

ORALITY

in Pioneer Business Planting

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Dr. Vicky Marie spent 33 years working in innovative and creative environments including multimillion-dollar technology deployments, alliances with technical luminaries such as Steve Jobs, Nicholas Negroponte's MIT media lab, Stanford Research Institute (SRI) and The Walt Disney Studios and leading entrepreneurial startup businesses.

Today Vicky is focusing on consulting with businesses in emerging markets. She helps organizations innovate and develop new viable business approaches through orality, business model workshops, entrepreneurship methodologies and innovation projects focused in Asia and Africa.

What does orality have to do with business? As we begin to experience the economic impact business is having in emerging nations, we must stop and ask ourselves if business is having the social and spiritual impact in the world we had hoped to see.

As businessmen and women, we often look first to secular examples of success in the business community and yet, as followers of Christ, we have been provided a wealth of biblical examples and models for leadership, ethical behavior, success, economics, strategic planning and a plethora of other stories for establishing, building, and directing our businesses. So, why do we not turn to these stories as we establish businesses and seek social and spiritual impact in the world?

First and foremost, we are not equipped. We are not familiar with oral-based learning and we do not know Bible stories well enough to apply them accurately to situations and circumstances we are facing. Next, we have secularized business; therefore, we look to the world for examples. It's no surprise we often become discouraged because we have not experienced the social or spiritual impact for which we prayed and we are left wondering why.

According to the International Orality Network, more than 70% of the world's population (5.7 billion people) are oral learners, by necessity or by preference—people who can't, don't or won't read, who prefer to learn and communicate by means other than print-based media or written instruction. They communicate through methods such as storytelling, drama, songs, poetry, parables, proverbs and other oral arts. Ironically, an estimated 90% of the world's Christian workers present content using literate—not oral—communication styles. In order to reach and disciple oral learners, we must learn to use the strategies that are familiar and relevant to them in every environment, including business.

As pioneer business planters, we still need to recognize the strategic role of orality and the need to equip businessmen and women who are involved in pioneer business planting.

Why, you might ask? In regions where businesses are most needed, business has been conducted for centuries via oral communications and, therefore, it is important that we are prepared to operate accordingly.

The first step to incorporating orality into business is to identify those stories that align with the messages we are attempting to communicate. Maybe it's a message regarding caring for those in need and the purpose of business. Maybe it's a message about integrity and leadership. Whatever communication processes, tools, illustrations and methodologies we use in our business activities, they must be relevant to the culture where we are conducting business.

The next step is to identify biblical stories to draw upon and to replace the written cognitive secular examples. It is important to use memory and image-filled illustrations. We must learn these stories and begin to substitute them in place of the written-based materials we use on a regular basis. The focus should be to create an oral-based participatory and developmental approach to launching and running business based on biblical principles that reflect both social and spiritual influences.

IT WAS NOT A BILLBOARD ADVERTISING THEIR BUSINESS THAT CAUSED THE BUSINESS TO GROW, IT WAS THE JOINING OF THE FATHER WITH THE BUSINESS THROUGH FAITHFUL STORYTELLING.

The change does not happen overnight but with diligence and intentional practice we will begin to see a difference in our approach and the success of communicating business principles in oral-based communities will become evident. Success will be reflected through growth in viable, legitimate, profitable businesses actively impacting oral-based communities for the glory of God.

Here is an example of orality in pioneer business planting that speaks volumes. Phillip and Samuel are two pioneer businessmen with hopes of spreading the gospel in South Asia. These two entrepreneurs created something very astounding in a single, tiny room—a barbershop. In this tiny portal, they have been blessed to create an economic, social and spiritual impact.

At first their “customers” would come and go without fellowship. They would simply come and receive what seemed to be a secular service. Phillip and Samuel, however, had something else in mind. They then began to memorize Bible stories, as well as other stories reflecting Christian morals. These stories soon began to meet the spiritual needs of those around them and those they served. Their goal was to plant spiritual seeds of character and integrity from within their business while developing relationships with the local men. The customers were so attracted to the oral stories that Phillip and Samuel were sharing that they began to bring more and more clientele. Today many will go to the shop ONLY to fellowship and to receive the stories.

Phillip and Samuel have earned a tremendous amount of respect from their community and have brought much glory to the Father by further hallowing His name. What these two have accomplished is an extremely honorable feat, especially in a region with limited freedoms. Though it is an honor to spread the gospel it also takes courage and should not go unrecognized as obedience with considerable risk.

Both of these young men are not only businessmen but also church planters as they have begun small Bible studies with the customers who have shown interest in learning more. They have successfully de-secularized their business by bringing the gospel to their customers. In return, the Father has blessed them with a business that is thriving economically through increased revenues, socially through bringing the community together, and, spiritually through the audible Word. It was not a billboard advertising their business that caused the business to flourish, it was the joining of the Father with the business through faithful storytelling. Their human hearts were touched by the Father, ushering them to do something different, to go against the common misconception that business is just business and allowing the Father to be glorified in all of their endeavors. 

