

Entrepreneurial Strategies for Reaching Frontier Peoples

By **BOB GOLDMANN**

Bob Goldman leads the PSALM Business initiative, which encourages cross-cultural workers to share the good news in hard places using a profitable biblical approach to small business. He can be reached at bob@psalmbusiness.com.

Business startups are an excellent way for cross-cultural workers to share the good news among frontier peoples. However, some entrepreneurial strategies are *more effective* than others.

Four questions can help us evaluate which entrepreneurial strategies to pursue:

1 What challenges need to be overcome in sending cross-cultural workers to reach frontier peoples?

Three challenges are particularly relevant when considering whether to use entrepreneurial strategies to reach frontier peoples. First, creative entry strategies are needed. Frontier peoples are often located in hard-to-reach countries, cities, and regions. Therefore, cross-cultural workers need creative entry strategies so they can gain access to specific locations.

Second, respectable residency identities are needed. Countries with frontier peoples are usually reluctant to allow foreigners to remain long-term unless they have a solid reason for granting residency visas. Therefore, cross-cultural workers need stable and respectable residency identities so they will be permitted to remain long enough among frontier peoples to make disciples and contribute to emerging movements.

Third, model biblical values. Local believers need to feed their families and withstand crises and persecution as they spread the good news and work to transform their communities. This means that biblical work values are important for new believers and emerging movements. Therefore, cross-cultural workers should model biblical work values in their residency identities.



Biblical Work Values

As we go and make disciples, we should teach others to obey everything God has commanded us (Matt 28:18–20), which includes God's commands about work. Believers should exemplify the following biblical work values.

1. Believers should **work** (Acts 20:33–35; Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 4:10–12; 2 Thess 3:6–13).
2. Believers should **bless** others (Ps 82:3–4; Matt 25:31–46; 2 Cor 9:1–15; James 1:27).
3. Believers should **pay taxes** (Matt 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26; Rom 13:1, 5–7; 1 Pet 2:13–17).
4. Believers should **tithe** (Exod 34:26; Deut 14:27–29; Prov 3:9–10).
5. Believers should **apply God's wisdom** at work (Deut 4:5–6; Ps 19:7–14; Col 1:9–10).
6. Believers should **share the good news** from work (Rom 1:14–17; 2 Cor 5:16–20; Eph 6:19–20; Col 4:3–6; 1 Pet 3:15–16).

We must always model what we teach. “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1; Acts 20:33–35; 2 Cor 12:14–16; 1 Thess 2:7–12; 2 Thess 3:7–10). If these six biblical work values are *modeled* and *taught* by cross-cultural pioneers sharing the good news among frontier peoples, they are more likely to be *caught* by new believers and emerging movements.

2 Why do we need business strategies to reach frontier peoples?

First, pioneering into other countries requires solid identities that allow workers to answer basic questions such as “What do you do?” and “Why are you here?” Cross-cultural workers need clear, simple, respectable answers to these questions in order to gain residency and have effective ministry.

Second, residency visa options in many countries are changing. Tourist visas aren't viable long-term options for residency. Employment visas are less

popular with local governments because they allow foreigners to take jobs that locals could potentially have. Small businesses, on the other hand, are increasingly attractive to local governments since they can provide jobs for locals and strengthen the local economy. A general pattern in other countries is this: If you *create* jobs for locals, you'll be more welcome. If you *take* jobs from locals, you'll be less welcome.

Small business can provide pioneers with creative entry strategies, respectable residency identities, and the ability to model biblical work values.

3 Why do we need to compare business strategies.

Which business approach should we choose as we consider how to reach frontier peoples? The term “Business as Mission” (BAM) has become so broad that it encompasses a wide variety of approaches. Why do many react negatively to the idea of using BAM to pioneer in hard places? Perhaps it's because they've seen too many poor examples.

When we advocate the use of entrepreneurial strategies for reaching frontier peoples, we should advocate *against* some BAM models and *in favor of* other BAM models. Some establish an empty business structure as a ministry platform to gain residency and start discipling, without pursuing a genuine small business that seeks customers, employees, and profitability. Fake business is flawed for several reasons. Authorities can tell from business tax returns if a business lacks income or some employees are working for free. Also, communities can tell by watching if a business lacks customers and employees. Running a fake business models the wrong behaviors to observers and believers. Profitable businesses are preferable to fake ones.

Furthermore, profitable secular business is also flawed. Some establish a profitable secular business that seeks customers, employees, and profitability but without a willingness to risk the business by being openly biblical and without creating opportunities for spiritual conversations. Purely secular (for profit only) business creates a disconnect between business values

and biblical values, reinforcing the “sacred-secular” divide. It makes spiritual conversations at work feel awkward. Finally, secular businesses model the wrong behaviors to observers and believers.

As a result, a biblically oriented business is preferable to secular business. Running a profitable biblical business is preferable. Some people establish a profitable biblical business that seeks customers, employees, and profitability, combined with a willingness to risk the business by being biblical and openly spiritual as well as with a willingness to keep the business small enough to leave time for discipling.

Here are a few benefits. First, profitable business models integrity and authenticity, because a legitimate business has customers, employees, and profits. Second, biblical businesses make biblical values and spiritual conversations at work feel natural. Also, profitable biblical business (1) shows that doing good deeds and sharing the good news can be integrated in a successful business and (2) models the right behaviors to observers and believers. As James 2:18 says, “I will show you my faith by my deeds.”

When one missions leader heard these contrasting approaches, he responded: “You’re right. I’m not really anti-BAM. I’m anti-*bad*-BAM.” More missions leaders would endorse entrepreneurial strategies for reaching frontier peoples if they understood that we recommend *profitable biblical businesses* rather than *fake businesses* or *secular businesses*.


4 How do we pursue a business startup that can be both profitable and biblical?

Four guidelines will help cross-cultural workers pursue profitable biblical business.

- a. Start *small* and profitable. It should be acceptable for a business to be small as long as it seeks to be profitable. To be clear, “small and profitable” is an attitude rather than a target size. Moreover, smaller startups work better in remote locations and unstable situations. They require less initial funding, which is easier for many to achieve and a simpler model for locals to imitate.

- b. Prioritize *simple* processes. Complicated processes, tasks, forms, and procedures tend to create problems in business. Simpler processes are usually less expensive, less likely to lead to mistakes, and easier to teach to others. Simplicity in business can be powerful, but it takes intent and effort to achieve it. Additionally, a simpler business is a better model for others to imitate.
- c. Pursue a *profitable* business. Every business should be profitable enough to serve customers, pay employees and owners, cover the bills, and prepare for crises. Excess profits should result in generosity toward others, not greed or selfishness for the owners. Keep in mind that profitable businesses have the capacity to be both sustainable (surviving crises and downturns) and generous (blessing the needy in families and communities). A sustainable and generous business is a better model for others to imitate.
- d. Be *biblical* in business. This approach will look very different from many examples in the world. A business that seeks to be biblical will value work, do good deeds, and share the good news. This kind of biblical business is a better model for others to imitate.¹

Conclusion

Entrepreneurial strategies can provide cross-cultural workers with creative entry strategies for accessing frontier peoples, respectable residency identities for remaining among frontier peoples, and the ability to model and teach biblical work values to new believers and emerging movements. A profitable biblical approach to small business provides a better identity than fake business or secular business. It also offers a clearer path to sharing the good news among frontier peoples. 

¹ To explore a framework for being biblical in business, see “Be Biblical.” *PSALM Business*. Published 12 Jan 2004. Online: psalmbusiness.com/be-biblical/.