

Mobilising Business as Mission

On whom should responsibility rest for identifying potential Business as Mission practitioners, and what criteria should they use in their selection?

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This essay relates to the recent missiological specialism known as Business as Mission, and is concerned with the process by which Christians may become involved as 'kingdom professionals'. Specifically, how are they identified and selected, and on what basis? In answering these important questions, this essay takes the following approach: Section I provides a brief introduction to (and definition of) Business as Mission (BAM), and Section II sets its historical and missiological context. Section III discusses how potential BAM practitioners can be identified, before Section IV asks what criteria should be used in selecting these practitioners and testing their suitability. We conclude that there are multiple valid routes into BAM and therefore responsibility for identifying potential practitioners is shared throughout the Christian community; and that those identified should demonstrate suitable business, spiritual and personal characteristics as they follow God's calling.

Section I

To many Christians the phrase 'Business as Mission' may seem a confused or even contradictory phrase – within much traditional thinking, business was what missionaries left behind to follow their calling, with tentmaking seen as a necessary exception. In the last decade or so, however, business has come to be seen as a deliberate and valid missiological and evangelistic tool. We use here Tunehag's (2006b, 1) broad definition of Business as Mission: "[it] is about real, viable, sustainable and profitable business; with a Kingdom of God purpose, perspective and impact; leading to transformation of people and societies spiritually, economically and socially – to the greater glory of God." Thus it is not just business *for* mission, or tentmaking alone (which uses skills profitably to finance ministry or outreach);¹ business *itself*, especially in terms of how it is conducted and what it achieves, is missional. This is also distinct from 'workplace Christianity' as it is targeted at cross-cultural, international economies, especially those closed to conventional forms of mission.

Section II

In truth, there has been crossover between business and Christianity since the latter's inception, with many early Christians sharing their faith in the marketplace, and the Apostle Paul is well-known as the original, literal 'tentmaker' (Acts 18:3). Suter and Gmür (1997, 99) argue that "over the past two thousand years, trade and business have greatly contributed to the spread of Christianity throughout the world," and Cox (1997, 111) goes further, arguing the church growth "has largely depended on the faithful witness of ordinary men and women who were going about their daily business."² Since the Industrial Revolution, however, a professionalization of the missionary function has taken place, resulting in a bifurcation between those involved in the 'material' world of economic production and those involved in the 'spiritual'.³

¹ For a fuller explanation of the differences between Business as Mission and tentmaking, see Tunehag (2006a, 6ff). There has been a good deal of confusion in this area, with some regarding tentmaking as an example of BAM, and others (such as Nordstrom and Nielsen 1998, 15) seeing BAM as a subset of tentmaking.

² To give some examples of the overlap between trade and Christianity, Cox (1997, 112) refers to Columbus, Marco Polo and the Moravians as traders who helped spread Christianity. Markiewicz (1999) gives two further examples: that of Jesse Boot, a Christian chemist and philanthropist who founded Nottingham University; and Arthur Guinness, who produced a mineral-rich drink to improve the diet of the Irish poor (and who, incidentally, funded the work of Hudson Taylor and Dr Thomas Barnado). William Carey, 'father of modern missions', is also remembered for being a shoemaker. As Cox (op cit., 113) points out, however, we should not ignore the tremendous impact of the very many ordinary Christians, "[u]nknown to Christian leaders, unknown to the structured church... [who] have gone out in faith to pitch their tents where God has lead [*sic*] them." Yamamori and Eldred (2003, 21ff) suggest that business as a missionary tool was influential until the 1920s/1930s when we entered a period of history where capitalism was not seen as useful by developing countries.

³ Rundle (2000b, 97) correctly asserts that industrialization made it both possible and efficient "to create a professional class of missionary that was supported financially by the donations of... 'ordinary' Christians. This model of a donor-supported, professional missionary has since become entrenched in the mind-set of the evangelical church."

The last twenty years has seen this bifurcation challenged. In a broader sense, some have sought to develop a 'theology of work' or a 'theology of business' that seeks to affirm business as a God-ordained blessing, and something worthy of Christian participation.⁴ In a more missiological focus, a number of Christians have realised the missionary opportunities made possible by Business as Mission: countries closed to traditional missionary activities remain open to investment and business development. At the same time, various Christian leaders have noticed a lack of fulfilment (or 'underutilization') felt by Christian businesspeople in the West.⁵ These forces have combined, in a propitious time of intensive globalization,⁶ to create a growing desire – and opportunity – for experienced Christian businesspeople to use their God-given abilities "to the greater glory of God."⁷

Understandably, perhaps, most traditional mission agencies have not fully appreciated this new dynamic – called "revolutionary" by one Christian business professor⁸ – and the worldwide mission movement is still coming to terms with this approach method and its implications. One missiologist warned me he was "not sure much thinking has been done, this side of the Atlantic, about the practicalities of Business as Mission" (Knell 2006), and this is, in many ways, still virgin territory. Rundle (in Yamamori and Eldred 2003, 230) asks "[h]ow do we know if someone is qualified for such sacrificial and difficult work? What preparation should be required? What characteristics, if any, do the most effective kingdom entrepreneurs have in common?" before concluding "[u]nfortunately, little research has been done." Whilst this essay is not able to add empirical evidence to the debate, it does seek to provide insight into such issues.

Section III

The Lausanne Occasional Paper on Business as Mission concluded with two manifesto recommendations:

- "We call upon the Church world wide to identify, affirm, pray for, commission and release business people and entrepreneurs to exercise their gifts and calling as business people in the world – among all peoples and to the ends of the earth; and
- We call upon business people globally to receive this affirmation and to consider how their gifts and experience might be used to help meet the world's most pressing spiritual and physical needs through Business as mission" (Tunehag et al 2005, 62).

⁴ See, for example, Daniels et al, *Toward a Theology of Business* (2003) and, especially, Grudem's insightful and persuasive, *Making the Case that Business Glorifies God* (2003), which argues that good business imitates God, and that imitating God glorifies Him. Grudem also argues that profit is intrinsically good, and that "the distortions of something good must not cause us to think that the thing itself is evil" (p.19).

⁵ To give this underutilization some perspective, it is worth noting Sudyk's statistics (in Eldred and Yamamori 2003, 154) that while 1% of US first-degree students studied theology or religious studies, 20% graduated with business or marketing degrees, clearly a large pool and one which must contain many Christians. Sudyk argues that "[w]e can inspire business students to consider using their careers for evangelism and in so doing effectively increase the potential workforce of the kingdom" (ibid., 156), although we may have some concerns about whether business students would, in the short-term at least, be sufficiently experienced for involvement in Business as Mission.

⁶ Cragin (2004, 1) has made this generalization: during the first millennium AD, the gospel was spread by persecution, during the second millennium it was spread through exploitation and colonization – and that during this third millennium it will be spread by the forces of globalization. We may recognize the potential benefits of globalization without necessarily sharing Pocock's conclusion (2005, 33) that the "hand of God is discernible in globalization."

⁷ It would be both complacent and misleading to ignore the problems of this new form of mission that, though not the focus of this essay, are nonetheless still real. Green (2002) has noted that, disturbingly, "too many communities and entire nations have been disappointed at the hands of businesses that proved to be exploitative." There is also the more general issue of business failure, and how this affects our understanding of God's involvement in mission and how we are able to witness through business, and Rundle (2000a, 292) observes that "Western-trained business professionals of all stripes – Christians and non-Christian – are having trouble adapting their know-how to countries that have little experience with free market capitalism." YWAM (2004) also warn specifically against mission drift, confused authority and the dangers of love of money in this context.

⁸ John Cragin (2004, 1) noted that "something revolutionary... [is happening] to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of missions" and leading missiologist Ralph Winter (2005, 111) notes that, "[a]lthough the idea is certainly not altogether new, the mounting and widening discussion of the idea is new," offering as evidence "the new swirl of related books and conferences."

This rallying call suggests that (a) the Church, and (b) individual businesspeople, should be involved in the identification (and more) of potential Business as Mission practitioners. This section explores how that identification can take place by looking at both of these routes, plus two alternatives (mission agencies, and businesspeople other than those being called). We should heed Sudyk's warning (in Eldred and Yamamori 2003, 161) that "[t]here is no simple formula" for someone exploring these options, and therefore recognise a plurality of experiences and potential paths to entry.

(i) Mission agencies

The role of mission agencies in Business as Mission is a disputed one. Although these agencies operate in a range of ways, it is probably true to say that they typically are more concerned with community and development work, and evangelism and church projects, than with missional *business*. This is a preference for operating in the not-for-profit sector, as opposed to the desired profitability of Business as Mission. As mission changes to incorporate 'kingdom business', some argue that "[s]olid, two-way partnerships between business and mission agencies are crucial" (Nordstrom and Nielsen 1998, 17). On the other hand, others are quick to highlight the lack of business understanding within mission agencies, e.g. Rundle and Steffen (2003, 98) note that "people in the missions world easily forget or downplay the importance of the GCC's business success... they sometimes struggle most at understanding the culture of business," and this has led at least one leading missiologist to argue that, in terms of business and traditional modes of mission, "keeping them distinct is essential for success in both areas" (Tsukahira 1997).

Perhaps the best we can say is that, since mission agencies tend to act within the traditional missiological framework, there may be better structures for the determination of who is suitable for BAM. Christian businessman Bryan Hilton proposes that a mission agency could conduct "an initial sifting" (2006, personal correspondence) but then pass on a candidate to a more specialist organization checking for business ability. Sudyk (in Eldred and Yamamori 2003, 166) warns not to expect too much at this stage from traditional mission agencies, and that approaching them "for objective guidance may be disappointing... [since they do not tend] to think from a business perspective," something which remains a structural, if not existential, characteristic.⁹

(ii) Individuals

Typically, it will be individuals themselves who initiate their progress towards involvement in Business as Mission, and often this will be in response to a 'calling'. Ginter (2002) strongly argues that kingdom professionals are "not driven; they are called," and most commentators on Business as Mission would agree with this argument: the 'businary', just as the missionary, responds to a calling from God. Tsukahira (2000, 95) equates such a call with that of church office: "[j]ust like ordained ministers, believing businesspeople must be sure of God's calling to their unique vocation," and there is general consensus that BAM should be conducted in accordance with God's will. We may note the similarities between this specific calling and any general calling within the Christian church: it should be confirmed in prayer and listening to God, and corroborated by other mature Christians.¹⁰

Most individuals are in the best position to weigh up their own combination of spiritual and business qualities; and most callings are foremost to individuals themselves. Dillon Harris of the UK Business Men's Fellowship (2006, personal correspondence) believes that "most often individuals feel called to minister in the marketplace," especially since "many are already... in secular occupation when converted." There is a strong case for potential BAM practitioners being self-identifying, and this resonates with the fact that such people may need to be characteristically self-reliant and entrepreneurial.

⁹ Rundle (2000b, 102-3) concurs that where there's "an unexpected business-related problem, the [mission] agencies are poorly equipped to respond." Specifically, they "fall short when it comes to providing even basic evaluation or advice in the area of professional qualifications, business strategies, and economics."

¹⁰ Tunehag (2006a, 6) underlines the specificity and validity of each calling thus: "if God has called you to business don't lower yourself to become a pastor – or vice versa."

(iii)(a) The Church – as an institution – and its leaders

We have chosen to consider the Church in two senses, which may perhaps be best understood as top-down and bottom-up, or clergy and laity. Firstly, then, is there not an argument that Church leaders should be responsible for identifying (and encouraging, mentoring and nurturing) those who may be suitable for BAM? Christensen (Chapter 4 in Lewis 1993) argued that entrepreneurs would tend to naturally emerge for missionary endeavours but that, failing this, there should be ‘spiritual career advisors’ to make linkages between missionary opportunities and those with business experience. Those with oversight for a congregation should, in theory, be in a good position to discern the gifts of church members.

However, serious problems exist with this approach (both theologically and, here, practically). Significantly, few church leaders actually have substantial business experience, and therefore cannot necessarily be expected to be a good judge of people’s business capabilities. The Connect initiative (2006) reports that a “Transformational Business Network” meeting in London in June 2002 “emphasised the need for church leaders to be trained to support members of their congregation for whom business is mission,”¹¹ and, if practicable, this could be useful training. However, many church leaders seem complicit with the view that the church’s real business is done within the church building and by its appointed representatives. As Tsukahira (2000, 97) laments, “[m]inisters and clergy have so far failed to release the spiritual potential for ministry latent within the believing business community.” To this criticism we must add the fact that so few ministers are even aware of the BAM model, and that they tend to focus on local rather than global mission.

(iii)(b) The Church – as a body – and its members

The Lausanne II Tentmaker Declarative Appeal of 1989 (cited in Cox 1997, 114) chose to “recognize the key position of church congregations in mobilizing and equipping the laity for world evangelization” and “in challenging and recruiting” others (in what was then understood as tentmaking but which could now be understood to also encompass Business as Mission). The key point here is that a church body – its entirety and not just its leaders – can create a climate of belief and practice conducive to linking business with mission and encouraging those who may be suitable to work across the two fields. Tsukahira (1997) strongly advocates this church-wide approach: “[t]here is a great need today in the Body of Christ for a way to help business people find their spiritual calling and to train them creatively for the task defined by Jesus’ Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20).”

This approach has been underutilised, with BAM literature tending to focus on individual calling or the initiatory role of church leadership or mission agencies. Yet it is entirely possible that other Christians, especially those who are themselves active in business, or may be returning tentmakers of a previous generation, can help identify and encourage those who would serve God well as BAM practitioners. This is not to say that an individual calling is not required, merely that the process of asking whether a vocation exists may be initiated by the wider church, prayerfully and with discerning.

(iv) Other businesspeople

Our focus so far has principally been on those outside of the BAM movement, and how they might encourage Christians to enter it. A different perspective, however, is to ask how those within the movement can help draw in like-minded and suitably qualified businesspeople. BAM practitioners often work for large companies – this is the thrust behind the concept of Great Commission Companies, for example. Such businessmen may wish to add further Christian businessmen to their staff; or they may be able to advise entrepreneurs how to start their own BAM enterprises. McFarlane (2004, 1) provides examples of taking businesspeople overseas for 1-2 weeks to expose them to the international mission field and train them in

¹¹ I have unsuccessfully tried to gather details of this meeting – however, the TBN did not exist in 2002 and they have been unable to identify this reference. Possibly the meeting was a training weekend for TBN leaders in June 2003, most of which was in the form of discussion groups which were not recorded.

cross-cultural business skills and awareness. Whilst it would be unreasonable to expect the BAM movement to be in this way self-perpetuating, it would be advantageous to consider how existing BAM practitioners could be involved in identifying and encouraging potential colleagues or replacements.

This section has shown that there is certainly more than one valid route into Business as Mission, as different institutions or types of people may be able to identify and encourage potential BAM practitioners; such a diversity of options should be celebrated. In the following section we look at the next step in the process: having identified potential kingdom professionals, what specifically should be looked for in them?

Section IV

Having briefly considered the potential ways for new BAM practitioners to be identified, we now discuss which criteria should be used in deciding how prospective 'kingdom businessmen' could be selected or recognised. By studying the existing BAM literature, I have been able to compile a list of characteristics variously deemed desirable in kingdom professionals (or, in some older literature, tentmakers); these are listed in full in Appendix A. In this section we consider which of those characteristics are the most important and most appropriate. For this exercise they have been categorised into 'business', 'spiritual' and 'personal' qualities, although in practice there may well be some overlap, and we should also strive to see what a person offers holistically.¹²

(i) Business

A realisation has struck the mission community that attempts to be engaged in business – whether as an ultimate or facilitating motive – should be serious and well-managed. And, as Craig Stewart in Rundle and Steffen (2003, 133) plainly puts it, a “commitment to professionalism requires, well, professionals.” Businesses which operated at a loss, or operated as a ‘cover’ for other activities may have had deleterious results in the past: through being a poor witness to non-Christians; through lacking integrity; and through placing a strain on limited missionary resources. Thus a central motif is that anyone intending to be involved in BAM – or anyone helping select a BAM practitioner – should check for *genuineness*. That is, a genuine desire to use business as mission, with the intention of transforming lives and communities.¹³ However, not all who genuinely believe themselves suitable will actually be so,¹⁴ what further criteria may be employed?

Crucially, a person must be experienced and qualified in their chosen field. That is to say, they must already be recognisable as a *businessperson*, with a reputation for professionalism and competency. There are dangers in arguing, as some have, that BAM practitioners must be ‘excellent’ in all that they do¹⁵ – we must be wary of unrealistic expectations, and we must remember that profit-maximisation or business performance is not an all-surpassing target. Rather, we should be looking for people who are good at their jobs, and who perform them in a way compatible with (and, where possible, demonstrative of) the Christian faith.

¹² Interestingly, in a list of 17 requisite qualities for *tentmakers* according to Global Opportunities (2006), just one related directly to business, namely “a marketable skill, preferably with some years of experience.” One criticism of the tentmaking movement has been that it has overlooked the significance of doing business well and the witness this itself provides.

¹³ The Business as Mission Manifesto actually claims a quadruple bottom line, viz. “spiritual, economical, social and environmental transformation,” (Tunehag et al 2005, 62).

¹⁴ Lewis (1993, 3-13) says that not all will be suited, and that we must therefore question their motives, spiritual readiness and calling. Likewise, Rundle and Steffen (2003, 132) caution that “[j]ust because someone is a Christian and is excited about your ministry does not mean he or she will be a good fit.”

¹⁵ For example, David Tai-Woong Lee (in Lewis 1993, 3-11) demands of would-be BAM practitioners “excellence in your own area of expertise” and “excellence in the area of personal integrity.” Perhaps more pragmatically, Rundle and Steffen (2003, 42) suggest that kingdom professionals should “*strive* for excellence in their work” (emphasis added).

More than one commentator has suggested that it “is easier to train a businessman to become a church planter than to train a church planter to become a businessman,”¹⁶ and, although either route is plausible, this generalisation is probably correct. There is nothing wrong in testing someone’s business competency if they plan to work as a Business as Mission practitioner, in the same way as spiritual maturity may be gauged, language skills tested, or health examined. Beyond the basic measurements of experience and competency, the more resourceful, strategic, creative and focused the businessman, the better, although in a team-based working environment such skills may be spread throughout the team and not therefore required in each person.

(ii) Spiritual

The mission community has typically been good at articulating what spiritual qualities are desirable in mission workers, and there is little need to review in depth such generalities here. Whilst those general characteristics – such as experience in ministry, spiritual maturity and a willingness to serve – remain necessary, we may wish to emphasize some spiritual qualities that are especially desirable in kingdom professionals. These can be seen to include being a natural witness to non-Christians, since this will be a significant component of kingdom business; and being experienced in Christian leadership, which would prove advantageous in business and in management. We should also emphasize that an awareness of spiritual warfare,¹⁷ and a habit of prayerfulness, should keep the kingdom professional attentive to the spiritual dimension of their day-to-day work.

(iii) Personal

There are further characteristics we may look for in Business as Mission practitioners that do not directly relate to either business or spiritual qualities, and these are grouped together here under the category of ‘personal’. Crucially, the would-be BAM practitioner must be culturally-sensitive – since it is insufficient to have business and spiritual experience and giftings if they are not transferable to another cultural context. Additionally, many of those experienced in BAM cite the need for persistence and perseverance, and for personal integrity and adaptability. Their context may well mean that kingdom professionals must be self-reliant and disciplined, and it will be to the advantage of any evangelistic endeavours if they are good communicators and have good relational skills.

A word of warning, however. We must be careful not to make excessive and unfair demands of those who may be called into Business as Mission; and the list of 80-plus desirable characteristics in Appendix A is only intended to be illustrative of what is generally thought desirable. The more of these which can be found in a potential kingdom professional, the better, but we should acknowledge the inevitability of human limitations and inadequacies.

We must also make room for a God of surprises, a God who often chooses to work through weakness and imperfection. Both the Bible and Christian history are full of unlikely and unpromising people who have actually been instrumental in God’s plans. As Rundle and Steffen (2003, 77) realise, we may only use “general guidelines rather than hard-and-fast rules” and, moreover, we must always be prepared for God to work unpredictably, mysteriously and sovereignly. Thus while Rundle and Steffen urge BAM practitioners to be qualified and experienced, their book *Great Commission Companies* actually contains examples where GCCs are established, and come to thrive, *despite* a lack of suitable experience: “some of the most successful GCCs have been started by people with no prior business experience or training” (2003, 195).

¹⁶ Davies (2001, 6) and Knell (2006, personal correspondence) agrees that “it is much easier to turn a businessman into a missionary, than a missionary into a businessman.” It is, of course, entirely possible that a person would develop both their business skills and their Christian maturity simultaneously.

¹⁷ Leading missiologist Ralph Winter (2005, 117) is especially vocal on this point, arguing that it is not “good enough for us to traverse the globe with good but relatively superficial remedies” – including Business as Mission – if we ignore the ongoing spiritual warfare which can negate or overwhelm our business/missional remedies.

Conclusion

We have established that Business as Mission is (with some historical precedents) a relatively new but legitimate form of Christian mission, although its legitimacy depends upon the integrity and earnestness with which it is conducted. And we have recognised the tremendous potential which could be unleashed if Christian businesspeople were encouraged to consider whether they are called into BAM, and answer in the affirmative. Done properly, it is undoubtedly what Green (2002, 5) calls “an ideal environment for incarnational evangelism.” It is fascinating to think how much mission will be done this way in fifty or a hundred years’ time.

Given this very real potential, and given the urgent opportunities BAM could witness into, I conclude that any effective ways of identifying potential BAM practitioners should be considered and utilised. Historical, structural and strategic issues will mean that mission agencies may not necessarily be at the forefront of this effort. Instead, individual Christian businesspeople must ask themselves whether God may be calling them into this specific form of mission; and their churches must simultaneously be asking whether they could be encouraging such people to step forward in faith. Whether such steps are made tentatively or with boldness, there should be a relatively rigorous process of enquiring whether these people are equipped spiritually, personally and in terms of business experience. Our own research, and the wisdom of the mission community will guide us in key criteria to look for, but we must also listen to God’s voice and seek His will, on a person-by-person basis.

Appendix A. Literature Survey – Desirable Characteristics of a BAM Practitioner

The following characteristics were noted as either essential or desirable for those working in Business as Mission (or, in some of the earlier literature, working as Tentmakers) – see the Bibliography for full details of referenced books and articles.

For each of the categories, the three most frequently mentioned characteristics are highlighted in bold.

(i) Business	(ii) Spiritual	(iii) Personal
Experienced Strategic thinker Well-qualified	Experienced in ministry Spiritually mature Willingness to serve	Culturally sensitive Persistence Whole-hearted
A good skill mix Able to sell Aware of current best practice Balanced Can calculate Careful researcher Competent Creative Entrepreneurial Excellent Good advisor Good analyser Good communicator Grounding in accounting Grounding in management Grounding in marketing Has financial backing Has training Knowledge of company law Long-term focused Marketable skills Planner Professional Receives input from national businessmen Resourceful Technical mastery Tolerant of risk Tough Uses business techniques Well-trained	Capacity to serve Church planting Commitment to God Faithful Heart for the world Integrity (Ministerial) leadership skills Long history of involvement Nurturing Prayerful Sense of wonder Sensitive to the Holy Spirit Spiritual warrior Spiritually self-reliant Well-trained Witnessing	Able to adjust emotionally Accountable Adaptable Alert to context Cross-disciplinary Cultural anthropologist Diligent Disciplined Endurance Fair Focused Good relational skills Hard-working Harmonious Honest Humble Integrity Linguistic skills Patient Proficient Realistic Resist intimidation Responsive Self-confidence Self-initiative Self-reliant Single-minded Tolerance

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