



One would think that a “Kingdom Business” would want to choose what to do not merely based on financial return but on the strategic value to the Kingdom of the service to be offered.

Ralph D. Winter



Dear Reader,

The missionary nurse fairly exploded in my face: “You can’t mix business and mission.”

She was referring to a worker she had trained who was now going out on his own across the mountains and giving people shots and other medicines as he used to do in her clinic. What was he doing wrong? He was self-supporting!

She said, “He not only charges for the injections he gives but for his burro and his trip across the mountain.”

I got into this tense conversation by suggesting that if her clinic could only become self-supporting it could be replicated. I figured the clinic was meeting only one percent of the need of a vast mountainous area where we both worked. If she could develop a self-supporting design it could be expanded to reach 100% of the need.

But, you say, poor mountain people can’t afford doctors! Not so! My thought was that her trained nationals could carry two-way radios. Most illnesses were simple enough to treat and did not need a doctor, but whenever something unrecognizable came up these agents of mercy could report key symptoms by radio to a doctor down in the city. People can’t pay a doctor for every problem, or even for a half hour consultation. They need to know when it is essential to make the arduous trip to the city. In most cases they can pay for two minutes of a doctor’s time—to find out if that trip is necessary. Okay, this is just an example of a work of mercy that could have been more effective if the service it rendered could have

been brought within the financial reach of the patient.

It is “a business” when the people being served can pay its costs. It is also “mission” if it is a God-glorifying blessing as well.

In my situation the medical committee of the mission would not hear of it.

Nevertheless, thousands of mission projects are ingeniously designed in such a way as to be self-supporting—ranging from small clinics and agricultural projects to major universities. Combinations of business and mission have been around a very long time.

But there is something new in the air.

Note these phrases: “kingdom business,” “kingdom professionals,” “Great Commission Companies,” “marketplace ministries,” “business is a calling.”

Really big and sudden changes in the world of missions don’t come often. But now one is upon us.

It’s the major optimism and thrill of business people who are devout believers starting or extending “Kingdom Businesses” around the world.

What is Kingdom Business?

This is a complex phenomenon, as our articles this time will clearly show. There is not, in fact, any single universally accepted definition of “Kingdom Business.”

However, we can say that “ordinary business” is not expected to be operated with the primary purpose of benefiting society, the customers, or the employees, though ordinary businesses almost always do benefit all three. If they didn’t they would not survive very long. But benefiting someone else is not the primary motivation of their owners.

Business people “know how to make money,” but their primary concern may not be to benefit society.

For example, Wal-Mart and other major US companies scour the earth to discover low-cost labor markets which will enable

them to produce things at lower cost and keep ahead of the competition. Their reason for probing the far corners of the earth is not primarily to aid pockets of poverty around the world, but to fill the pockets of investors although they may effectively do both.

In any case, today it is as if suddenly thousands of Christian businessmen have discovered the kind of faith that encourages them to regard major goals beyond profit—and still make money.

This is not new in principle, but its awareness is newly and amazingly widespread. The always tough challenge of enabling a business to pay its bills, its employees, its owners, and at the same time sustain a reliable and lasting service to humanity and glorify God is no small achievement of faith, creativity, hard work, patience, risk, intelligence and resourcefulness. Such a challenge is, however, so arduous that thoughts about “benefiting” customers and employees beyond what is necessary can easily get lost in the shuffle.

In its simplest form a business is whenever someone “provides a service and recovers all costs.”

Notice, however, that it is equally possible to choose a product or service which will allow you not only to offer a product or service and recover your costs but get back a maximum of additional income.

Good to Great

If it is money you want—and usually “business success” means making money—a current management proposal apparently designed to maximize income is called the Hedgehog Principle: choose to do what you can do better than anyone else and concentrate on that. It comes from a book titled *Good to Great*, which suggests that truly great firms got to be great by doing what they could do better than anyone else, be it coffee, rooftop solar power, mousetrap or whatever.

If maximizing income is the primary consideration then Hedgehog Principle may indeed be wise counsel. One wonders, however, why it does not seem to make much difference exactly what one does, as long as it is something one can do better than anyone else and can thus be more profitable.

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Kingdom of the service or product to be offered.

One business might seek a financially safe activity that would be most likely to succeed and still be a wholesome and helpful activity. Another business might seek to identify the most urgent and strategic need and then try to figure out how a business operation could be designed to meet the need and still come out in the black.

It is safe to say that in general the business world is mainly seeking to gain not to give. Business schools and management books rarely come at things the other way around, asking what can be done that will be the most crucial of all contributions and still be sustainable.

Basically (and unfortunately), commercial dynamics are impersonal and tend to be blind to the relative urgency of a need—especially those that by their nature cannot provide a substantial remunerative function.

For example, no wonder so little goes into stamping out diseases while so

much goes into caring for the sick. Helping heart attack victims brings in \$1 billion a day in this country. Less than 1% goes to research the primary causes.

Fortunately, “learning how to make money” inevitably leads to learning how to benefit someone willing to pay for that benefit. But “what people will pay for” is not the most stringent test of what is most strategic to the Kingdom.

Earning a Living is not Enough

Some tasks are worth more to the Kingdom than others.

Would it not be better in terms of Kingdom priorities to figure out whether it is possible to fight malaria even if costs are only barely covered than to figure out how to make a “killing” by creating a new version of Barbie dolls, Beanie Babies, or iPods?

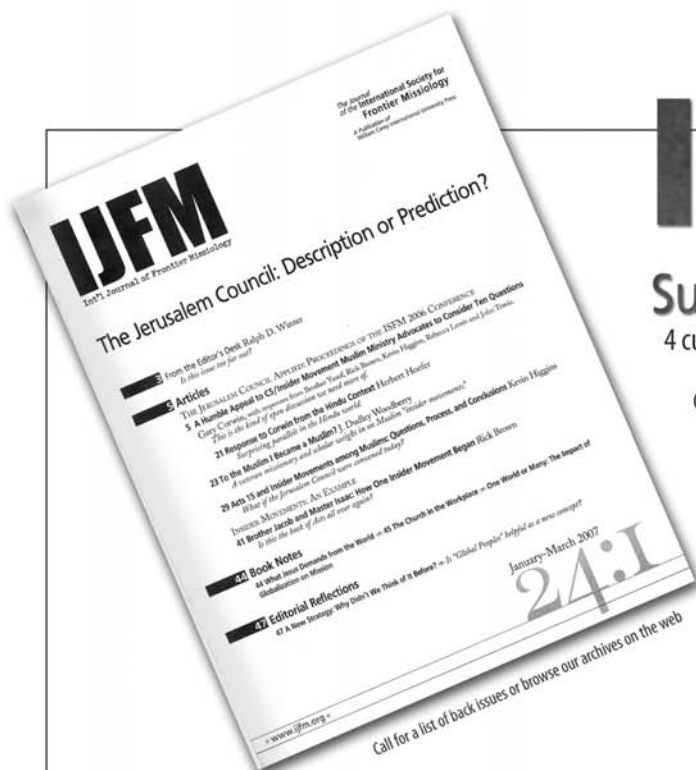
Usually business people pay little attention to the strategic value of the service to be rendered. Viability, sustainability, and profits are more of a concern.

Nevertheless, the truly “new” (old) thing is that any good work can be holy in the

Kingdom even if it is not usually considered holy in church. 🌐

Here is a quick run down on a handful of truly outstanding books related to “Business as Mission.”

- *Business as Mission: From Impoverished to Empowered*, Steffen and Barnett, 2006
- *Loving Monday: Succeeding in Business without Selling Your Soul*, Beckett, 2006
- *Where There Are No Jobs: Enterprise Solutions for Employment and Public Goods for the Poor*, Befus, 2005
- *God Is At Work: Transforming People and Nations through Business*, Eldred, 2005
- *Great Commission Companies: The Emerging Role of Business in Mission*, Steffen and Rundle, 2003
- *Business for the Glory of God: The Bible’s Teaching on the Moral Goodness of Business*, Grudem, 2003
- *Joy at Work*, Dennis W. Bakke, 2005 and *Joy at Work: Bible Study Companion*, Raymond Bakke, Hendricks, and Smith, 2005



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