

THE ESSENTIALS OF GOOD BUSINESS AS MISSION

10 Guiding Principles

Introduction

It is important to identify those things that set business as mission apart from “business as normal” (BAN). There are some complementary areas of overlap between the two. For example, a good business as mission business will, by definition, have many of the characteristics of any well-run business. A kingdom business must be profitable and sustainable just as any other business. Integrity, fairness and excellent customer service are characteristics of any good business, not just a business as mission venture. As such, those characteristics will not by themselves necessarily point people to Christ. A kingdom business begins with the foundation of any good business, but takes its stewardship responsibilities even further.

Here we will highlight the overarching principles that distinguish business as mission from business as normal. It is important to note that the *application* of a principle will vary from context to context. For example, for spiritual guidance and accountability some companies have found it useful to have formal contractual relationships with churches or mission agencies. While this approach has merit, it is merely one of many ways to seek prayer support (Principle #9) and to maintain spiritual accountability (Principle #3). Thus we are intentionally avoiding the term “best practices”. The actual practices can vary according to the specific social, cultural, religious or economic context, but the “guiding principle” is the same.

In addition, the *depth* to which each principle is applied and its *focus* will vary from business to business. For example, one business might emphasize the need to create jobs in areas of endemic unemployment (related to Principle #3 & #4), whereas another might place more emphasis on coupling the business with a church planting strategy (also Principle #3 & #4).

What follows is a list of principles that should underpin a business as mission business. This is divided into two sections. First we list the basic foundational principles that must exist in any good business. Following that are the principles that distinguish a good business as mission business.

Foundational Business Principles

1. Strives to be profitable and sustainable in the long term.

Profit is an indication that resources are being used wisely. It indicates that the product or service being produced and sold does so at a price that covers the cost of the resources, including the cost of capital. For most businesses, profits are fleeting, and never a sure thing. It is common for businesses to experience periods of low profit, and even negative profit. Thus it is important to take a long-term view of profitability. Occasional windfalls are often what will sustain a company through periods of financial losses. For that reason a well-managed business will use extreme care when considering whether and when to distribute profits. Profit, and its retention, is not necessarily an indication of greed.

2. Strives for excellence, operates with integrity and has a system of accountability.

While it is possible for a disreputable business to make money by cutting corners, this is not a viable long-term business strategy. People eventually wise up, bad reputation spreads, and the company eventually goes out of business. Long term viability and success requires an unflinching commitment to excellence, and a reputation for hard work, honesty and fairness. This is a basic law of economics, and holds true regardless of whether the company is owned by a Christian. There are standard business practices and benchmarks of excellence that no

business, including a kingdom business, can afford to neglect. Furthermore, companies that are committed to doing business with excellence are transparent, and encourage criticism, feedback and accountability from employees and the local community.

Business as Mission Distinctives

3. Has a kingdom motivation, purpose and plan that is shared and embraced by the senior management and owners.

Good business practice alone will not by itself point people to Jesus. For that to happen the company must be more intentional. This begins with a plan, preferably a written one, which reflects the kingdom motivation and purpose of the business. By “kingdom motivation and purpose” we mean a desire to have a positive and lasting impact in the local community as well as the local church. The owners and managers are mindful of the fact that, while the business itself may not last indefinitely, the impact can be a lasting one. Furthermore, the spiritual priorities of the company are regularly communicated to employees and customers in a culturally sensitive way.

4. Aims at holistic transformation of individuals and communities.

In line with its kingdom motivation, the business will leverage every opportunity to bring spiritual, social, economic or environmental benefits to the community at large. The company is a relevant force within the community, and respected by the local leaders. It seeks to be, if at all possible, at peace with all stakeholders, and conducts itself in a socially responsible, culturally appropriate way. The company sets a high moral standard for itself, and is not content merely adhering to the minimum requirements of the law. It also avoids producing products or services that are harmful, or are perceived as harmful or sinful in some cultures.

5. Seeks the holistic welfare of employees

The company sets a high standard in the way it treats its employees. An ongoing effort is made to make the work and working conditions as safe and pleasant as possible. Employees are treated with dignity, and are given opportunities for personal and professional growth. The value of the family is upheld.

6. Seeks to maximise the kingdom impact of its financial and non-financial resources.

The managers and owners recognise that God is ultimately the owner of the company. As such, they focus on how to maximise the kingdom impact of the company. For some companies, they donate money to other ministries. Other companies may have less financial freedom, but will contribute to the advancement of God’s kingdom in other ways, such as through employee development programs, the management of its supply chain, and so forth. A word of caution is appropriate here. Some people feel strongly that corporations should tithe from their profits. We prefer a less legalistic approach for two reasons. First, as pointed out in Principle #1, it is sometimes more appropriate to retain profits. Second, some people will be tempted to think that tithing fulfils their business as mission obligation and they will not aggressively seek other ways to use their company for Christ. Generosity is good, but more importantly, the managers and owners should take a holistic view of business as mission, and how to integrate a business *and* mission strategy.

7. Models Christ-like, servant leadership, and develops it in others.

Managers of business as mission businesses lead by example, and reflect Christ by serving others. Furthermore, they mentor and disciple others through word and deed. Questions about faith and its relevance are encouraged, and handled in a contextually appropriate way. Decisions are checked against the question of “What would Jesus do in this situation?” Managers meet regularly for prayer, and employees are encouraged to do the same. Employees, customers, and other stakeholders are prayed for by name on a regular basis. In some cases, a spiritual mentor (such as a local pastor) is retained by the company for the purpose of emotional and spiritual care of employees.

8. Intentionally implements ethical Christ-honouring practice that does not conflict with the gospel.

Kingdom businesses operate on the moral and ethical principles of the Bible. These can be followed by all business people to their benefit. Kingdom businesses are enterprises whose purpose is to produce goods and to perform services that accomplish God's will on earth as revealed and proclaimed in the Bible. They intentionally apply Christ's teaching to their business life and practice. They ensure accountability systems that address areas of ethics and Christ-likeness. They carefully evaluate their goods and services to ensure they do not conflict with the message of the gospel.

9. Is pro-active in intercession and seeks the prayer support of others.

Managers and owners seek prayer support from others, and maintain open lines of communication with those prayer supporters. Satan will do everything possible to sabotage the kingdom goals of the company, so specific attention must be given to spiritual warfare. Pro-active intercession for the business is integral to the leadership of the company.

10. Seeks to harness the power of networking with like-minded organisations.

As the proverb states: two are better than one and a three-strand cord is not easily broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Companies that are networked can be a powerful force. Often multiple organisations (for-profit or non-profit) can accomplish more for the kingdom by working together than by working separately. Good kingdom businesses seek out those relationships and are open to serving other organisations that have similar goals.

Our aim here has been to offer a set of guiding principles for those who wish to put business as mission into practice. This is not a definitive list and will no doubt be refined through collective experience; however, these points offer a starting point. The principles were drawn out from the Lausanne Forum 2004 Business as Mission Issue Group's own knowledge and experience of best practices. Case studies submitted especially for this paper as well as others existing literature were also used.