

LESSON 18: Business Performance

Developing a Ministry Plan

Business leaders typically recognize the value of having a business plan. They will work through a strategic plan and may also have a marketing plan, but very few have ever considered developing a **ministry plan** for their business.

Like any plan, a ministry plan can help you become purposeful about developing goals and action plans for the future of your business. These kinds of goals, however, are uniquely different. A ministry plan focuses on how you can have eternal significance in and through your business.

This concept of a ministry plan may make you uncomfortable. It certainly is not for the faint hearted. A ministry plan requires leaving our comfort zone, and it comes with risks. However, the rewards are eternal and significant. Incredible things can and do happen when God's people open their workplace to His work.

A ministry plan should begin with an *objective*: What do you hope to accomplish? It doesn't have to be anything fancy. Just succinctly and plainly state your desired outcome of performing ministry through your business. This will allow you to remain focused on the important eternal tasks for which you have been called.

After your objective has been stated, you need to dig into the meat of the plan. Your plan should concentrate on the following five key areas. In each section of your plan, outline your purpose for focusing on this activity and the acceptable and unacceptable methods to accomplish your goals.

EVANGELISM

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus told his disciples, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."* This was one of

Jesus' last instructions. This is a charge for every believer in Jesus that is applicable today as much as it was back then.

As business leaders, we have a tremendous opportunity to share the gospel with people who may never enter a place of worship. Jesus could have appointed and anointed the clergy of the day to build the church and to preach the gospel. Instead, he told a bunch of fishermen, a tax collector, and other assorted people of commerce to go forth and do it. We need to recognize our call, be obedient to that call, and quit hiding behind our rationalizations for avoiding this difficult—but very exciting—possibility.

In developing a ministry plan for your business, leadership needs to determine what policies and practices should be addressed in order to guide your team. Even in your zealotry to be evangelistic, you'll need to be respectful of each person in the workplace.

You also need to be sensitive to legal issues that come with workplace evangelism. In their booklet "Christian Rights in the Workplace," the American Center for Law and Justice states: *"An employer can talk about his religious beliefs with employees as long as employees know that continued employment or advancement within the company is not conditioned upon acquiescence in the employer's religious beliefs.... Employers must be careful, however, not to persist in witnessing if the employee objects. Such unwanted proselytizing could be deemed religious harassment."*

DISCIPLESHIP

A good shepherd makes sure that his flock has its needs met both spiritually and physically. A portion of your ministry plan should address your employees' need for spiritual growth. If you have brand-new believers, they naturally need to be discipled and steered towards a strong relationship with the Lord. Existing believers also need to be continually challenged in growing in their relationship with the Lord, and in applying God's truth to their daily environment.

Discipleship can take place in a one-on-one situation or in a group setting. Many businesses have voluntary Bible study groups meeting in their office before or after work hours, or during break times. This can be an easy way to encourage employees to go deeper into the Word, and to hear more from you about the beliefs you value and how they can be applied in the workplace. Just be sure employees recognize that the activity is voluntary and that it is being held outside of work hours.

In your ministry plan, address the methodologies you are willing to use, and what is not acceptable, so that your boundaries are well defined. Encourage other believers in your workplace to disciple as well. The real fruit comes when you have more than one person in the workplace actively practicing and teaching God's Word.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about evangelism and discipleship in the workplace? How does your current workplace culture reflect those views?

2. Is your personal nature to lean more towards evangelism or is it more towards discipleship? In what ways do you demonstrate your leanings?

3. Brainstorm as a group what sort of ideas could be inserted into a ministry plan regarding a proactive approach to evangelism and discipleship.

LOVING YOUR TEAM

Ministering to the needs of your employees goes hand in hand with evangelism and discipleship. Paul teaches in 1 Timothy 5:8: *“If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”*

The principle behind this passage is that we are to take care of our own. For a business leader, this means God has placed people in your care for a reason, and they should be treated as your “business family.”

People have needs that are emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual. If you ignore these needs, not only will you damage your opportunity to evangelize and disciple these people, but you will be shirking your responsibility as the steward over these people. Jesus’ most effective ministry came from his willingness to meet the individual needs of people, both physically and spiritually.

There are many different ways to minister to your employees, but the most important way is to be available and sensitive to listening when they have issues they feel need to be addressed. One method used effectively is to set up an employee assistance fund. These funds can be designed to help staff with needs. Maybe an employee is about to have their utilities shut off, or their home foreclosed on, or they’re drowning from medical bills. These are opportunities to show the love of Christ by having either the company or other employees—or preferably both—pitch in to help in an employee’s time of need.

Marketplace Chaplains has a program that many companies use to provide an outlet for their employees. These chaplains help employees with family tragedies, weddings, funerals, addictions, and many other issues important to them. This can be a non-threatening way for an employer to provide spiritual counsel for an employee without the employee feeling job pressure.

Be creative in finding ways to meet the ongoing needs of your staff. They will appreciate it, and it will likely bear eternal rewards.

LOVING CUSTOMERS, SUPPLIERS, AND COMPETITORS

Businesses have tremendous influence in their community. They make daily contact with customers, suppliers, civic organizations, politicians, and many public servants. These are all opportunities to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Demonstrating excellence in all that you do, loving others, and serving people can change the very nature of your city.

A pastor challenged a group of business owners to begin praying for their competition. Rather than view them as an enemy, he challenged these men to love them. The next week one of these men did just that.

It seems this man had been so convicted by that conversation that he went home and called his competitor. He apologized for the times he had degraded him to prospective customers. He went a step further and said his company would no longer say derogatory things about the competition and would begin referring customers to them when they were a more suitable solution. The very next day, both parties referred customers to each other, and began working towards making their industry and businesses more cooperative and stronger.

Is God calling you to consider, in your ministry plan, how you can better serve others? Whether it is your competition, customers, suppliers, or other business people, look for ways to shine the light of Christ into the lives of others. Solicit input from your staff as to how you can better accomplish this noble goal.

LOVING YOUR COMMUNITY

Employees have needs, but so do people in your community. In Leviticus 19:9-10, God commanded the Israelites, *“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.”*

God desires us to use the excess in our business to help the poor, aliens (unbelievers), and widows and orphans. (See James 1:27.) We need to be obedient to this standard by using our business resources to assist with the needs of the community. Businesses have the unique opportunity of their resources, people and time, to be very effective. Unfortunately, we see large Fortune 500 businesses leveraging this strength for activities that do not always glorify God, while many smaller businesses that have a heart for God’s work overlook this creative way to assist the community for God’s glory.

Look for activities in which your business could assist the needs of oppressed people. For example, single parents really need support in today’s world. They are similar to the widows of biblical times, having limited resources and big responsibilities with little outside help. God would be pleased to see us use our time, talent, and money to help these hurting and stressed people in our community.

SUMMARY

A ministry plan can be a scary thought and takes a leap of faith. It requires that your faith become real—not only to you—but also to the staff around you. If you properly outline your goals and objectives, communicate them to your staff, and then model them you will be amazed at how God will honor your efforts. The harvest is ripe, but the workers are few. Are you up for the challenge?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What ways have you used your business in the past to love your employees, customers, suppliers, and competitors?

2. If God truly owns every business, how should that change your feelings and actions toward your competitors?

3. What proactive and defined steps might you take to love others who come in contact with your business? What are the most important ideas you should include in your ministry plan?

(This lesson was adapted in part from a chapter in Rick Boxx's book, Unconventional Business.)