

Over-Steering a Cadillac

by Frank L. Roy

When I was 7 years old I was allowed to drive a go-cart on the street for the first time. Our family's 8mm movies capture me over-steering in one direction then quickly turning to compensate and steering too far in the other direction. Back and forth I went while my brother watched and my dad chased after me.

Fortunately it was just a go-cart and not my dad's massive Cadillac or my over-steering could have killed my observing brother.

This story shows the benefits of making quick course corrections when there is immediate feedback. It also illustrates the advantage of limiting the negative consequences by starting small. But what happens when the results of our actions take a long time to become visible or when the negative consequences are magnified by starting too big? This article is about two mindsets that will answer these questions and more.

Wealth Amplifies Consequences

Western non-profit organizations working to solve social problems are often not able to see the immediate consequences of what they are doing. And because they have so much wealth the negative consequences are amplified.

The book *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* by William Easterly is full of case studies illustrating the problems resulting from massive foreign development aid to Africa. Not only has tons of money been wasted but often the people end up worse off in the long run.

The Searcher Example

The book suggests some very insightful solutions. For example it tells the story of a man who started with little influence and money and through trial and error

discovers sustainable solutions. Without pouring in funds his programs grew and now benefit millions of people. Mohammad Yunas won the Nobel Peace Prize for encouraging business through micro lending and has enabled more than 5 million people to rise up out of poverty.

The man is an example of being faithful with little things, proving success on a small scale before growing. He is described in the book as a grass roots *searcher*. His searching and understanding of the on-the-ground realities led him to discover sustainable solutions that fit the needs of people in Bangladesh.

Work as a Solution

He discovered that enabling job opportunities and creating value is a solution to solving social problems. This did not come by applying Western plans and wealth but came as the result of starting small, working locally and letting success grow from the hard work, inspiration and entrepreneurship of the local people.

Thomas Friedman the author *The World is Flat* confirmed this model when he said:

Africa needs many things, but most of all it needs capitalists who can start and run legal companies... People grow out of poverty when they create small businesses that employ their neighbors. Nothing else lasts.

Western Agencies are Learning

These ideas are not new to missions. Instead of starting with big plans many mission organizations encourage starting small. They know it takes time to truly understand the context of another people and culture to effectively serve people over the long term. Today some mission organizations are discovering that sustainable success does not come from the power of donor money.

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A tiny seed in the garden, yeast in bread—Jesus’ own metaphors of the kingdom. The Kingdom of God works best as a minority movement in opposition to the kingdom of this world.—Phillip Yancey

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.
2 Corinthians 12:9

Separation mindset	Integration mindset
Work is not important	Work as worship
Words only	Example
Ministry professionals	Empowering lay people
Christian bubble setting	Mainstream work setting
Low risk accountability	Job provides accountability
Dependent	Sustainable
Dependent relationships	Responsible relationships
Limited roles	Everyone fits somewhere
Self accountability	Local accountability
Creating hope	Creating jobs
Teaching responsibility	Earning responsibility
Models independence	Models service to others
Predefined spiritual roles	Enables core competency
Models self reliance	Models service
Talks servant leadership	Models Servant leadership

Planner mindset	Searcher mindset
Power from strategy	Power in weakness
Planning	Trial and error
Apply global plans	Learn local conditions
We can do “this” for “them”	We are “them”
Solid assumptions	Always learning
Dependent	Sustainable
Dependent relationships	Responsible relationships
Accountability from afar	Local accountability
Accidental dependency	Enabling integrity
Inconsequential	Stabilize politically
Growth dependent	Organic growth
Serving constituents	Serving the oppressed

The two tables are an exaggeration of two views to make a point about the importance of being a searcher seeking sustainable models and the power of integrating work as a core belief that brings glory to God.

Accidental Consequences

Mohammad Yunus has helped raise millions out of poverty not by charity but by creating opportunities for people to work. The sink or swim aspect forces accountability and responsibility that are not inherent in non-profits. Work and business are important and can produce great benefits to the country and communities where we live. Through work, we serve people; learn to give to those in need, meet our own immediate family needs as well as the needs of our parents.

There are plenty of great missionary role models. However if this model subtly elevates this role as a “higher calling” it may give the impression that full time ministry is more important and reinforce a misconception that God’s work is better done by paid workers.

At the core of this misunderstanding is a mindset that separates activities. Consider the young man who thinks his work as a waiter at the local cafe is less important than his work as a youth leader at church. The negative consequences of separating activities can be huge.

It would be terrible if the waiter’s boss said “beware of Christians they make bad employees.” The waiter would not only be losing his best opportunity to be a role model but instead he has become a negative example. A positive view of work is required for any individual to have a rich and fruitful impact.

Thinking Long-Term

Missionary service has left behind a legacy of hard working responsible people. The society then can be a model of responsible behavior as a testimony to others. Pity the place and people who have been left with a belief that work doesn’t matter to God.

I hope the business as mission movement is not unknowingly minimizing the importance of work. If work is just a platform, a means to an end, it will have the same consequences as the waiter working in the café.

If a company is just a platform and it does not do its best to be successful and serve customers then it too may become a bad example. The people working in the company deserve more than just being a platform. They too need to be served to the utmost.

Integration of Life

Diligent, honest work is something that has value in itself and is not just a necessary evil. On the contrary it can be at the front lines of fighting evil. Anything that dilutes working in a way to bring the utmost for His highest will be wrought with inconsistencies. 🌐