

# Business As Mission:

## A critical strategy for establishing reproducing churches

Jesus commands us to love the LORD our God with all of our heart, soul and mind, and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mt 22:36-39). One of the primary ways we can fulfill this mandate and have kingdom impact is through our vocations. The workplace is not only an ideal place for building relationships but an integral part of God’s holistic, redemptive plan for the world. Business as Mission (“BAM”) is a fundamental strategy in facilitating this transformational plan. As BAM expert C. Neal Johnson describes it, “*BAM is a genuine convergence of one’s passion for Christ, for business and for mission.*”<sup>1</sup> BAM proponents embrace the principle that an individual can be both a successful businessperson and an obedient follower of Christ—one who reflects Christ in all of his or her business practices and consistently demonstrates a work ethic infused with honesty, morality, integrity, grace, fairness and forgiveness.

God is the author of work and has ordained it for every believer, whether it is in the home, in the fields or in the marketplace. The latter, however, touches the lives of virtually every member of a community, as the following quote so aptly describes,

*“...Jesus recognized that the marketplace is where people actively engage life, earn their livings, conduct their daily lives, feed their families and receive the bread and wine that graces their tables. He understood that the marketplace, in one form or another, is a thriving part of every human community and transcends all cultures, national borders and ethnic differences. Everyone is affected, directly or indirectly, by the marketplace and its commerce, and all humans encounter the marketplace in their daily lives, either as participant or as a consumer.”*<sup>2</sup>

Advocates of BAM believe that businesses operating within a local marketplace are an innovative and critical avenue for reaching spiritually and economically impoverished people with the gospel of Christ *and* are an effective means to build healthy, reproducing churches. Hurting people around the world not only need immediate relief (well-provided by secular and Christian not-for-profit organizations) but long-term economic development and spiritual renewal. Individual and community transformation is facilitated by BAM businesses because the sphere of influence for such ventures is not restricted merely to the employees—it encompasses the clients, vendors, investors, and the community and governmental leaders with whom the business or venture has a working relationship. The potential is great to bring sustainable, transformational and holistic kingdom impact to hurting unreached people groups all around the world and to build Christ’s kingdom through the “*formation of...worshipping, nurturing, on-going communities of believers.*”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2009, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103

## **The Four Bottom Lines**

Unlike fake shell companies or Christian charities disguised as businesses and acting as “covers” in order to obtain visas to enter closed countries, BAM businesses are authentic and committed to incorporating the following “bottom lines”<sup>4</sup>:

### **Spiritual bottom line:**

*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Matthew 6:33*

Ultimately, BAM businesses are not successful unless they point workers to the saving power of the Messiah. Therefore, every BAM business should strive to be a conduit for the proclamation of the gospel of Christ and for the building of His church among the unreached. Committed Christian employers who demonstrate the love of Christ to their employees and allow the Holy Spirit to draw the lost into the kingdom of God are vital to the spiritual renewal within the workforce as well as the community. God-honoring, biblically-based company practices should be infused into every aspect of the BAM business. Poor, marginalized and unsaved people need jobs, hope and Jesus. BAM businesses bring eternal hope as well as temporal prosperity and are vital in discipling new believers and transplanting them into healthy churches. As Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch state in their book, “Finishing the Task”,

*The essential missionary task is to establish a viable indigenous church planting movement that carries the potential to renew whole extended families and transform whole societies. It is viable in that it can grow on its own, indigenous meaning that it is not seen as foreign, and a church planting movement that continues to reproduce intergenerational fellowships that are able to evangelize the rest of the people group.*<sup>5</sup>

### **Economic bottom line:**

*“Without business there is no long-term relief from poverty, no potential for sustainable, improved standards of living and no hope for millions who are oppressed by life’s economic misfortunes.”*<sup>6</sup>

Economic stability is a priceless commodity in any community. BAM businesses provide valuable goods and services and create profitable and sustainable jobs. Consequently, wage earners with new-found buying power stimulate the local economy and help boost the standard of living of the community. The positive outgrowth of this job creation has been labeled by economists as the “multiplier concept”.<sup>7</sup> Simply defined, this means the net economic stimulus from one wage earner has the potential to be 5-10 times the actual wage earned, as illustrated below:

---

<sup>4</sup> C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2009, Chapter 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, *Finishing the Task*, p. 538

<sup>6</sup> C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2009, p. 480.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.



It should be noted that there are also many emotional health benefits associated with gainful employment. Women and men that are economically self-sufficient tend to retain their dignity, develop healthy self-esteem and live hopeful lives. For those who encounter Christ there is the added blessing of realizing the abundant life that Jesus promises His followers: *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” John 10:10*

**Social bottom line:**

*“And what does the LORD require of you but to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8*

As Christians, we are *“called to use the resources that the LORD has placed in our hands for good, not evil, and to build up people, institutions and cities, not to tear them down. We are called to action to help people holistically improve their lives and to see Jesus as the source of that transformation.”*<sup>8</sup> BAM ventures operate in harmony with the local culture and strive to improve it. Community development projects are a natural outcome of BAM businesses striving to achieve their social bottom line. Such projects should be done in a culturally responsible way and should meet the true needs of the impoverished communities in which the BAM business is located. Contributing money and manpower to the building of schools, parks, recreation centers, drug rehabilitation centers, child care centers, paved roads, athletic fields and clean water initiatives are just a few examples of meeting some of the chronic needs of community members steeped in poverty. As Jesus so profoundly expressed to the disciples,

*“For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in , I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me...truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these*

---

<sup>8</sup> C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2009, p. 274.

*brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me...whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” Matthew 25:35-36, 40, 45*

### **Environmental bottom line:**

*“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Genesis 1:28*

In obedience to this command, all followers of Christ need to take good care of God’s creation. Consequently, BAM businesses should incorporate a “green” bottom line to ensure that they are fully committed to godly stewardship of the environment in which the BAM business operates. God takes our stewardship of His resources and gifts very seriously so every aspect of a company’s operations should be evaluated and proactive policies should be implemented to avoid having a detrimental impact on the local environment.

### **The Power of Prayerful Planning**<sup>9</sup>

*“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.” (Proverbs 21:5)*

An enormous amount of praying and planning are essential to successful BAM ventures. Before any Christian considers serving in a BAM business or venture, they should meet the following prerequisites:

- A Spirit-led, biblically-bathed calling and passion, both to business as a vocation and to missions through business.
- A God-given, creative craft or business experience in your chosen field.
- Human and financial capital to launch the business.
- A thorough understanding of the cultural, political and economic context for the business location as well as the missions history and best missions methods for that region.
- Completion of a core curriculum in BAM preparation, church planting, biblical literacy, missiology as well as business management practices (administration, HR, accounting, marketing, sales, business law, etc.)
- A team of co-laborers, inside and outside of the business, who will provide prayer support as well as financial and spiritual accountability. The BAM ministry team must be connected to the body of Christ, back home and on the field.

Once the above prerequisites have been met, there are several BAM business essentials that are foundational for success:

- Corporate, Christ-centered core values: honesty, integrity, morality, keeping vows, grace, forgiveness, fairness, humility and dignity.
- Persistent prayer life: often the only thing that keeps those on the mission field from the clutches of the evil one is a consistent, persistent prayer life.

---

<sup>9</sup> C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2009, Chapter 14.

- Balancing of the four “bottom lines”: spiritual, economic, social and environmental. The spiritual bottom line must be infused into the other three bottom lines.
- High standard of accountability (a system of checks and balances). The CEO and the leadership team must be held accountable for their commitment to integrate biblical principles into the business and lead it for the glory of Christ.
- Deep and continuous culture of developing relationships within the company to facilitate the sharing and sowing of the gospel message.
- Profits, delivery of valuable goods or services, and jobs that give the employees a stake in the stability of the community and help it to become healthier, happier, more peaceful place to live.
- Socially responsible corporate policy to help the local community in which the business operates (community development projects will be a natural outgrowth of this policy).
- Commitment to do business well and to minister to all of the employees, clients, vendors, etc., regardless of their religious background.
- Finally, a strategic master BAM plan (“SMBP”)<sup>10</sup>, a written, one-year blueprint designed to facilitate the most efficient, productive, profitable and God-honoring way possible for the company to succeed. The SMBP is critical to success as there is no such thing as “BAM in a box”. It must reflect the company’s ethos of faith, character, values, substance and identity and it must encompass every aspect of the BAM business or venture. The SMBP is a blend of the:
  - Strategic Mission Analysis (SMA), an intentional, systematic and in-depth ministry plan which ensures the BAM business is yielding spiritual fruit and enabling the development of ongoing, reproducing communities of believers in Christ. It is critical that the spiritual dynamics of the potential labor pool are evaluated and that there is a vibrant faith integration plan on a personal and corporate level. *“BAM calls for companies...to examine every internal aspect of the business to determine how to maximize the company’s usefulness to God’s mission.”*<sup>11</sup> Key questions must be answered such as, “How am I different than my secular competitors?” and, “What is the Christian distinctive we bring to our business?” As C. Neal Johnson describes it, *“Faith integration is being obedient to Jesus to live the gospel 24/7, to love people through our lives at work, to show that love through actions that help people and communities holistically, to show respect for those who disagree with us, and even to love and help our enemies.”*<sup>12</sup>
  - Strategic area analysis (SAA), an assessment of the area/country/culture of the people to whom the mission team is taking the gospel (contextualization) and how to be culturally appropriate. The business plan and the business operations need to be in harmony with the local context. *“Both the mission enterprise and the business itself are totally dependent on acceptance by the community. Without that acceptance, customers, sales and profits will diminish and the business will be in serious danger of collapse.”*<sup>13</sup> This certainly will entail

---

<sup>10</sup> C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2009, Chapter 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 255.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 365.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

taking at least one “vision trip” to the potential country in which the ministry team would like to set up shop.

- Strategic Business Plan (SBP) addresses the business’s prospective goals, operations, product market, structure, bottom lines and how the BAM business will harmonize with the local business culture.

The strategic master plan must be the Master’s BAM plan—developing a BAM company that has sustainable, long-term, holistic and kingdom impact based on Christ-focused, unique planning at both the *mission* level (SMA) and the *business* level (SBP). However, when working for God, the unexpected is expected! The Master can intervene and disrupt the master plan. Patience, persistence, commitment and flexibility are essential to the success of any BAM venture, especially in the first year.

BAM ministry teams must also heed the warnings not to put their BAM venture before Christ as the business ultimately belongs to God—“*Whatever is under the whole heaven is Mine.*” *Job 41:11*. Neither should they put the people to whom they are ministering nor their family before Christ—“*And He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have supremacy.*” *Col 1:18*. Finally, BAM operators and their employees must be cognizant of the spiritual warfare in which they will certainly be engaged. Satan will work overtime to thwart the BAM efforts. Spiritual warfare is war—it is real and inflicts casualties. (Eph 6:11-12) It is essential that the BAM team “*be bathed in prayer, clothed in the armor of God, armed with the Holy Spirit and alert to the dangerous road ahead.*”<sup>14</sup>

## **Conclusion**

C. Neal Johnson poses a vital question regarding the infusion of BAM into mission practice:

*“Isn’t it reasonable, especially in today’s globalized world that God would choose to use business—and the profits so necessary to its existence—as a tool for His purposes?”*<sup>15</sup>

The beauty of BAM is that it is a combination of the Great Commandment (loving the LORD our God and His people), the Great Commission (discipling the nations), and the Cultural Mandate (being good stewards of the world). By obeying these commands and operating BAM businesses, local, regional and national redemption and transformation can occur all to the glory of Christ. The call to BAM is a call to *mission Dei* (God’s mission)—to see people of every tribe, every tongue and every nation reconciled to Himself. The end goal of BAM is to have productive, profitable, Christian-led businesses that produce successful Christ-followers *and* plant thriving, reproducible churches among the unreached in some of the neediest parts of the world. May Christian businessmen and businesswomen be used by God to bless and serve His people and His creation with God-honoring and creative ventures so as to live out Paul’s admonition: “*To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*” (I Cor 9:22-23)

---

<sup>14</sup> C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice*, 2009, p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.267.