

# The Essentials of Good Business as Mission: 10 Guiding Principles

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## Introduction

Having identified Business as mission (BAM) as an integral and vital part of the overall mission of the Church, it is important to identify those things that set Business as mission apart from "business as normal" (BAN). As the illustration below demonstrates, 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.

## The Building Blocks of a Business as Mission Initiative / Company

- BAN = 'Business as Normal' e. foundational business principles which apply to all business initiatives.
- BAM = 'Business as mission' e. essential distinctives of a BAM initiative.

Specific contexts will dictate how the business is built in practice.

This section 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 #8) 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**

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.

**Example:** The founder of a company established in Turkey left the multinational world to focus on developing a “Great Commission Company”. He wanted to do world-class business while facilitating church planting work in the 10-40 Window. He deliberately focused on Turkey as one of the “largest unreached nations on earth” and intentionally moved to a small city in a region of Turkey with 1.5 million people and no church. His business and community involvement have given him the opportunity to speak the good news to his employees and others in the community that might never have otherwise heard the gospel.

**Example:** The initial goal of Evangelistic Commerce was to generate funds for mission agencies. It was soon realized that much more could be done to spread the gospel. Now with over 60 employees, the company holds daily prayers attended by Christians, Hindus and Muslims and has bi-weekly Bible studies. The company is able to emphasize personal care for employees and actively demonstrate the love of Jesus through the leadership of Christian managers. Beyond being salt and light within the company, management has helped form two churches and a Christian elementary school.

#### **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.

**Example:** A company in Asia has found that through its business activities the majority of employees in the business have accepted Christ and many local people have been influenced by the gospel. New companies have been started in remote places and resulted in new churches be established as well. In addition, many employees are actively investing time to influence their communities. The government has given the business awards for their activities and as a consequence, those in the business have had a chance to model right living before officials and become a positive influence in their region.

**Example:** A successful Costa Rican healthcare enterprise Clínica Bíblica has partnered with other ministries with similar objectives. It works in strategic partnership with Roblealto Children’s Ministry whose mission is to minister to the spiritual and physical needs of Costa Rican children from difficult situations. This mission is closely aligned with its own healing ministry through business. Clínica Bíblica uses its medical expertise to meet the medical needs of Roblealto children and benefits by ministering to children they would not otherwise meet.

## 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.

**Example:** Being able to work at home provides weavers in the “D company” with the flexibility to attend to other responsibilities such as family, field work and other jobs. Women, often excluded from many aspects of business life, can freely and equally participate in making rugs.

**Example:** After experiencing periods of neglecting both God and family because of business pressures, TRP Limited instituted a plan and accountability structures for rest and renewal. Current practices include one day per week to pray and plan for business, church and family needs.

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

The managers and owners recognize that God is ultimately the owner of the company. As such, they focus on how to maximize 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 fulfills 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.

**Example:** The D weaving company started as a job creation project, targeting the economic, spiritual and personal welfare of the villages in which it works. More than a decade after its founding, this commitment had outgrown the initial project and produced an additional commitment to founding schools. Today D company supports more than ten schools, which have impacted over 600 families in 100 villages. It has also helped finance the construction of several churches in the surrounding villages.

**Example:** Clinica Bíblica uses its surplus income to support its many dependent community ministries. The network to which it belongs uses its combined income to subsidize the medical care of all needy patients. They divide income into three: one third towards building and maintenance costs, one third towards medical equipment and one third to fund other medical or social action ministries.

## 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.

**Example:** The founder of a company in Asia shares: “Our employees learn from us that service to our customers is the foundation of our business. In fact, being willing to serve is an eternal value. Business is God’s training ground to teach us to serve.”

**Example:** In the BA company in South East Asia they have been learning about living the Gospel. John relates: “The Lord was showing me the power of discipling people in the workplace. Where do Christians spend most time? Where will character flaws show up? Is this in church on Sunday or in the weekday workplace? Therefore, where should people be discipled? In many church meetings the Word is only spoken. In the workplace it must be lived, and Christian discipleship modelled in response to real challenges.”

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

Kingdom businesses operate on moral and ethical principles of the Bible. These can be followed by all businesspeople to their benefit. Kingdom businesses are enterprises whose purpose are 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 Christlikeness. They carefully evaluate their goods and services to ensure they do not conflict with the message of the gospel.

**Example:** Adhering to Christ-honoring business ethics has limited some financially profitable business opportunities for TRP Limited in Central Asia. Fluctuating bureaucratic and economic conditions and instances of corruption have added to the challenges of doing profitable business in an ethical manner. The founder has support from a Christian mentor and a network of like-minded businesspeople in Central Asia. He also understands that an abundant prayer life and deep knowledge of God and His word are *NOT* optional if one wants to do effective spiritual work in the business world.

## 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.

**Example:** In the beginning of the business, the founder of a company in Asia was not prepared for the degree of spiritual warfare he encountered. He didn't intentionally focus on prayer, either by himself or with the few believers he knew. As time went on he determined that 'prayer is work' and through prayer as well as organizing others to join him, he began to see results. He has found that systematically having someone praying for each employee each day was the best investment that he could have ever made.

## **10. Seeks to harness the power of networking with like-minded organizations.**

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 organizations (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 organizations that have similar goals.

**Example:** The founder of TRP Limited has been involved in setting up a loose network of about 200 people within a Central Asian country, and another 50 outside of the country, who are interested in pursuing kingdom business in that country. A web site is being set up to facilitate networking and to encourage believers doing business in that country.

**Example:** From 1991 to 1993, AMI averaged sales of over \$10 million per year and currently have equity in nine operations in East Asia. From this position of strength AMI has established strategic alliances with more than 15 non-profit agencies to do education, development and church-planting work among local East Asian and Muslim communities. In each company the Great Commission (GC) strategy coordinator, networks with local church leaders and creates strategies related to evangelism, discipleship and church planting. Expatriates are spiritually accountable to a church or mission agency and have contracts that describe and specify their job descriptions and working terms.

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 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. Case studies that most fully reflected the principles were then chosen as examples.