

Business as Mission and Church Planting: Practical Strategies



Understanding how a business as mission (BAM) venture can advance the gospel is often easier than knowing how to integrate BAM initiatives with other missions efforts. But BAM can be a highly effective partner in church planting strategies, often by simply recognizing how to leverage the strengths that a business already has and use them for church growth.

What is a church?

It's helpful to start back with the basics. What exactly is a church? Our own definitions can be heavily skewed by Western cultural concepts of what church is. Bob Vajko, TEAM church planting consultant, offers a more universal definition of a church:

"A gathering that has come about by God's working; composed of a group of baptized believers; who meet regularly under the authority and teaching of God's Word; who celebrate the Lord's Supper; who practice biblical discipline; who have leaders conformed to God's standard; who worship God, build one another up, and yearn for lost people to be saved and enfolded into the church [or into a new church]."

How can a BAM venture support church planting?

Just as in the United States, church planting on the missions field takes all types of believers to be successful. Commitment and participation from lay church members is just as important as the work of professional pastors — if not even more important! So no matter what an individual's role may be on a BAM team, that person has valuable, God-given skills, passions and insight to offer to a church plant. There are some essential strategies BAM workers can adopt, however, to make their church service more effective.

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1. The BAMers should have a prayer support team praying specifically for the spiritual ministry and the start of a reproducible indigenous church.
2. Identify the people within the BAM company's sphere of relationships (e.g. employees, suppliers, customers) with whom the gospel can be shared in word and deed.
3. Intentionally focus on the starting of new churches, not just reaping converts. This means gathering people by their family group, workplace group, friends group, etc. Do not limit the ingathering to only one church that meets inside or beside the BAM company.

4. Form discipleship chains for accountability. A local manager in the BAM company could be spiritually mentoring believers at work, family at home, or friends at the teahouse. Everyone is responsible for obeying what is taught to them and teaching the lesson to someone else.

5. Develop forms of worship and teaching that are reproducible by local believers. Get local believers involved in leadership as quickly as possible to avoid dependence on expatriates.

6. Impart the vision of multiplying churches from the beginning. Show how the believers from this one BAM company can impact a large network of relationship contacts. Model a concern for other companies, the families of the staff, the neighborhoods nearby, even for other cities and people groups visited during business trips.

7. Assist in the early stages of the church planting work. As the reproducible indigenous church develops, become more of a coach, letting local believers do the direct ministry.

A visitor to the SonRise Café in Tokyo, Japan enjoys some time reading while waiting on her coffee. The SonRise Café location provides a spring board for relational ministry to the community around.



Expatriate BAMers in Church Planting

BAM initiatives are often comprised of both national and expatriate team members. Expatriates have a unique role to play in church planting. They also have unique needs.

1. In the early stages, the BAMer must be a learner — of the culture, the language, and the business environment. The BAMer should identify himself/herself as a follower of Christ as soon as it's possible and prudent through lifestyle, work ethic and conversation.
2. The BAMer will have responsibility to evangelize unbelievers and disciple new believers in the early stages.
3. After two or three local people have become followers of Christ, the BAMer is responsible for seeing that a culturally relevant gathering experience is created for this developing church that is not dependent on the expatriate BAMer.
4. The BAMer is responsible for providing opportunities for local leaders that will lead to the beginning of a reproducible indigenous church. These opportunities could be spiritual training programs or they might be assistance with business start-ups so the local believers can move to new areas.

Adapted from "Strategy for BAM Church Planting," Doug Witzig, TEAM



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