

# Business Tentmaking

© Dave English

## Benefits of Running a Business

Running an effective business provides significant benefits.

1. Effective businesspeople are able to stay indefinitely in the country if they are providing something of real value like greater productivity, foreign exchange, and job creation.
2. They have more freedom for witness within their company and beyond. It is easier for them to share their faith without threat and to offer Bible studies. They can use company facilities. Of course, they must be careful not to violate employees who are a captive audience.
3. They often have many networks of contacts among the people: workers, suppliers, customers, government officials, transport people, etc. What a great opportunity for witness!
4. They model and set patterns of hard work, of integrity, of running a successful business, and of the validity and proper use of profits.
5. They provide jobs, especially for Christians who are discriminated against.
6. They help workers develop increased job skills, productivity, and confidence.
7. They can provide money to fund other ministry.

This is terribly important. The central non-spiritual need in developing countries is real economic development which increase productivity. Without it, no other development can be sustained whether health care, transportation, communications, or general quality of life. But this requires more than technology. Central to this is developing a genuinely good work ethic—morally good, not merely American with all our “get ahead” – “the good life” values. Effective businesses provide jobs, increase productivity, and build people’s fruitfulness and self-worth. Infusing godly patterns of work and business is indispensable. Godly, effective business tentmakers are invaluable!

## The Cost of Running a Business

But there are disadvantages. Running a business is consuming. There are enormous hurdles overseas—taxes, regulations, customs, and relationship patterns. Legally required taxes can be so high as to make profitability virtually impossible. Bureaucratic regulation can be paralyzing. Dishonesty and fraud may be so common that running a business is almost unworkable. Starting a successful business in the U.S. can be challenging enough. Starting one overseas can seem impossible. People need special gifts, skills, training, and experience to pull off a business.

## Business Integrity

The business must be real. Phantom businesses dishonor Christ and often hurt people. If it just provides a cover to live in a country, it provides a model that deception and circumventing authorities is okay justified for a good cause.

Further, the business' earnings must cover all expenses including all salaries which are usually the biggest expense. Covering salaries from non-profit sources is unfair competition and is illegal. A real business must cover all its costs or else fail.

Running a business without full commitment to its success and full dependence on its income creates a bad model. It communicates a low view of work and profit—that work and faith do not integrate and that profit is illegitimate. It also models a poor work ethic. Yet a truly good work ethic is core to discipleship and one of the greatest needs in developing countries.

A bad model robs the people of seeing how to run a successful business and developing the skills they need to do so. It also contributes little to job creation, which is so desperately needed. People need to see a Christian model of godly, effective business. A genuine Christian business provide jobs, increases skills, builds better work ethics and character, raise people's expectations of what they could do, stimulates more businesses, and expands the economy. Godly, effective business people are greatly needed.

### Launching an Effective Businesses

First, get training and experience here. Ideally get start-up experience before trying overseas.

Second, research the culture, market, and business environment. How do relationships and decision-making work in the culture? How does work itself proceed? What are the tax laws? Business regulations? Government bureaucracy? What products and services are needed in the country? Which ones are marketable and how? Where and how is best to set up the physical operation? What capital is needed?

It is highly desirable to live and work in the country for a year or two to observe and learn the culture and business environment. This also enables you to build relationships for the future.

Third, develop a strong, but flexible business plan which covers all areas previously mentioned. As part of this planning, develop a set of Christian company values and cultural strategies to build these into the company. Along with the business plan, develop a tentative ministry plan for reaching your circle of contacts.

Fourth, find resources of money and people to run the business. Once resources are in place, set up the physical location, equipment, and systems to operate the business.

Fifth, launch the business-ministry. At this point, the work is only beginning. From here you must keep adapting both in business and in ministry.

Build ministry out of natural on-the-job relationships. Business people have more freedom for evangelism within their business. They also have natural influence. So fishing evangelism and starting seeker Bible studies are natural. But participation should never be mandatory, nor a condition of advancement. Rather, the gospel should draw people because of its power and beauty in the life of the business tentmaker and the story of Jesus. For more, see "Workplace Evangelism: How to Fish out Seekers" and "Investigative Bible Study Discussions" on GO's website, [www.globalopps.org](http://www.globalopps.org). Grow ministry in sync with the business.

Sixth, keep adjusting, building, and discipling. Creative problem-solving, change and unflagging spiritual pursuit are essential for effective business and ministry.

© David English, Global Opportunities

Ken Crowell – Galtronics:

## Doing Business in Israel

Doing business for God? Possible or impossible? Done wrongly or just as a cover, running a business can dishonor the name of Christ. But done the right way, it can be a great tentmaking strategy. Realistically, running a business places many extra demands on a tentmaker. It's not for everyone. But for the person with the right gifts and temperament, it offers some great advantages: long-term access without the need to renew or replace a contract, leverage in the society by providing needed products and jobs, a natural structure for implementing Christian values, and more.

Here's the story of a very effective business that began small but couldn't stay that way! God made it grow! He did it through one of his special children named Ken Crowell, who started a business called Galtronics in Tiberius on the Sea of Galilee.

Ken possessed academic, spiritual and work qualifications before he began. He already held several patents. He supported his family as a project engineer with a large firm in Portland while both he and his wife graduated from Multnomah School of the Bible.

Then he was recruited for a three-year contract with a large international firm's affiliate in Tel Aviv. Consequently he learned the culture and the business culture of this country before he struck out on his own. The company almost tripled under his leadership. His complete openness about his faith gave him many opportunities to witness and he was introduced everywhere as "the Christian engineer." This is impact of being well qualified and doing quality work, as Paul commanded in Eph.6:5-10, Col.3:22-24.

In 1977 he started his own firm. He wanted to produce antennas for two-way communication transceivers—something unavailable in Israel and an excellent product for export. The Israelis were so eager to have it that they facilitated all the legal red tape involved in the incorporation.

He had already started a small operation in the U.S. for the purpose of transferring it overseas. But a partner diverted its purpose. He had to begin his new firm in Israel with almost nothing! His first "factory" was his own house. The first work bench was a discarded X-Ray table from the old Scottish hospital. The antennas needed to be baked. So he put the black, sticky PVC plastic into his wife Margie's oven. It regularly smelled and smoked up the house. Finally Margie gave an ultimatum: antennas or cookies, but not both! So he found other facilities!

Ken had three purposes:

1. To establish a company in a place where there was little or no Christian witness. Tiberius, with no Christian church for centuries, qualified for that! It was an unlikely location because it is the city to which the rabbis fled after the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and where the Mishna and Talmud were written. Today it is one of four rabbinical centers in Israel—conservative and fanatical. He planned to start a house fellowship which he dared not call a "church."
2. To provide employment to Jews, Arabs and Christians, to enable one-on-one evangelism. He also gave jobs to Jewish believers who could not get employment because of their faith.
3. To bless the nation of Israel with high quality "Made in Israel" exports to strengthen the economy.

When he started, he was received by the mayor of Tiberius and the city clerk, because this would be the city's first factory! The rabbis began their opposition at the same time. Nevertheless, in a short time he had 30 employees and 30 in the house fellowship!

Then a young Israeli military officer came to visit whom Ken remembered winning to the Lord in Tel Aviv when he was just a boy! Ken invited him to become his general manager. Later he became the pastor of the Peniel Fellowship.

But rabbinic opposition increased. The little hotel the Christians rented for the fellowship was burned to the ground. Margie was hit in the head by a rock thrown through their plate glass window. Then 35 Orthodox Jews invaded the company while the rabbis danced the Hora outside. They counted on all Ken's non-Christian Jewish and Arab employees abandoning him. Instead, they defended him.

This story made the newspapers and television, resulting in reports on what Messianic Jews believe and teach! There were even public debates over Christian beliefs!

At this point the rabbis launched three criminal investigations against Ken, but he was cleared in every case! Once again, this greatly increased communication of the gospel! By then Ken had about 300 employees and almost 300 in the Peniel Fellowship!

Then a seemingly small move made an enormous difference for the company. His employees started a basketball team and won the championship for the city! The mayor himself awarded the trophy. The company became popular with the press and the local citizens. Though the Crowells were foreign, the firm was wholly identified with the people of Tiberius.

Then Ken asked the assistant to the Prime Minister of Israel how he could help the country. The PM said they were expecting half a million Jewish immigrants from Russia and they had few jobs to offer. An understatement! The Berlin Wall came down and Russian Jews came in droves, by land, air and sea! Ken employed 120 in Tiberius.

Among these immigrants were Messianic Jews. So the government passed a new law that all Jews who had become Christian weren't really Jews and thus not eligible for financial help and liable to deportation. Many of these Jewish Christians were living in miserable condition in Haifa. So Ken started a branch firm in Haifa and hired 60 of these Christian Jews! He also started another fellowship! All this made Galtronics the biggest employer in the whole Galilee region!

Then the Kuwait-Iraq War brought 39 scud missiles raining down—most of them in Haifa where they broke out factory windows. People feared for the loss of Ken's factories and scarce products and asked if he could start a backup firm in another location. So he started a branch in Scotland—run by Christians with the same principles of work and witness.

Ken now has 800 employees. Recently the Israeli government gave him two of their highest awards: the Decade Award—best firm in the decade! And the Kaplan Prize—highest award for industry. These were bestowed by the Prime Minister in the Knesset's marble hall with most of Israel's dignitaries present.

The Orthodox also came, in their distinctive black robes and long flowing beards, and charged among other things, that these Christians kidnapped Israeli children and sold them to Africa! The authorities apologized. But once again, this opposition led to much TV and newspaper publicity, all of it positive for Jesus Christ!

Ken Crowell's latest venture? A firm in China—to provide jobs for the unemployed in that country, to spread the knowledge of Jesus Christ in house fellowships, and to bless China!