

JESUS – BUSINESS DEVELOPER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Authors: Mel and Susan Finlay

It is doubtful if anyone in the history of the world has undertaken such a bold plan for business development as Jesus of Nazareth did. Others have had grandiose notions of conquest – Alexander the Great, Marc Antony, Cortez, Napoleon, to name a few. But their notion of military conquest was a far cry from the personal development and cultural transformation that Jesus initiated. There are many lessons to be learned from Jesus as one undertakes business development in the pursuit of business excellence.

The first is a grand vision. It takes no more effort to generate a big vision than a small one, to dream big dreams rather than little ones. Obviously, more resources, time and energy are required to bring big dreams to fruition, but at the dreaming stage the personal and corporate expenditures are no greater.

Clearly, Jesus had a grand vision; nothing less than restoring the shattered relationship between God and humanity. The relationship lay in ruins, having been destroyed both by neglect and by wilful disobedience on the part of humanity. God had gone to extraordinary lengths to promise forgiveness, restoration of His kingdom, fresh opportunities coming from a clean slate. The promises had been made over countless centuries. Occasionally, a few people had taken Him at His word, accepted His promises, and striven to live according to His will. But their efforts inevitably ended in disaster if not in their own generation then in succeeding ones. Although God was willing to restore the relationship, humanity was missing not only the will but the means for restoring it. Each attempt failed miserably.

We can identify with that in our own lives. Both personally and professionally we start with the best of intentions (usually each January 1st with New Year's resolutions). We resolve to treat our employees and co-workers better, to be more loving and caring to our spouses and family, to clean up our act on weekends, to set an example for others to

follow instead of being used as a bad example, to honour the Lord and to serve Him faithfully. Yet within days our good intentions have gone the way of all good intentions, and we realize that good intentions are not enough. There has to be something that deals once and for all with our baser nature, that re-forms us from the inside out rather than tinkering with parts of us.

So Jesus set the grand vision – to re-form humanity, one person at a time, to deliver each one from himself and make possible an ongoing relationship with God that would truly transform the nature of every human relationship and deal with the problem of sin, wilfulness, and self-delusion.

Secondly, Jesus set limited objectives. Within a grand vision there need to be manageable stages. This is where most grand visions falter, and ultimately fail. Too often, no one bothers, or perhaps knows how, to break a vision down, and then to develop the patience to complete each stage before moving on to the next.

Jesus came first to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” He was clear, both in his own mind and in interpreting his vision to others, that his priority lay with one cultural group, not with the whole world. That cultural group resided primarily in a small country that could be covered on foot within a reasonable period of time. On rare occasions, in response to an unusual display of faith by individuals not belonging to that cultural group, Jesus would shift his focus and concentrate on that one individual. But it was only for a brief time, and never at the expense of the immediate objective. Very quickly his focus shifted back and once again he became single-minded in fulfilment of his overriding objective. Only late in his ministry, and most particularly after his resurrection, did he broaden his objective. Even then, he did not seek to carry out the broadened objective himself. He passed it along to his employees, his disciples. They were the ones, not he, who were to move beyond the “house of Israel” and “go into all the world.”

Thirdly, he picked his staff carefully. We do not know the precise size of the pool he had to draw from, but we do know that there were more followers than the twelve he settled on to bring into his “inner cabinet.”

We wonder at his selection of people. One, Judas, betrayed him, not by selling corporate secrets (there weren't any to sell!) but by handing him over to the authorities to be put to death. Another, Peter, promised to be there when the going got really tough, then bailed on him when a woman warming herself at the same fire suggested that Peter might really be a follower of Jesus. He then compounded his denial by repeating it separately to two other people. Yet a third, Thomas, encouraged the rest to go with Jesus to Jerusalem, “that we may die with him,” and was so preoccupied with Jesus' death that he refused to believe the testimony of other disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead. Only one, John, was there through the whole horrible proceedings of arrest, trial, multiple beatings, the struggle to carry the cross through the streets, and the crucifixion. One out of twelve would seem to be a pretty sorry average.

Yet on the backs and through the mouths, feet, and hands of eleven of the twelve (all but Judas), Jesus built a world-wide movement that still thrives twenty centuries later. What did the Eleven have that enabled them to overcome their sorry selves and become powerhouses in the employ of their Master?

That's the fourth component of Jesus' business development. True to his word, he did not leave his employees “as orphans.” He knew they didn't have it in them to carry on the ‘family’ enterprise in his absence. They couldn't even carry it on in his presence! (Sound familiar?) So after he left them to be with his Father in heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, to guide them “into all truth.” They had more than an operations manual – they had the very Boss himself. The Spirit “will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears... He will bring glory to me (Jesus) by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. ...the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.”

Finally, Jesus bathed all of his business development in prayer. He prayed before he selected his employees, the disciples. He prayed before he embarked on his final trip to Jerusalem. He prayed before he extended his objectives to encompass all of humanity. He prayed with and for the disciples before they went out into the night to go to the Garden of Gethsemane for their last hours together before he was put to death. He prayed in the Garden before he was arrested. He prayed on the cross. He prayed as he gave up his spirit and died. He prayed ... he prayed ...

For more than 2000 years, ordinary men and women have been engaged in business excellence in spreading the good news that humanity has been reconciled to God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, because Jesus did his business development well. Brutal persecution has not stopped the business; indifference has slowed it down but not derailed it; moral failures on the part of leaders have brought discredit but not defeat. By any standards, the grand vision of Jesus has resulted in a great business – the business of salvation.

So we come to the greatest lesson we can learn to ensure that business development actually does lead to business excellence. "...the Son (Jesus) can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father (God) doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." We do not have Jesus present with us, but we do have the Holy Spirit. By bathing everything we are thinking of doing in prayer, by subjecting our business, professional, and personal plans to the scrutiny of God in advance, by drawing on the Holy Spirit, and by putting ourselves, our businesses, and our families completely at God's disposal, we can be certain that our business development will indeed lead to business excellence, because the "business" we will be about will be our Father's business.