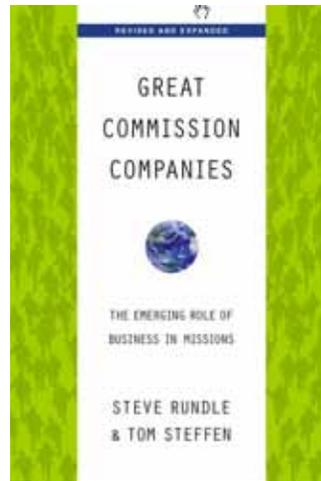


Book Summary



Great Commission Companies

By Steven Rundle and Tom A. Steffen

Summary in Brief

Globalization has opened the door to international business. It has broken down barriers and has given great opportunities for the gospel to be proclaimed and modeled. Historically, Christian “professionals” have been seen as more hierarchal in the realm of proclaiming Christ than any other profession. Yet biblically, one’s gifts as given by his/her Creator are equally essential to the Great Commission. International Business as a Great Commission Company is a very viable and exciting way to go forward with the Gospel into the unreached and poorest regions of the world. The authors lay down 4 Assumptions about Holistic Christian Missions:

- We have been created for good works.
- Good works will create opportunities to share good news.
- Authentic missions meets real physical needs, but never stops there.
- Authentic missions aims to draw people into the family of God, but never stops there (ch. 2).

Based on these assumptions, in Great Commission Companies the view of business and missions as equated to “oil and water” is dispelled and replaced with an integrated and impactful creation of business and mission (ch. 1). This is demonstrated in several Great Commission companies whose stories are the culmination of the book.

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There is a perception that Christian professions will do the missional work, and as a result the rest of the Body sits resigned that they have no place. Collectively, effort needs to be expended to change this mindset, as the poorest and most unreached places in the world require a great deal of creativity to evoke change.

It is sobering to quote two separate statements from the book back-to-back:

“In parts of the world, poverty is defined not by whether a person has a home with heat, electricity and indoor plumbing, but simply by the person’s ability to remain alive from one day to the next (ch. 1).”

“Given that Christians earn approximately one-quarter of all the income in the world, we have a choice: we can either be the focal point of much of the envy and bitterness in this world or a source of blessing and hope (ch. 4).”

It’s an awesome opportunity Christians, regardless of their profession, have to be a blessing and a hope. Great Commission Companies should be seen as a strong option for investing in unreached and poor areas.

Oil and Water

There are 3 reasons stated why people see business and missions like “oil and water” and are hesitant to try and mix the two.

- ‘work’ takes time away from ‘ministry’
- a business cannot both serve and make money
- work and ministry create complications for a ministry’s tax exemption (ch. 2)

These are valid in that they provide the opportunity to directly address some of the challenges with Great Commission Companies (GCCs), but are not an opportunity to dismiss GCCs as an invalid approach to taking advantage of globalization for the Gospel.

GCC when done with the appropriate and balanced integration of business and mission is a unique and astounding avenue to impact people for the gospel in those places with difficult access. Since “cover” businesses create suspicion, lack integrity and are simply dishonest, legitimate and profitable business afford a platform that is honest, beneficial to the community, and strategic in both proximately and time to the people that need the gospel.

“Missionary” and “Cross-Cultural Missionary”

If all Christians are equated with the word “missionary,” it creates problems due to the historical and cultural connotation of the word. The authors use the words “kingdom professional” to relieve those working in GCCs from preconceived false stereotypes. In addition, there is a pointed effort to distinguish between

“all Christians are missionaries” and the meaning of “cross-cultural missionaries” (ch. 2). The reasons behind this effort are the belief that:

- Central to Missio Dei is the universal glorification of God and the restoration of all creation to a right relationship in harmony with Him...by definition, missions or ministry involves an intentional effort to make Christ known.

- Missio Dei is perfect and unchanging. However our human attempts to participate in that plan are imperfect and continually adapting to new social and ecclesiastical conditions.

- Different kinds of ministry bring different challenges (ch.2).

As stated above in the brief summary, there are 4 assumptions on which the authors write to clarify the view of Christian missions from which they are writing:

- We have been created for good works.
- Good works will create opportunities to share good news.
- Authentic missions meets real physical needs, but never stops there.
- Authentic missions aims to draw people into the family of God, but never stops there (ch.2).

About the Book

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Cross-cultural mission is unique and challenging, distinct from the general term “ministry” and necessitates a different readiness and training. Cross-cultural missions bring a set of challenges that local ministry does not.

“Kingdom Professional”

To define the term, “kingdom professionals”...“see their profession not as a distraction from ministry but rather as the necessary context through which relationships can be built and Christ can be revealed (ch. 2).” This statement oozes with an intentional mindset and heart, intentional about not only becoming a profitable business but with the integration of Missio Dei, “the universal glorification of God and the restoration of all creation to a right relationship in harmony with Him (ch. 2).”

“Intentional” comes with hard work from starting a business to ensuring its sustainability. The creation of a legitimate business plan, collecting the financing, forming a board of directors, seeking out advisors and a choosing a management team are all done through the lens of a Great Commission Company mindset. The development of a business plan and a Great Commission plan go hand-in-hand and together form the Master Plan of a GCC.

Business plans need to be thorough in regard to what the business wants to accomplish

as well as the reason for these goals. A complete evaluation of why the business is needed in a particular place and a complete descriptive of those who are involved in doing the business need to be included. Careful forethought into the potential challenges and how to face these finishes the picture. Great Commission Companies offers several questions to ponder in regard to type of business and place of business to help the entrepreneur address an unmet need.

In addition, a Great Commission Plan will need to be written in line with the business plan. Goals need to be clear and measurable, and the effect of Christianity on the business and on the local church should be considered. Together the Business Plan and the Great Commission Plan if well integrated make the Master Plan a tool wherein all decisions are based.

“A central part of our thesis is that globalization is a part of God’s design to integrate the entire body of Christ into his global plan (mission) (ch. 3). Globalization and business have incredible potential to impact the world positively. It depends on whether or not we are self-centered or we want to share benefits with those who need it. Globalization has exposed problems, which can be a good thing if we set out to fix those problems. The struggles are different depending on the country, and it’s important to determine if a particular business can come alongside and be a part of the solution.

One Answer

The Great Commission Company is ideal for a hurting world:

- While poverty is nothing new, never before have so many people been so aware of their poverty, so open to change and so willing to partner with businesses that promise a better life.
- Jobs provide a dignified means to support one’s family and also for Christians to support the work of their local church.
- The continuation of the successes toward bringing the Gospel to all people groups will require significant additional resources, and GCCs can be an important source of such funding.
- Never has it been so easy – indeed necessary – to conduct business internationally, but so difficult to go as a professional missionary.
- More than any time in recent history, Christian lay people want meaning in their work and are looking for ways to integrate faith into their work.
- A properly motivated world-class business can contribute to economic growth and social progress in many ways. Moreover, the marketplace provides a real-life setting where values, ideas and biblical principles are exchanged, observed and tested (ch. 4).”

Although the significant challenges of doing business cross-culturally should not be

minimized, the potential benefits can be hugely motivational. Bringing foreign income into a developing country, creating new jobs and raising the standard of technology are just a few. Considering the benefits from a GCC standpoint, one would be careful to be socially responsible, not compete with the local market, invest in modernizing the community and invest profits locally. The positive impact of the business on the community in order to proclaim Christ trumps all (ch. 3).

Trends and Challenges

There are some very significant changes happening in missions due to globalization. The expansion of Christianity is moving away from the wealthier countries and toward poorer countries. Cross-cultural missionaries are being sent from countries that in the past only received missionaries. Organizations committed to the Great Commission are partnering together to bring greater impact for the Gospel. Globalization has also led to the migration of other religions to places where they are more accessible to the Gospel. The unreached come to those with the Truth (ch. 4).

In addition, there are huge challenges. Making the Gospel known in a culturally appropriate way so that it is understood is one challenge. The escalating gap between the rich and the poor is another. Add to those the widespread persecution of Christians and the

continual decrease of resources and one can see that the task is not easy. At the same time, these trends and challenges lend themselves to bringing transformation economically and spiritually to the unreached and the poor (ch. 4).

About the Authors: (as stated in the book)

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Steve Rundle is associate professor of economics and business as mission at Biola University in La Mirada, California. His teaching and research interests are focused on the intersection between international economics and faith-based business. He is also the editor of *Economic Justice in a Flat World: Christian Perspectives on Globalization*.

Tom Steffen is professor of intercultural studies at Biola University in La Mirada, California, where he directs the Doctor of Missiology program. He was a missionary to the Philippines for fifteen years, and he is the author of a number of books on missions and cross-cultural ministry.

Great Commission Companies Illustrated

Six business stories are told that illustrate the academic portion of the book. A summary of 3 of them will be included here. It is noteworthy that all 6 companies have a strong emphasis on the Great Commission and its integration with business. The development of each of the six businesses was greatly influenced by the owner's past experience, and all faced not only significant challenges but also God's intervention.

The Silk Road Handicraft Company

The Silk Road Handicraft Company manufactures home and office furniture, both low and high end. The owner of the Silk Road Handicraft Company, Jeff, as a young believer needed to learn to love people by listening more, talking less and consequently building relationships. This was just the beginning of deep spiritual lessons he would learn as he ventured toward a Great Commission Company. His journey included dealing with challenging political and economic situations, lack of commitment by those offering to walk alongside, local competition and poor management. He learned that God was truly interested in the daily running of the business and not just the crises. Bringing in a local believer, Aaron, a Farston man, was a huge building block in the building the business. Not only did Aaron have a passion for spreading the Gospel but he was

also a vital link for Jeff between the business and the culture.

One area of business that Jeff developed was the concept of lean manufacturing. "Lean manufacturing refers to the elimination of as many unnecessary steps and as much waste as possible." Alongside this concept of lean business the atmosphere of service among employees was also implemented. They were to treat each other as they would a customer. The combination of these two was truly remarkable.

Although profits are down due to the economy, the story of the Silk Road Handicraft Company continues to be a story of a learner and a story of eternity.

Bajalia Trading Company

"Bajalia Trading Company was founded in 2003 as a nonprofit Fair Trade organization that partners with entrepreneurs and artisans from the developing world with the aim of alleviating poverty and making known the true sustainer and giver of life." From the foundation of the business in 2003 there has evolved a for-profit company that works in close proximity with the non-profit company. This progression encourages both business growth (for profit) and training and community development (non-profit). "The purpose of the for-profit company is to focus on product development, marketing, sales and order fulfillment,

and to provide resources and training for the consolidation centers. Meanwhile the nonprofit will focus on the humanitarian and community development goals.” The founder’s history prepared her well for the development and success of the Bajalia Trading Company. Reading her story will greatly enhance the vision of the business in the reader’s eye.

Her goal is to pursue Fair Trade for transformation. Her forethought in developing a system that included research, a testing phase, tough love and the building of consolidation centers all contributed to high quality of goods and service.

Little Texas

Little Texas is a 4 star hotel and restaurant in Romania. It was created to support “local ministry and church planting.” As of the writing of the book, \$2 million had been raised for this purpose.

Due to dissatisfaction in a flourishing business in the US and the prompting of the Holy Spirit on a trip overseas, as well as the changing political climate, Jeri believed the move to Romania was a must. This business entrepreneur initially started 3 used clothing stores, all which are flourishing and earning \$150,000 annually to give toward local ministry. Once the clothing stores were running smoothly, again, the restlessness settled in and Jeri left the stores

in the hands of trained local people, bought land near the airport and over time developed Little Texas. It wasn’t without its challenges of staffing problems, money deficits and burnout. “Every day started with an impossibility and ended with a miracle” was the trend. Jeri watch God send them what they needed, from money to architects to general contractors and web developers. As the business began to be profitable, it not only was able to fund ministry but also be a ministry in itself.

“Little Texas provides a valuable service for the community and is a source of local pride. It directly employs forty-five people and has created jobs indirectly through its support and incubation of other businesses. The company is intentional about employee development, that is, helping employees achieve their personal and career goals. In short, we believe that even apart from the number of people who are exposed to the gospel and the funds raised, which have been significant, Little Texas is bringing glory to God. Little Texas is 100 percent business and 100 percent ministry (ch. 9).”

Great Commission Companies does an excellent job at providing valuable information on business as mission and then portraying that value through actual business stories. The reading of this book will not only help shape important concepts into a Great Commission Company plan, but also encourage seeing God’s vital role in the daily running of business.