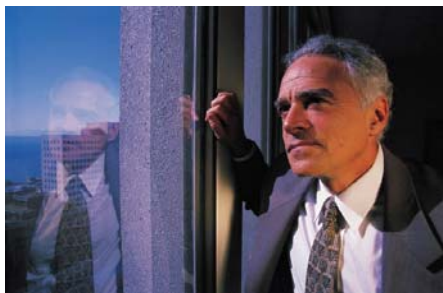
**The Christian  
Leader’s Guide to  
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**The Value of Christian  
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*Regent Business Review* is an electronic magazine published by the Regent University Graduate School of Business. The mission of RBR is "to equip and encourage Christians to be more God-honoring leaders and managers." As such, we offer practical guidance about what it means to be an authentic Christian in the workplace, as well as tools for better communication, for character development, and for other building blocks of leadership excellence. Driven by a calling to make disciples in the marketplace, we seek to exhort and coach Christians to "excel still more" (1 Thess. 4:1) in their roles as leaders and managers.

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# Building a Great Commission Company

Steve Rundle and Tom Steffen

Using business as a vehicle for missions and ministry is not new. The apostle Paul, for example, was a full time leather worker during much of his missionary career. A study of his letters reveals that working was more than a way to support himself; it was a central part of his missionary strategy. Preaching the gospel for free added credibility to his message and served as a model for his converts to follow (see 1 Cor. 9:12-18). Similarly, centuries ago, Christian monks integrated work and ministry by tilling fields, clearing forests and building roads, while also tending to the sick, the orphaned and the imprisoned, protecting the poor, and teaching the children. As villages and towns sprang up around the monasteries, the communities were transformed as they incorporated many of these same social concerns. And even as recently as the nineteenth century, many early Protestants integrated business and other secular occupations into their mission strategies.

That tradition continues today in myriad Christian owned and operated companies around the globe. These “Great Commission Companies,” as they have been called, are income-producing businesses created to have a second (but primary) bottom line: to glorify God by promoting the growth of local churches in the least evangelized, least developed areas of the world.

Based on our five year study of for-profit companies with this missional purpose – and conversations with literally hundreds of kingdom professionals working within this context – we discovered not only some fascinating case

## Based on a five year study, here are the steps to launching a Kingdom-building business

studies (chronicled in our book), but also some best practices that characterize those who have successfully pursued this dual bottom line. We suggest six steps for those who wish to start a Great Commission Company of their own:

1. Evaluate the business opportunity
2. Evaluate the missions opportunity
3. Assemble a management team
4. Build an advisory network
5. Develop a business plan
6. Develop a Great Commission plan

### 1. Evaluate the Business Opportunity

The most promising business ideas are those that address a relatively unmet need. The

more urgent the need or the problem, the more valuable the solution will be. For a business to be successful, however, it must have more than just a good idea. It must have some kind of competitive advantage or “barrier to entry” that makes it difficult for others to copy the idea and compete away the profits. Without an obvious way to differentiate your product or service and keep competitors at bay, a business may never get off the ground because the likelihood of recovering its initial startup costs is low. Therefore before pursuing a business opportunity it is important to ask at least the following questions: (1) How large is the market? (2) What makes the business unique? and (3) Is the idea financially viable?

#### *How large is the market?*

An aspiring entrepreneur must begin by understanding who the customers are, why they need the product or service, and how much they would be willing to pay. Harvard business professor Amar Bhidé has found that the most successful entrepreneurs are those who find solutions to problems they encountered in a previous job! One advantage these people have is that they already understand the customers’ problem and the potential value of the solution. In contrast, only 20 percent of Bhidé’s sample came up with the idea “serendipitously” through a relative, a magazine article or, in one case, while on

a honeymoon in Italy. In these cases, much more research is required to get a realistic sense of the market size and the revenues the business can expect.

Those percentages are probably reversed in the case of missionaries seeking to become business owners.

Many start by first identifying a country or people group, often after visiting the country once or twice, then proceed to sort through – rather serendipitously – possible business ideas. A common “solution” is to start an import-export company, where the typical pattern is to find a product first – say, beautifully handmade scarves – then look for a market for the product. Occasionally a company will succeed, but more often it merely sets people up – customers, suppliers, employees – for disappointment and failure. There is simply no substitute for identifying a customer first, knowing what his or her needs are, then finding competent manufacturers who can reliably meet the customer’s specifications.

### ***What makes the business unique?***

One must also consider the potential competition, both known and possible future competitors. If the idea has any merit at all, competition will be inevitable and profits will likely be short-lived. This can be especially true for markets that are large and relatively undifferentiated, such as Internet service, which raises the possibility of companies

being overrun by larger and more efficient competitors. We know of at least one GCC that inadvertently got caught in this situation and had to choose between growing and selling the company quickly or getting squashed by a large multinational. Choosing the latter strategy would force

## **There is simply no substitute for identifying a customer first and knowing what his or her needs are**

them back to the drawing board, so to speak. Choosing the former strategy would potentially result in a huge payoff that could be used to bankroll other ministry efforts.

The management team chose the former. We are not in a position to second-guess that decision. All we know is that as an ongoing presence in an unreached country, the company unfortunately has been overtaken by market forces.

The best markets will be large enough to allow for significant growth but fragmented enough to have defensible niches. Starbucks Coffee probably would never have succeeded had it taken on the whole coffee industry. Instead it successfully exploited a small (but surprisingly not so small)

niche: the gourmet coffee market. Likewise the most promising GCCs are those that find niches in which they enjoy certain competitive advantages based on such things as unique managerial talent, brand recognition, efficiency, quality or a hard-to-replicate technology. Without something that clearly distinguishes the company’s product or service from others, the company’s long-term prospects are not good. Once established in the market, caution must also be taken to avoid complacency. There are few things, including patents, that cannot be by-passed or imitated if given enough time. A company’s long-term survival requires a continual process of innovation and improving service.

### ***Is the idea financially viable?***

Not until the market has been clearly defined and the company’s distinctiveness identified can we start talking about the financial viability of a business opportunity. This is not necessarily a function of size. Small businesses that serve small markets – a local coffee shop, for example – can be profitable if the initial investment is low and the product or service is distinctive enough to fend off imitators. As the risks and investment size increase, there needs to be a corresponding increase in the expected return, or investors will look elsewhere for more attractive risk-return opportunities. This is true even when the investor is a kingdom-minded Christian and the investment being considered is a GCC.



The experience of the Strategic Capital Group – a company that helps raise venture capital for GCCs – is an enlightening illustration of this point. They have found that many wealthy Christians would rather donate their money (and receive an immediate tax deduction) than *invest* in a high-risk venture in a less-developed country. Even when there is a significant probability of both a spiritual and a financial return on the investment, investors tend to scrutinize a for-profit opportunity much more rigorously than they will a donation.

That being the case, the management team should be prepared to answer the following questions:

- How much money will it take to turn this into a profitable business?
- Where will the money come from?
- What other resources will be required (management skills, technologies and so on)?
- What is the expected timeline for payback?
- How “mobile” are the assets? If things go badly, can they be redeployed or sold?
- How flexible is the business model? Is there room for expansion, changes in direction or alliances with other companies?
- What will be the return on investment?

Many people who aspire to start a GCC search far and wide for kingdom-minded investors who are willing to

accept a low return (in the neighborhood of 5 to 10 percent). Given that some of the safest investment opportunities also earn this much, it is often difficult to persuade people to accept that same rate for a high-risk venture. Some investors can be found at these rates, but generally speaking there is a

## The value of a “missions strategy” is greatest when the venture is reaching people who cannot be reached by other means

limit to how much capital can be raised that way. The more serious entrepreneurs should have a clearly identifiable plan for growing the company and for producing a 25- to 50-percent annualized return for the investor. This is not to say that the annual interest rate or dividend needs to be that high, but the investment should be structured so that the total expected return is high enough to compensate for the added complexity and risk.

### 2. Evaluate the Missions Opportunity

As with financial value, GCCs that have the most significant *missional* value are those that address a relatively unmet need. There is nothing necessarily wrong with redundancy; that is, outreach efforts that overlap, taking

place where others are already working or where the population has already been heavily evangelized. But good stewardship demands that we *consider the most strategic use for our resources*. The most strategic role of a business will depend on the nature of the business, the countries in which it operates and the status of missions in those countries. The following questions will help the entrepreneur identify the key issues: (1) What location or people group will benefit the most from this type of company? (2) What can this company do that other Christian organizations in the area cannot? and (3) Where will the resources for ministry-related activities come from?

### *What location or people group will benefit the most from this type of company?*

The holistic nature of a GCC means that it brings both material and spiritual benefits to a community. As we said before, the least-reached countries also tend to be the world’s poorest. Many of the unreached are minority peoples who are victims of injustice and oppression. By bringing meaningful and dignified work to these communities, GCCs are engaging in an important ministry. For those employees who are Christian, an added benefit is the tithes that flow into the local church.

The value of a GCC is immeasurably greater when, in addition to the physiological and material benefits, it serves as a person’s first meaningful point of contact with the gospel. This is most likely to

occur if it is operating among large populations of people who have never heard about Jesus or have not seen the gospel's life-transforming message lived out in a practical way. There is no question that, while GCCs can certainly have an impact in highly evangelized parts of the world, the need is far greater in less-evangelized countries.

It also helps to think creatively about which stages of production – manufacturing, research and development, purchasing, marketing, customer service – can be located among those people and how the people can be most effectively engaged and mentored by the kingdom professionals.

***What can this company do that other Christian organizations in the area cannot?***

While Christian organizations are permitted in most countries, they are closely watched in many cases to ensure that they are not clandestine efforts to do nothing more than evangelize and convert the nationals. Many organizations comply with those restrictions and focus instead on such things as disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, the provision of medical care, teaching English, job training and other community services. These are all worthwhile and valid ministries, but there is a limit as to which segments of society can be reached by these methods and where these ministries can be located. By comparison, GCCs often have greater freedom and can reach

an entirely different segment of society. For example, one kingdom professional recently shared how his business credentials enable him to build relationships with people he could never reach before as a traditional missionary. Specifically, local government or business leaders would have nothing to do with him as a

**The most effective GCCs are those that are led by a qualified and balanced team of kingdom professionals**

missionary, but as the owner of a thriving business he now receives regular invitations to their homes and workplaces. This observation has been made countless times during our research, and it illustrates another important point about the strategic value of a GCC: the value of a missions strategy is greatest when the venture is reaching people who cannot be reached by other means.

***Where will the resources for ministry-related activities come from?***

For those contemplating starting a GCC there is a natural desire to use company resources to fund ministries of every kind. Restraint is called for, however, for several reasons. First, as Tom Sudyk of Evangelistic Commerce often says, "A company that does not *focus* on making money will almost certainly

never make any." The truth is, growing a company into one that can be consistently profitable is a monumental task, and siphoning money away from the company too early will make it even more challenging. A company is not likely to have a meaningful, long-term ministry impact if it fails. Therefore the first priority must be given to the company's survival. Some modest levels of corporate philanthropy may be acceptable, but in the early stages the tithes of the management team will probably be more significant.

Depending on the structure of the GCC, a careful distinction may also have to be made between the nonprofit and for-profit activities. While a for-profit corporation is free to do whatever it wishes with its profits (as long as the owners agree), a nonprofit corporation can only use its money for charitable purposes. GCCs that work in close partnership with nonprofit corporations must be careful to avoid the appearance that monies from the nonprofit are being used to benefit the for-profit company (and its owners). For example, in the past, some GCCs have been managed by people who are supported partially or entirely by donations made to mission agencies. While there are legal ways to structure such arrangements, not all relationships between GCCs and mission agencies are structured with the same care. The main thing to remember is that donations made to nonprofit corporations *can only be used for charitable purposes*. If a member of the management team receives some donor

support for the charity work he or she does outside the company, so be it. But any work done for the company must be paid for by the company. Ignoring this can

## **Fierce spiritual opposition is guaranteed**

jeopardize the nonprofit's tax-exempt status, or worse, be prosecuted as a criminal act.

### **3. Assemble a Management Team**

The most effective GCCs are those that are led by a qualified and balanced team of kingdom professionals. Each team member will naturally bring different skills and experiences, but they should all integrate their faith into every part of their daily life. Under no circumstances should someone who views business as a "cover" for ministry be accepted. Instead, team members should all see the business itself as a valid ministry.

Qualified candidates will be well grounded in the spiritual disciplines and have a history of drawing people's attention to Christ. There will be evidence of spiritual maturity and an active interest in helping others grow in their faith. Young Christians are not necessarily unfit for this work, but care should be taken to make sure they are properly supervised and disciplined. It is important to remember that

the principle purpose of GCCs, whether facilitative or pioneering, is to bring light into the darkest places – Satan's strongholds. Fierce spiritual opposition is guaranteed. Furthermore, there are unique temptations and trials involved in doing business in less-developed and religiously hostile countries that test the faith of even the strongest Christians. As a general rule, it is best for young believers or those who still need more business or ministry experience to begin working on those skills in a less challenging context first. Our research suggests that the old adage "experience is the best teacher" is absolutely true. It is also the best indicator of how effective a person will be on a GCC team.

For those who will be working cross culturally, additional skills are required, including language skills and an ability to adjust to a new culture (with its different styles of learning, decision-making, leadership, conflict resolution and so forth). Those who adapt most successfully tend to have a natural interest in establishing relationships with people from other cultures and exhibit an ability to share the gospel cross-culturally as well. They are humble and can laugh at their own cultural mistakes. They are willing to adjust their lifestyle so that it does not inhibit their witness, and they treat the difficulties of living in a foreign country as challenges for growth rather than sources of irritation.

The necessary business experience will depend on the circumstances and the job

being filled. Because the companies tend to be young and entrepreneurial in nature, the management team should consist of people who have experience working in similar situations. In other words, a person who has spent twenty years working in middle-level management for a large, hierarchical corporation may not be as suitable as someone who has worked for smaller (perhaps even defunct) companies. This does not mean, however, that team members must all be aggressive, type-A personalities. Successful team members come in every shape, size and personality type. What they do share, however, are passion, persistence, a capacity to learn from mistakes and a willingness to make decisions and take *calculated* risks. By that we mean they do not act recklessly, but neither do they allow themselves to become paralyzed by too much analysis and planning. They plan, pray and get advice. Then

## **An advisory network identifies obstacles and the strategies for overcoming them**

they act, and they do not obsess over what might have been.

The ideal team will include both expatriate and national believers who share similar values and vision. It is often necessary, even desirable, to have nonbelievers on the management team who can add

strength in certain areas and, at least indirectly, enhance the prospects for effective ministry. When this is the case, care should be taken that no one is added who is hostile to the holistic ministry purpose of

## **A common mistake is to rely too heavily on the provision of free or sharply discounted services**

the company. Furthermore, if the company is going to reflect Christ in its community, it is essential that a substantial share of those in key decision-making positions are kingdom professionals.

### **4. Build an Advisory Network**

The most durable and effective GCCs have active participation and support from a wide range of advisers, from lawyers, accountants and technology experts to local government officials, mission agencies and leaders of the indigenous church. While not directly involved in the management of the company, these people can significantly improve the likelihood of success by helping identify obstacles and the strategies for overcoming them. They also bring access to a broad network of contacts and resources that the management teams may lack, including potential members of the team itself. The added

credibility they give the venture, along with the network of relationships they represent, can help build broad-based support for the business/ministry model, which is useful when trying to raise capital.

One study of successful business startups found that not only does an advisory network tend to accelerate the startup process, but those entrepreneurs with previous startup experience began developing these networks much earlier in the process than first-timers. The most successful advice-seekers followed these procedures:

- Identify people and organizations that will have an interest in the outcome of this project
- Seek criticism, advice and suggestions from those people
- Ask them for the names (at least two) of others who may be contacted, and get permission to use their names when doing so
- Ask them what preparation is necessary before speaking to those contacts
- Do the necessary preparation
- Return later to the original contacts and tell them how their advice helped, thus cementing useful relationships
- Repeat these steps for the new sets of contacts

A common mistake is to rely too heavily on the provision of free or sharply discounted services. Many people are indeed happy to provide

discounts, but care should be taken, especially with professional services such as legal or accounting help, not to rely exclusively on those who offer the cheapest rates. The danger is that a “volunteer mentality” may take hold whereby they view the GCC more as a hobby than a client. This can mean settling for help from people working outside their area of specialty, or waiting while they take care of their higher-paying clients first. Like any business, a GCC should be prepared to pay market rates for these services or work out some agreeable alternative.

Another cautionary reminder, especially for those with extensive experience in the nonprofit world, is that some questions and some risks will inevitably remain. That is the nature of entrepreneurship. Quite frankly, the only way some answers will ever be known is to try it and find out.

## **At some point somebody will ask to see a business plan**

Therefore, while we encourage the active participation and support of many advisers, one must guard against making the decision-making process too unwieldy. A committee mentality will paralyze the planning process.

### **5. Develop a Business Plan**



At some point somebody will ask to see a business plan. Not that business plans are necessarily the best predictors of success, but they at least demonstrate that you have done your homework. The business plan should succinctly describe the opportunity, identify the strengths and weaknesses of the business model and the management team, and give some conservative estimates about how and when the venture will break even. Prospective investors will naturally want to see a business plan, but so will others who are being asked to make substantial commitments, such as advisers and prospective members of the management team. Entrepreneurs often resent the exercise of writing a business plan, but there is frankly no better way to prepare for what Harvard business professor William Sahlman calls “the most daunting journey of a businessperson’s career.” Moreover, because the management team cannot be everywhere at once, having a business plan that can be sent to interested parties is an efficient way to make initial introductions and to sort out the seriously interested from the merely curious.

Most business plans, says Sahlman, “waste too much ink on numbers and devote too little to the information that really matters to intelligent investors.” They put too much effort into making financial projections that everyone knows are little more than blind guesses and are overly optimistic about the amount of time, effort and capital that

will be required to achieve profitability. Instead Sahlman maintains that the best business plans illuminate the following:

***The people.*** The men and women starting and running the venture, as well as the outside parties providing key services or important resources

## The novice-turned-kingdom-professionals we profiled said that if they had it to do over again, they would get more business training and experience first

for it, such as its lawyers, accountants and suppliers. Ideally there is an energetic managerial team in place with skills and experiences directly relevant to the opportunity they are pursuing. It is best if they have also worked successfully together in the past.

***The opportunity.*** A profile of the business itself: what it will sell and to whom, whether the business can grow and how fast, what its economics are, who and what stand in the way of success. The business model is attractive and sustainable, and can create and defend a competitive edge. Many options exist for expanding the scale and scope of the business,

and these options are unique to the enterprise and its team.

***The context.*** The big picture – the regulatory, demographic and macro-economic environments. While these things cannot be controlled, are they at least favorable?

***The risk and reward.*** An assessment of everything that can go wrong and right, and a discussion of how the management team can mitigate the impact of difficult events.

In the end, says Sahlman, great businesses “have attributes that are easy to identify but hard to assemble.” By focusing on these key areas, the business plan can give the reader confidence that the obstacles have been carefully considered and that a plan is in place for overcoming them.

### 6. Develop a Great Commission Plan

Some stakeholders will naturally be more interested in and more skilled at evaluating the missions opportunity than the business plan. Therefore it also makes good sense to write a Great Commission plan. This will highlight many of the same things as the business plan.

***The people.*** The kingdom professionals on the team are all committed to the ministry goals of the company. Non-Christians at the management level are not opposed to those goals. Where the team is weak in terms of ministry experience or skills, outside parties have agreed to fill in the gaps. Ideally each team member will

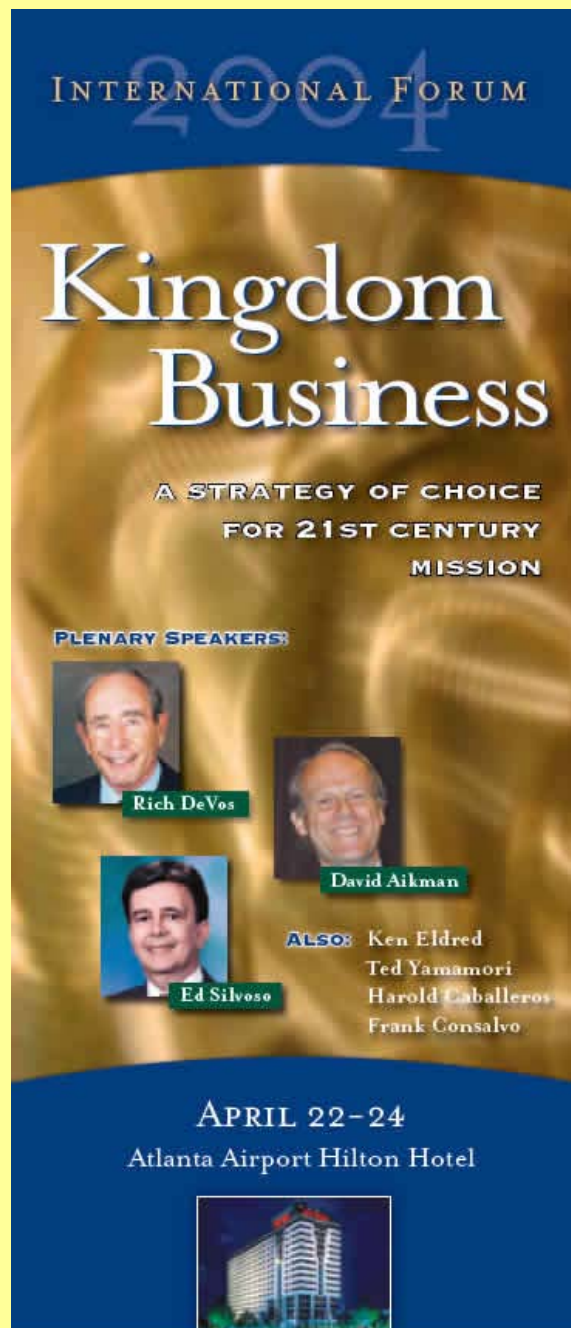
have a history of working successfully in this context.

**The opportunity.** The founders know what they are hoping to accomplish and why. The goals are clear and measurable, albeit not always perfectly. Ideally the company will open up opportunities that did not exist before or reach a segment of society that was difficult to reach before. The ministry can be sustained with local resources, so it does not require the long-term involvement of foreigners.

**The context.** The big picture – the socioeconomic and religious environment in this country or among this people group. The status of the church.

**The risk and reward.** How difficult is it for local Christians to express their faith freely? How difficult will it be to openly pursue ministry in this country? Is it possible for the ministry to create problems for the business?

The failure to achieve the highly publicized goal of “a church for every people by the year 2000” has created a kind of planning backlash among some in the ministry community. Yet even those who are the most critical of what they see as excessive planning do not pursue ministry haphazardly. It is basic good stewardship to have at least some idea of what we are trying to do and why. The Great Commission plan helps bring clarity to the process.



Speakers include

**Ted Yamamori, John Wharton, Gary Ginter, David Aikman, Rick DeVos, Frank Consalvo, Harold Caballeros, Jonathan Shaw, Ken Eldred and Ed Silvoso**

For more information, or to register for the conference, visit

**[www.kingdombusinessforum.org](http://www.kingdombusinessforum.org)**

## Preparing to Lead a Great Commission Company

How does one prepare for this kind of ministry? First we should note that every one of the novice-turned-kingdom-professionals profiled in our book agree that if they had it to do over again, they would get the appropriate business training and experience before embarking on this journey. Indeed, the experience gained in a secular context is often a central part of the equipping process. It should never be viewed as a “necessary evil,” but rather as “today’s assignment” by a God who is both using us now and preparing us for the future. That preparation may include twenty years or four years of faithfully reflecting Christ in

the corporation. It may include three graduate degrees or none. You get the point.

The most effective kingdom professionals – whether working in a pioneering or facilitative context – also demonstrate some level of competence in the area of cross-cultural communication, cultural anthropology, foreign language acquisition, church planting and spiritual warfare. Many get this through formal training, but others take a less formal but still very deliberate approach to acquiring the necessary skills. Either way, aspiring kingdom professionals should seek to improve these skills because reflecting Christ cross-culturally requires significant changes in a person’s perspective.

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## WANT TO WRITE FOR REGENT BUSINESS REVIEW?

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# Six Ways to Get Involved in the “Business as Missions” Movement

Scott McFarlane

Have you ever felt that your calling is not as “spiritual” as someone else’s? Has a friend or a leader in the church ever implied that if you were really “on fire for the Lord” you would drop your current profession and enter what is commonly referred to as “full-time ministry”? Have you wrestled with why God would give you skills and abilities in the field of business if that is not a valid use of your time?

In many church bodies, the Christian business community has been effectively marginalized by what Dr. R. Paul Stevens has poignantly described as a “Spiritual-Vocational Hierarchy.” Illustrated in the shape of a pyramid, Stevens shows how unbiblically some in church leadership view business people. Each level of the pyramid supposedly gets you closer to becoming more spiritual since, in the minds of these leaders, God is more pleased with the service of those in the upper sections – those known as “professional” clergy. (Apparently, then, He must be pretty displeased with

lawyers, politicians, and others who don’t even make it onto the chart!)

Sadly, these are the prevailing assumptions about work in many churches, and they culminate in apathy, discouragement, resentment, and ultimately, a sweeping demobilization of talented people. The good news, though, is that many leaders are seeing through the fallacy of this pyramid and actively awakening people to the important work they can do for the Lord, both locally and globally, *using the skill set He has already given to them.*

In fact, this has now become a burgeoning movement of the Spirit. Today, it is loosely called the “business as mission” or the “Kingdom business” movement, but these are not new ideas. They are freshly packaged in a way that fits the global marketplace. Because God desires to use the whole body of Christ to advance the Kingdom around the world, He has opened up several options to gifted business professionals. Here are six of

these options.

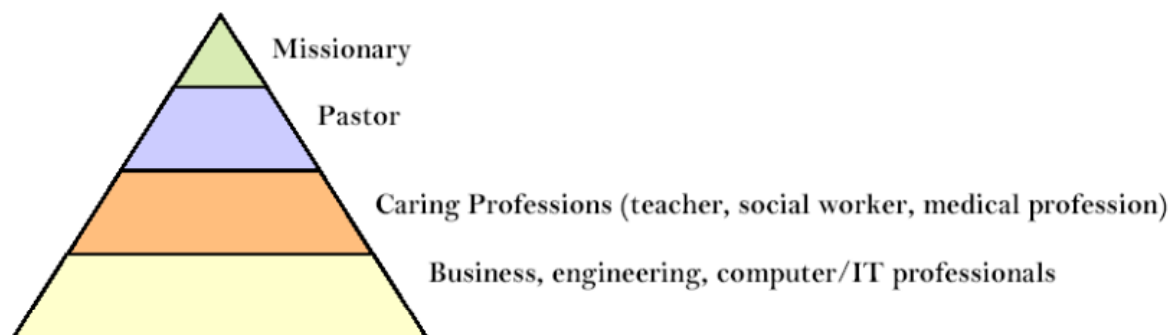
## ***Option 1: A one to two week trip to train business people overseas***

Do you like to teach? Do you have something of value to share with business people around the world? Do you want to share Biblical truths at the same time? Then why not take a mere eight days of your life to share it?

Opportunities abound to conduct seminars for business people internationally. In these seminars, you can share your business acumen, answer pressing questions, and really get to know businesspeople from other cultures.

Importantly, as a trainer, you’ll also have an opportunity to introduce to Jesus the many non-Christians you’ll teach.

Gary Shotton, a retired business owner, explains: “To get business people around the world plugged-in to their calling – and to see a fire lit in the local church for revival – why not ask the countless number of highly experienced





Christian business people in America to take a few days to share their experience? After all, who is more equipped to teach business people than business people? And as they spend a few days training others in the technical truths

## God has opened up several options to gifted business professionals

of improving sales, increasing production, and meeting customer demands, they also teach about ethics, honesty, integrity, and generosity as presented in the Bible. Everyone wins here.”

Sotten’s organization, Global Business Success Foundation, has been working for more than three years to create a model for these trips. That model includes these five aspects:

- 1) **Business Mentoring Sessions:** The trainer presents his or her expertise to a group of people interested in those skills. The teaching has a solid biblical basis but is not overt Bible teaching. For example, a sales person might teach on improving sales from the basis of ethics, honesty, and respect.
- 2) **Business Visitations:** The trainer visits the students’ places of business. The central purpose here is to build relationships and give encouragement.

- 3) **University Lectures:** The next generation of business people in every nation is studying at the universities. With formal invitations, the trip participants lecture to classrooms or even to the entire student body of major institutions of higher education.
- 4) **Biblical Teaching Sessions:** These are separate opportunities to teach Bible lessons about how the Christian faith applies to business and finance.
- 5) **Personal Development and Fun:** Apart from the development that comes from teaching, trainers grow personally and professionally by just being in another country. This is a trip to teach others and to share Christ, but it’s also a time to have fun and enjoy the uniqueness of other cultures.

If your church is already mission-minded, then consider adding Business Mission Trips to the list of other short-term trips that you may be offering. If you are not currently sending out short-term mission teams, then consider starting with Business Mission Trips. In the same way that a Teen Mission Trip is designed to use the skill sets and desires of a teenager, or a Medical Mission Trip is designed to use the skill sets and desires of a doctor or nurse, Business Mission Trips are designed to use the skill sets and desires of someone from the business and professional field.

For more information on seminars and business mission

trips, contact Gary Shotton, Global Business Success Foundation ([gshotton@gbsf.org](mailto:gshotton@gbsf.org), [www.BusinessMissionTrips.org](http://www.BusinessMissionTrips.org))

### ***Option 2: Consecutive Curriculum-based Seminars (CCS)***

CCS is an expanded or “continuing” version of the seminar model in Option 1, offering consecutive, quarterly seminars for certification in Marketing, Managerial Accounting, Information Technology, Human Resources, Strategic Management, and other business disciplines. Because the repeated contacts naturally build relationships, CCS can be used powerfully by North American churches to provide world-class training to the unreached business community overseas, bearing substantial spiritual fruit.

## Consider adding “business missions trips” to the list of short-term trips your church is offering

Clearly in comparison to the one week seminars, the CCS model entails more of a long-term commitment to a community. It requires a substantial investment of time and patience to help transform business people and their companies through this training and mentoring process. But many have found the dividend to be well worth

it, among them, Doug Hunter, a businessman and church leader at Perimeter Church in Atlanta. Using as his platform a business curriculum developed by HighMark, Inc. ([www.highmarkinc.com](http://www.highmarkinc.com)), Doug is mobilizing those within his church to implement CCS around the world.

For more information on how your church can get involved in facilitating the use of this dynamic seminar strategy, contact Scott McFarlane, Director of the Business as Missions Division of Advancing Churches in Mission Commitment (ACMC) at [scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org](mailto:scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org)

### ***Option 3: Consulting with Kingdom Companies***

If they choose to do so, Christian businessmen and women can offer more than seminars and classes to their counterparts around the world. They can also lend their expertise in a consulting capacity. Sometimes, this entails consulting with companies owned by non-believers. Often, though, it entails helping fellow believers overseas.

Like all organizations, “Kingdom companies” – businesses that have as one objective the spreading of the gospel – need advice. Kingdom companies in Asia have expressed a significant need, in particular, in the areas of strategic planning, marketing, feasibility studies, business operation, and process development.

To meet this need, EC Institute, an organization

closely involved in the Business as Missions movement, has partnered with John Terrill, National Director of MBA ministries of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Matt Cobbett, co-founder and director of Coram Deo Consulting. Together, this trio is mobilizing the MBA students

## **“Kingdom companies” – businesses that have as one objective the spreading of the gospel – need advice**

at top schools (Harvard, MIT, Chicago, and Northwestern, to name a few) to invest their summer breaks consulting with Kingdom companies. As a result, some Asian businesses are now advancing the cause of Christ in even more creative ways, not only by addressing social justice issues and meeting the physical needs of those in their communities, but also through discipleship programs and church planting efforts being integrated into their businesses. These privately-held, multi-million dollar businesses are actually transforming communities!

For more information on how to get involved in an MBA consulting project, contact Matt Cobbett at [matt@coramdeoconsulting.com](mailto:matt@coramdeoconsulting.com)

([www.coramdeoconsulting.com](http://www.coramdeoconsulting.com)), John Terrill at [jtterrill@ivcf.org](mailto:jtterrill@ivcf.org) ([www.intervarsity.org/gfm/mba](http://www.intervarsity.org/gfm/mba)) or EC Institute at [info@ec-i.org](mailto:info@ec-i.org) ([www.ec-i.org](http://www.ec-i.org)).

If you are not currently in an MBA program, but you’re interested in this sort of consulting, there are several other organizations that will match you to opportunities all over the world. For more information here, contact Scott McFarlane at [scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org](mailto:scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org)

### ***Option 4: Micro Enterprise Development/Micro Finance (MED)***

In many countries, poverty is rampant and economic development is stifled by government, war, and corruption. MED offers a pathway around some of these obstacles by providing small amounts of capital to start businesses – loans that are managed and repaid in the local community.

Mike Baer, of Micro Development Systems, runs programs in several different countries, providing training courses for aspiring entrepreneurs and capital for worthy business plans. He tells the following story about MED:

“Karl (not his real name) is one of our graduates, a man who has a great heart for God and an amazing testimony. One of the earliest Christian believers in his Muslim country, Karl had suffered for the gospel. After a period of persecution, Karl fell away from the Lord and ended up in prison on charges of murder (he was

innocent, but that doesn't matter in many countries). While in prison, someone sent Karl a Bible in Russian, and as he read the Word he was again gripped by God and made a full repentance from his backsliding. He began to preach to the other prisoners and many of them believed – so many that Karl was eventually discharged from the prison because the officials felt his influence was 'too disruptive.'

"Karl was now a free man, but like many of his fellow Christians, he was unemployed and impoverished. That's how he came to enroll in (this MED project). Upon graduation, Karl was given a micro-credit of \$1,000 and enabled to start a small cattle operation. He later returned for another loan to start a second business so he could employ other believers in his village. This spawned a third business and the impact multiplied.

"Although Christians in Muslim lands have little or no platform from which to influence their communities, Karl discovered that being a successful businessman changed all that. Through relationships formed in his business dealings, Karl began to share Christ and to do good for his village in His name. The result was amazing. His contacts began to embrace Christianity and formed a small fellowship. Then another was formed...and another. Today there are over twenty churches in the area surrounding Karl's village, and in addition to managing his three businesses, Karl serves as

a kind of 'circuit riding' pastor to nearly 250 believers."

Baer's organization is but one of several that have successful MED operations in virtually every part of the developing world. For more information, contact Scott McFarlane at [scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org](mailto:scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org)

**It was amazing. His contacts began to embrace the faith and formed a small fellowship. Then another...then another. Now there are over 20 churches in the village**

#### ***Option 5: Small to Medium-sized Enterprises (SME)***

After getting their companies off the ground, small business owners often need larger infusions of cash to grow their businesses and to employ others. With financial commitments typically ranging from \$5,000 to \$100,000, some Christian development organizations assist these small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Ken Eldred, in his forthcoming book on Kingdom business, illustrates how this works through the example of Integra Ventures, an organization operating primarily in Eastern Europe.

"Vili and his brothers own and operate a bakery [a client of Integra Ventures], a successful Kingdom Business in western Romania that employs 130. The bakery specializes in confectionery items such as cookies, cakes, and pastries. Vili sees his faith and his business integrated in a way that is refreshing; his focus on helping others is a central component of the objectives of Kingdom Business...

"The bakery is providing meaningful employment to scores of Romanians. But it is going even further, making an effort to hire those who face challenges to employment. For example, an orphanage in his region is dedicated to training orphans in social and business skills through an employability program. Vili provides jobs for some of the orphanage graduates. Moreover, profits from his Kingdom Business have also allowed Vili to invest in a café and small bakery in a town close to Serbia that provides employment for 'unemployable' women in the village...

"SME lending has made much of this possible, allowing people like Vili to expand his influence. And as loans are repaid, additional SMEs are helped and another community is impacted. It's an approach that has the power to transform cultures at the organization and community level."

For more information on SME development, contact Terry Williams, President, Integra Ventures at [Terry.Williams@integrausa.org](mailto:Terry.Williams@integrausa.org) ([www.integrausa.org](http://www.integrausa.org)).

### ***Option 6: Overseas Private Equity (OPE)***

OPE involves an individual or group investing in a company in another country – often, but not always, a Kingdom company. This is usually an investment of \$100,000 or more to be used in creative ways to advance the Kingdom.

Here's one example of how OPE has made a difference. One investor injected \$150,000 into an IT start-up in India, a company with the mission: *"To be a witness in the market place and present Christ by life and example."* The General Manager is a godly, experienced business woman who is also a leader in her local church.

Her company of about fifty people seeks to leverage all the creative capacity of business to support the indigenous church. To give but two examples, the company used its architect to design a church building and Bible college. Similarly, one of the managers owns and directs a local foundation that supports church planting, social welfare programs for orphans, and literacy programs for women.

From a missiological standpoint, this is ideal. It is run by an Indian woman who lives there, rather than a white westerner who travels there a few times a year. This reduces accountability and dependency issues. The company has also been able to partner with a local non-profit organization that reaches out to young people suffering the effects of polio and other forms of

physical handicaps, training these young people to use computers for the growing IT industry.

For more information about how to get involved in OPE contact EC Group International at [info@ecgroup-intl.com](mailto:info@ecgroup-intl.com) ([www.ecgroup-intl.com](http://www.ecgroup-intl.com))

### **Don't Just Sit There, Change a Life!**

Bob Lupton has written a tremendous summary of the state of so many business people in the pews today in his book, *For Theirs is the Kingdom*.

"There they sit, row after row of remarkably gifted grown-ups. Dressed in proper Sunday attire, they are waiting – waiting for the minister to step to the microphone with words to ignite them, hoping that this Sunday he will challenge them to more than a capital funds campaign for the new family life center. They wait, these talented ones, for words to stir them, to drive them from their comfort to challenges worthy of their best. Perhaps today they will hear the call to tasks of greater significance than their own personal success or the growth of their church.

"An architect, a CPA, a surgeon, and seven other professionals file down the center aisle. They bow for prayer, then dutifully fan out with the offering plates to collect a cut of the profits from the marketplace. With the exception of a CEO who reads the morning Scripture, ushering is the most noticeable role that lay leaders fill.

"Less visible are the real estate developers, insurance brokers, and educators who serve on church committees. But there they sit, a people with the nature and the gifts of the Divine, fully equipped with every skill and ability necessary to tackle the complex problems of the world. Although domesticated by their culture, they long for the courage to throw off the obligations of consumerism and spend themselves for the God who has called them."

If God has blessed you with skills, experience, education, or financial means, you need not just sit there in the pews any longer. There are at least six ways for professionals to "spend themselves for the God who has called them." Change a life on the other side of the globe. Build up a Kingdom business. Transform a community – or a country. Introduce people to God and touch their eternity. Find a way – today – to get involved in the Business as Missions movement.

*Scott McFarlane is the Director of the EC Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan and the Director of the "Business as Missions" Division of Advancing Churches in Mission Commitment. Scott has traveled to more than twenty countries, studying issues related to culture, religion, business, economics, development and poverty. You can reach him at [scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org](mailto:scottmcfarlane@ACMC.org)*

\* Author's Note: Broad definitions of MED, SME and OPE have been significantly influenced by Ken Eldred's forthcoming book on Kingdom business.



# The Value of Christian Values When Doing Business in China

Michael S. Lane

Executives in large, multi-national companies have been learning China for two decades, but the doors have just opened for small and medium-size enterprise (SME) entrepreneurs. Many of these newcomers are not riding the wave of opportunity, but rather, they are being swept into Asia in search of lower labor costs – and survival. As one manufacturing VP told me, “let’s face it, we are not in China by choice, we are there by necessity.”

This “necessity” has challenged more than a few SME entrepreneurs to grapple with the cultural chasm that stands between start-up and success. I experienced this chasm recently while trying to secure partnerships over dinner with some Chinese businessmen. At our banquet table, I was offered big fish head and deep fried wasp larva. Then the conversation proceeded in every direction except toward my business agenda. The meal culminated with a raucous drinking game and about twenty merely maudlin promises and toasts. We all liked each other, I think, but it was clear to me that we were a long way from even understanding one another, let alone to partnering on something.

How much farther was I, then, from conducting business with them in a way that honors

God? I wondered, in the wake of this evening, whether I or *any* Christian could succeed in business here without compromising his or her values. I got my answer

**Sam and George were both intelligent men. Both had succeeded in their home cultures. So why did one succeed and the other fail in China?**

shortly thereafter – a resounding “Yes!” – from watching a Christian friend navigate a hotel startup in Guangzhou.

## Sam’s Story

But this success story actually starts off as a cross-cultural disaster. Two Westerners I knew decided to invest in a hotel in China. They were looking to for a quick return and, longer term, for a foothold in the thriving tourism industry. One of the two, I will call him George, chose to be on-site for two months and assist in managing the renovation of the hotel, hoping to get the facility up and

running just before high tourism season started. But after only a few weeks, George had alienated the local contractor, he was accusing his hired interpreter of taking bribes, and his government liaison, local friends and cooperators were embarrassed. He then became angry and hired another expat to come in and “straighten out the situation.” Matters only grew worse, and finally, work came to a halt altogether. When the other partner, I’ll call him Sam, caught wind of the problem, he realized that George was about to lose their investment and got closely involved. Soon thereafter, though, George just went home and withdrew from the partnership.

Just pause for a moment and consider Sam’s plight. He was facing offended people and an unfamiliar culture. At best, I thought he had about twenty-five percent chance of turning the project around. But turn it around he did. And today, Sam is clearing profits so great that he’s been able to expand into adjacent buildings.

George and Sam were both intelligent men. Both had succeeded in their home cultures. So what was the difference between the two in China? And what lessons can we glean from their disparate experiences? The most central lesson, it seems, is that Sam’s success in China is a direct result of both his confidence in

God and his practice of Biblically-based business principles. There is value to Christian values when doing business in China.

## **Sam's spiritual capital was enormous. Before launching, he took an extended sabbatical for the purpose of prayer**

### **Sam Sought and Heeded God's Counsel**

Sam's spiritual capital was enormous. Before launching the project, he had taken an extended sabbatical for the purpose of prayer. He saw the project as a "gift from the Lord" and even named the hotel "future blessing" to remind him that the Lord was the owner.

Then, throughout the project, Sam asked God for guidance. And he got plenty of it. To cite but one example, when the lease on his property was questioned by authorities – quite mysteriously – and things seemed to be falling apart, God spoke to him on a rainy Chinese morning through Isaiah 55:

"...as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish . . . so is my word that goes out of my mouth."

Sam says that at that moment he decided to aggressively continue, rather than pull out, because, "I took this moment as a promise from the Lord . . . that God would do a wonderful thing." Dependence on God's purposeful direction sustained Sam.

Over time, on this foundation, Sam's resolve increased at every turn. He says that God also led him to 1 Peter 5:8 ("the devil prowls . . . looking for someone to devour") to reveal that spiritual warfare lay ahead on this project, but that Sam was to persevere because the hotel was more than a business exercise. Persevere he did, as shown next, guided further by the Biblical principles of humility, shrewdness and love.

### **Sam Humbly Respected Chinese Culture**

Sam is wise and humble – attributes that aided him in managing cross-culturally. He understood his North American biases and "set them aside" in favor of his Chinese cooperator's perspectives. Whereas rugged individualism is valued in the U.S., in China, people think more collectively. In fact, relational networking is critical to success in China. Because George ignored this nuance of Chinese life, he became unnecessarily alarmed when the Western company's interpreter got chummy with the building contractor. That relationship could have been a valuable asset to the project, but George did not have the humility to consider other approaches – culturally-sensitive approaches – to

getting work done. Instead, George spent his time posturing for power, sending a clear message to his overseas cooperators: "My Western way is good. Your ways are bad."

Sam, on the other hand, didn't spend time wondering why his Asian cooperators weren't handling things the way people do in the West. Rather, he humbly accepted their local construction methods, operating on the principle that some disconcerting things are not "good" or "bad" in the wild, wild East, they're just different.

Sam's cultural humility was also manifest in his willingness to learn from his local Chinese associates. For example, he learned that the best way to honor the host culture was to work within the local social network, called "guanxi." George egregiously violated the principle of guanxi when

## **Sam understood his North American biases and set them aside in favor of his Chinese cooperator's perspectives**

he brought in another expat from the outside to solve his problems. But Sam learned to work through local mediators to mend fences, a behavior that implied to the Chinese that Sam he was adaptable, in line with the Chinese spiritual value of avoiding extremes,

called “the Golden Mean.” Ultimately, this paid big dividends for him.

### **Sam Shrewdly Planned Multiple Pathways**

Sam’s shrewdness paid dividends as well. Just as Jesus taught his disciples to be shrewd as serpents among those with diverse worldviews (Matthew 10:16), He taught Sam to be shrewd enough to always have a back-up plan.

So in the midst of the turmoil and cross-cultural confusion, Sam identified multiple pathways to meeting objectives. This was natural for Sam since he believed that God was dominating what he called the “foggy territory” around him. If one pathway led to a dead end, perhaps God had a different route in mind. Accordingly, Sam could always move forward despite setbacks. He was always prepared with a Plan B, since, for all he knew, B may have been God’s plan all along.

### **Sam Cared about People**

After George left the project, I watched Sam go to each offended individual to mend fences. I watched him bring aboard a talented local manager whom he wisely made a shareholder. And I watched him regularly encourage those around him. These were not just a human relations

turnaround tactics; they were an outgrowth of Sam’s genuine care for people.

Sam showed me that “faith working through love” can be a powerful force in China. His servanthood and compassion won him the respect and

**Sam was humble enough to be prepared with a Plan B since, for all he knew, B may have been God’s plan all along**

admiration of the locals, and, as a result, he attracted several key Chinese cooperators who were essential to connecting the dots of the project.

And if you go into Sam’s hotel today, you’ll find continued evidence of his love. Adorning the lobby are pictures of needy students (typically, under-privileged orphans) who receive some tuition scholarships from the business. This scholarship program was a natural move for a man whose life verse could be “not merely looking out for [his]

own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4).

### **The Value of Christian Values**

If we rewind the tape, we can also see the potency of these principles through George’s experience. Yes, George. His management of the project was the antithesis of Sam’s, marked by self-sufficiency, by an arrogant assumption that the Western way was the best way to do things, by the naive lack of a contingency plan when times got tough, and by a generally uncaring attitude toward people. Counter-Biblical management failed miserably here.

Just as a diamond shines more brightly against a black background, the power of Biblically-based management is evidenced all the more when set against its converse. God’s way works in business, even when the odds are long.

And even in China.

*Michael Lane, his wife, Joy, and their three children lived in China for 18 years. Mike has taught English in universities, directed a Sino-American management training center, and provided cross-cultural consulting services for Chinese and American businesses. You can reach him at [michla1@regent.edu](mailto:michla1@regent.edu)*

# The Christian Leader's Guide to Making Decisions

Michael Zigarelli

It's a relatively straightforward question: *How should Christian leaders make decisions?*

The answer, it seems, is equally straightforward: Christian leaders should make decisions the same way that any Christian should make a decision: seek God's will and then do it. God is sovereign. God reveals His will to us. And it's our role to follow Him in humility. Therefore, arguably, "What is God's will?" is the only question we need to ask when making decisions.

Simple, right? It would be except for two major complications.

First, sometimes, though our spirit is willing, our ears are weak. We think we hear God and know His will, and we act on this confidence, but what we are really hearing is not God at all. Rather, it's our self-talk shaped by years of secular management training, bad habits, and assimilation to the corporate culture. But because we're so sure that we are godly people doing God's will, we don't critically analyze the process by which we reach decisions – a misstep that culminates in decision-making that largely is *independent* of God's counsel. Ironically, this cavalier approach to "hearing" God ultimately renders us deaf. Our overconfidence begets oversight.

Second, sometimes, though our spirit is willing, our hearts are hard. That is, there are times when we are truly in touch with God's will, but we simply elect not to pursue it. This is

**A time-honored tool called a "decision tree" can combat the overconfidence and self-reliance that so often infect our choices**

what some call "the knowing-doing gap." In the Garden of Eden it was simply called "pride," and it's an ailment from which no one is immune. This too culminates in decision-making devoid of divine direction.

Indeed, there are other obstacles to godly decision-making as well, but as an antidote for these primary ones – our ear and heart conditions – we Christians in leadership positions can use a time-honored tool called a "decision tree." It's a series of questions designed to keep before us non-negotiable scriptural principles for decision-making. In doing so, it gently but effectively combats the overconfidence and self-

reliance that so often infect our choices.

What are these questions? Personally, I'd recommend devising your own set to keep you on track. To stimulate your thinking, though, let me present one approach, pictured in the sidebar "The Christian Leader's Decision Tree." As you see in that graphic, to evaluate almost any option before us, we can ask four questions.

## ***Question 1: Is the option legal?***

Don't break the law. That's axiomatic. Granted, it's possible that a higher law may mandate an exception here (e.g., Jesus turning over the tables in the temple (Mark 11) or Daniel's refusal to pray to the Babylonian king (Daniel 6)), but those times will be *exceedingly* rare. Almost never in scripture did God ask someone to break the law. In fact, God teaches us to submit to earthly authority (see, e.g., Romans 13).

## ***Question 2: The Servanthood Test: If people are affected, can you envision Jesus treating them this way?***

When making decisions, God-honoring leaders balance "servanthood" (the needs of individual stakeholders) and "organizational stewardship" (the financial needs of the organization). That is, they



seek courses of action that reside in the intersection of these tenets of the faith. Questions 2 and 3 of the decision tree act as guardrails here.

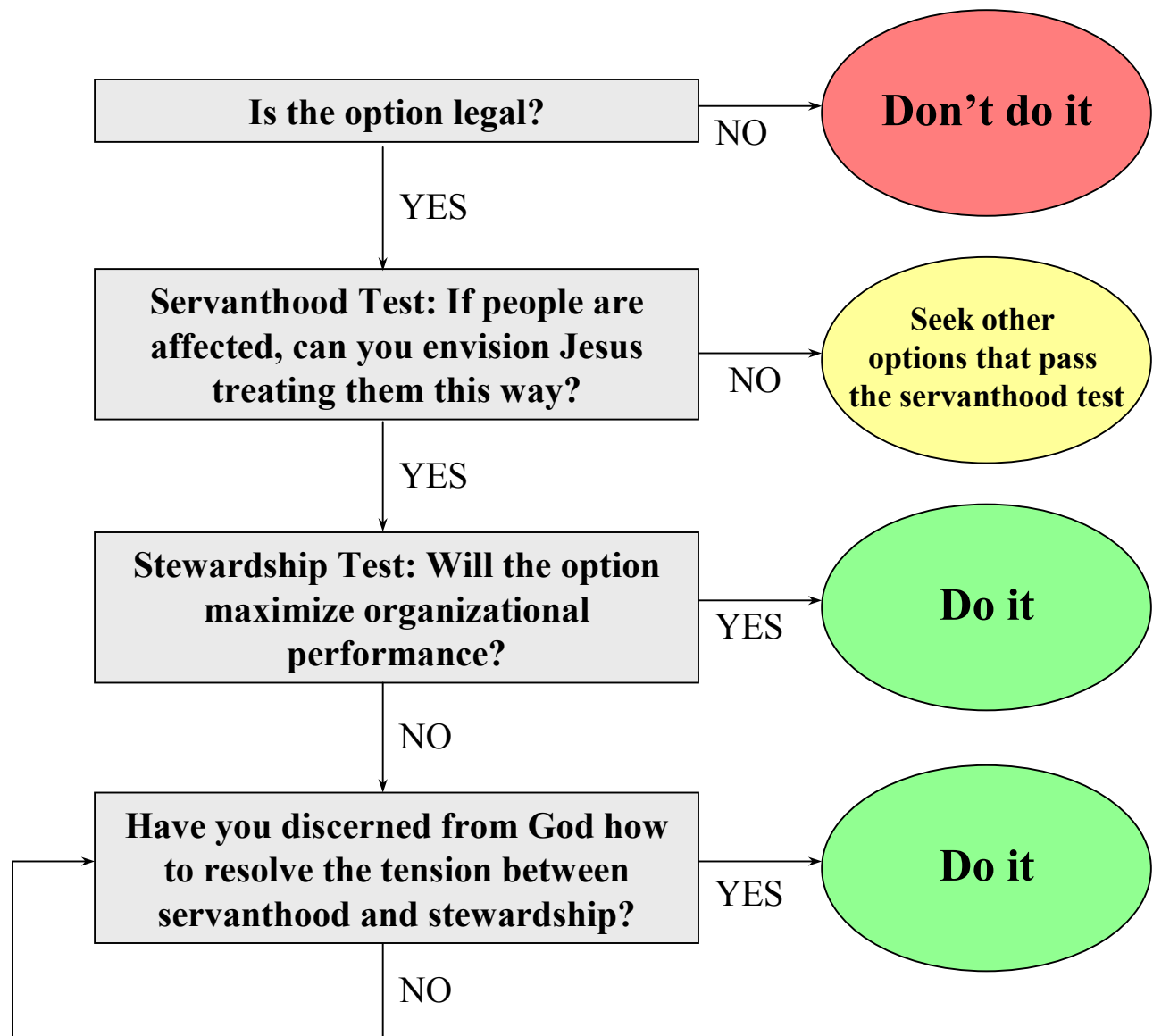
In an organizational context, we can think of *servanthood* as “making a top priority of identifying and meeting the needs of individual stakeholders” (customers, employees, shareholders,

suppliers, creditors, local community, etc.). It means to conceptualize all people as children of God, created in His image, and to treat them with love and respect in every decision that we make. Jesus both teaches and personifies this principle in places like John 13 (Jesus washing the feet of His disciples), Matthew 20 (Jesus teaching that a godly leader is one who serves), and in the ultimate act of

servanthood, His sacrifice for us on the cross. That’s why in the decision tree, this “Servanthood Test” might be captured well by the question: *if people are affected, can you envision Jesus treating them this way?*

This is a critical threshold question, a clear prerequisite for us. As imitators of Christ, we are not to take any action that He would not. So options

### The Christian Leader’s Decision Tree



that do not pass this litmus test should send us back to look for better options that are consistent with the character of Jesus. Which of these “better options” should we select? That’s where Question 3 comes in.

***Question 3: The Stewardship Test: Will the option maximize organizational performance?***

Serving individual needs is a central virtue, but at the same time, we need to remember that there’s more to our faith than servanthood. On the job, God also encourages us to be mindful of the corporate good when making decisions. This is what I’d call “The Stewardship Test.”

Here’s the basic theology. Everything belongs to God and we are to manage (i.e., “steward”) these God-owned resources in accordance with His will. We find stewardship taught throughout scripture, namely in the Dominion Mandate (Genesis 1:28), in the Psalms (“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it” (24:1); “for the world is mine and all that is in it” (50:12)), and in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25, Luke 19). The application to decision-making is patent: Christian leaders are to act as stewards, not owners, of their organizations and of the capital resources at their disposal. These things belong to God and, traditional Christian theology maintains, God’s will is that we sustain and grow the organization he has entrusted

to us. Under our care, five talents are to become ten.

However, the same caution applies here that applies to Question 2 above. Just as it’s myopic to reduce Christian leadership to servanthood, it’s also myopic to reduce it to good stewardship of the organization. “Do right by the

**When making decisions, God-honoring leaders balance the ideals of servanthood and stewardship**

organization,” say some well-intended Christian leaders, “and you will have honored God in your work.”

Truth be told, though, that’s a little like Boeing saying: “The right wing of the plane is more important than the left, so let’s cut costs by eliminating the left wing.” Such an aircraft would clearly never reach its goal. In the same way, Christian leaders do not reach their goal of godly decision-making through an unbalanced, steward-dominated approach. In fact, they crash the plane, rationalizing away the moral responsibility to care for individual stakeholder needs. Whether that stakeholder is an employee in need of more time off or higher pay, a prospective customer who wants the full story about your product, a small supplier who can be

coerced into reducing his price, or a community desiring that a plant not be relocated, an exclusive focus on the right wing of “organizational stewardship” abandons the left wing of serving individual needs as Jesus would.

That does not mean that servanthood trumps stewardship: we cannot do without the right wing, either. Rather, it means that the central challenge for the Christian leader is to retain both ideals when making decisions – to affirm servanthood and stewardship, pursuing those initiatives, policies, and practices that pass both tests. Often, there is broad overlap here, if we will take the time to identify it, and these options will be God-honoring.

Still, one question remains: what of those times when there seems to be no overlap – when all the Jesus-like servanthood options appear to fail “The Stewardship Test,” adversely affecting the financial bottom line? That’s when we ask Question 4.

***Question 4: Have you discerned from God how to resolve the tension between servanthood and stewardship?***

Veteran leaders will tell you that they’ve experienced a lot of moral ambiguity during their careers. Often, the choice is not between right and wrong; rather, it’s between right and right. It’s right to maximize organizational performance. But sometimes, it also seems right to take an action that will probably have

a negative return on investment. Giving away expensive product, as Merck does with its drugs in developing countries, is one example. Paying suppliers more than market rate so that they can make a better living and contribute more to economic development, as Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts do with coffee farmers, is another. Refusing to open on Sundays so that all employees are assured a day of rest, as Chick-fil-A does, is a third example. In each case, stewardship steps back to serve a common, arguably greater

good.

There are other times, though, that the ideal of servanthood must be subordinated for the sake of the collective organizational good. Cutting loose a chronic under-performer, mass layoffs to remain solvent, and reducing factory pollutants no further than the law requires are but a few examples. Accordingly, for Christians, there will be times when, even though an option may not survive one of the litmus tests in the decision tree, it still passes God's test for decision-making. *But how*

*would one know?*

Not through a flow chart.

Ultimately, any decision-making model that claims to be consistent with a Christian worldview *must* rely on God for answers. Practically speaking, that means we marinate every step of our decision-making in prayer and discernment. How much more necessary, then, is discernment when godly ideals compete with one another?

It is especially at these moments that we need to slow

## When You Can't Just "Do It"

By design, decision trees are tools for deciding what should be done, not necessarily how to get there. Often, it's this implementation stage that trips up Christians, more so than does making the decision itself. Dozens of obstacles litter the pathway from decision to execution, obstacles that are both internal to us (concern for our reputation, impatience, poor persuasion skills, etc.), and external to us (corporate policies, resistant people, limited budgets, etc.).

So, even if we know the right thing to do, sometimes we can't just "do it" as easily as might be implied by a decision tree. Quite the contrary, execution requires circumspection. Usually it demands shrewdness, diplomacy, patience and humility. And almost without exception, it requires a resolute spirit – a willingness on the part of the decision's champion to "do it."

Books and articles on effective leadership remind us regularly that great leaders combine zeal and grace to challenge the status quo and advance breakthrough ideas. Moreover, the influence literature has uncovered the essential tactics necessary for getting buy-in for our decisions – time-honored tactics dating from Socrates to modern-day empirical studies. And, importantly, some contemporary Christian literature shows that many of these "best practice" approaches to execution comport with scripture.

To become more adept at implementing your decisions – at the "Do It" element of leadership – consider investing some time in the following books:

*Execution: The discipline of getting things done* by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan

*Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap...and others don't* by Jim Collins

*The Leadership Challenge* by James Kouzes and Barry Posner

*Influence: The psychology of persuasion* by Robert Cialdini

*The Soul of the Firm* by William Pollard

*Leadership is an Art* by Max DePree

*Loving Monday* by John Beckett

down even more, to reflect more deeply, to gather more advice, to recognize and reject any faithful misinterpretations of scripture we may have formerly embraced, and to substitute instead a humble, patient, and radical discernment God's sovereign will, letting Him lead our leadership. *We are to defer rather than to default*, receiving God's direction on a case-by-case basis.

Hence, Question 4: "Have you discerned from God how to resolve the tension between servanthood and stewardship?" If the answer is "yes," then move forward in faith. If "no," then don't move until the answer is "yes."

For sure, this more circumspect approach to decision-making is not swift, but importantly, neither is it hasty. Though it cannot guarantee that we will always make God's choice, it guards

against the common maladies of overconfidence and self-reliance, guaranteeing, at least, that we will always *seek* His choice, and not our own, when making decisions.

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## Bookshelf

### **Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450- Year-Old Company that Changed the World**

Chris Lowney  
(Loyola Press, 2003)



Chris Lowney caught my eye with this title, first, because the concept of “heroic leadership” sounds intriguing, and second, because I wanted to know the identity of this “450-year-old company that changed the world.” Much to my surprise, Lowney was not referring to a corporation but to the Jesuit Order. Founded in 1540 by ten men and an unlikely leader, Ignatius Loyola, the Jesuits, says Lowney, afford us several enduring leadership practices.

The Jesuit approach to leadership offers four distinctives, some of which are at variance with more contemporary views of leadership:

- First, we are all leaders in one way or another, and we’re leading all the time, well or poorly
- Second, leadership springs from within. It’s about who I am, as much as it is about what I do
- Third, leadership is not an act or a set of actions. It is a life, a way of living
- And fourth, one never completes the task of becoming a “leader.” It’s an ongoing, never-ending process

How do we get there? How does one pursue this ongoing, never-ending process to develop into a more godly leader? Lowney suggests as one pathway the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, presenting them as a lifelong tool for growth. At a time when bookstores are

inundated with self-help books premised on narcissistic, humanistic psycho-babble, Lowney’s call for a return to a classic approach is refreshing and worthy of consideration.

Overall, Lowney’s perspective seems unique for a leadership book. Perhaps that’s because he lived in both worlds, first as a Jesuit seminarian for seven years (an experience that provides depth to his insights) and then as an investment banker. Consequently, I recommend spending some time with this book. It’s a valuable resource for leaders who need renewal.

Leadership does indeed spring from within, and books like *Heroic Leadership* can add a much needed bounce to that spring.

*Review by Paul Metler. Paul is an Associate Pastor at Heritage Fellowship in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. You can reach him at paulmetler@hotmail.com*

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