

# Starting a Business Abroad

Are you an entrepreneur? Do you have experience in starting or managing a business of any size? Do you have a heart for ministry in the workplace? Why not start a business abroad for Jesus Christ? The Christian entrepreneur is a model for national Christian businessmen and can influence business ethics. Not only does he serve in missions at no cost to the home church, but his business can even help provide jobs for others.

Here are some examples of businesses started by tentmakers overseas:



- Internet Cafe in North Africa.
- Computer sales & service shop in Islamic country.
- Business Consultancy in Mexico.
- Catering in Czech Republic.
- Coffee Plantation in Brazil.
- Dairy in Algreaia.
- Electronic Assembly in Israel.
- English Language School in Libya.
- Executive Search Firm in Europe, Turkey, India, South Africa.
- Forestry Joint Venture in West Africa.
- Oil Joint Venture in West Africa.
- Plastic Manufacturing in UAE.
- Poultry Farm in Tunisia.
- Boat manufacturing company in Middle East
- Rug Export in Ethiopia.
- Travel Agency in China & Brazil.
- Village Bakery in Peru.
- Yarn Retail in Brazil.
- A goat breeding farm in North Korea
- ESL school franchise in China
- Barber school in a refugee camp
- Carpet weaving business in the Cacasus
- A surf shop in the Balkans
- Sandboarding tourism in Libya

The tentmaker supports himself while making Jesus Christ known. He may start his own business abroad, or enter into a joint venture with a national, or even open a franchised business. One tentmaker opened a fast food shop and also the largest restaurant in a Muslim capital. He also introduced miniature golf and temporary office help.

A biblical model is Abraham, who moved his cattle business from one country to another, at God's command, in order to represent Him in a region where He was little known. Priscilla and Aquila also may have owned their own business.

In the early modern missionary movement, Moravian Christians fleeing persecution were sheltered on the estate of young Count Zinzendorf, one of the wealthiest nobles of his day. Groups of Moravians went abroad together, and supported their communities by farming, hunting, tanning, shoemaking, textiles, handicrafts, pottery, cutlery, carpentry, tile making, woodworking, watch making, bookbinding, etc. Some were bakers, tailors, furriers and shopkeepers.

They did export/import and their own shipping. The Moravians opened 29 new mission stations in 29 years, a feat unequalled since. One in every 60 Moravians in the world was a foreign missionary and they were not dependent on donor gifts.

Tentmakers today are missions-minded Christians who use their workplace in a foreign culture as a point of entry for ministry, and they serve at no cost to the church. Why go to so much trouble when donor support may be available? The reality is that raising donor support can be a lengthy process. The cost of reaching the world for Jesus Christ through donor supported missionaries is staggering. 500,000 missionaries are needed now to get the Gospel out to the whole world, and it would cost 9 billion dollars a year if they all required donor support. The Christian entrepreneur maximizes resources as he is supported by income through his business abroad.

The tentmaker can witness in countries that are off-limits to conventional missionaries. Good academic training and experience unlock doors for the Gospel. His motivation is not suspect as he is not viewed as a religious worker. Yet the tentmaker is in full-time ministry, doing low-key evangelism on the job and in his free time. He can even do church-planting.

The Christian entrepreneur has an advantage over the Christian employee abroad. He is in control of his schedule and can provide jobs for other Christians to be in the country, even if pay is supplemented from home. He can provide training and jobs for local Christians who are often discriminated against. Helping nationals earn a living also broadens the financial base of the local churches, enabling their donor-supported ministry. The tentmaker models unpaid lay evangelism, and by his example can help produce a pattern where every lay Christian evangelizes on his own time and at his own expense. This was Paul's great concern.

The Christian entrepreneur is a model for national Christian businessmen and can influence business ethics in top business and government circles. He also provides jobs for non-believers and contributes to national development. In one needy country, a couple of Christian engineers set up a firm that builds high-rises, hospitals and factories. They place Muslim and Christian architects, engineers and builders side-by-side, where low-key evangelism naturally emerges. The company has a unique testimony before top building professionals and the government because of an incident where they preferred to take a big loss rather than to pay the expected bribe, because both the Bible and the Koran forbid bribery. In some countries, however, extortion organizations are accepted in the business community as a form of mandatory "insurance" even though it is outside the law. One young man in a former communist country is quoted as saying "I don't like to lie, but sometime I must". As a tentmaker committed to godly ethics, your light will shine brightly.

The type of business that you start overseas will depend on the needs of the country that you choose. Make sure that your skills match your location. A country with a ten year waiting list for home telephones may not benefit from your high tech Web Page design business. The tentmaker's priority is to be a positive influence in the name of Jesus Christ as they serve in the host culture. One publication says about Tanzania that if you know shoe repair, you become a national resource, because you can teach someone how to earn a living. Repair shops for cars, bicycles, radios, TV's, computers, etc., are possible in some countries. A Christian faculty person in a Muslim country says that at least half of the photocopiers are out of order at any one time, and the closest repair person is 100 miles away! In most developing countries one can find native crafts and materials that can be upgraded and marketed overseas, providing income for needy people.

Ideas for tentmaking businesses are limited only by your imagination. One secular organization initiated by an American clergyman analyzes job needs in a community, then trains unemployable people for them. This helps employers and unemployed alike. An English language school could be run by a woman in all but a few Muslim countries. English language kindergartens are popular and lucrative since people want their children to learn English

The Peace Corps may be an avenue to consider, particularly if you would like to broaden your experience before actually starting a business on your own. President Reagan shifted the focus of Peace Corps to small business development, since economies improve when people earn. Your quality work will provide a foundation of witness and will develop leads for low-key evangelism.

Even if you have successfully run a business at home., there will be complications and issues to consider in another culture. Every government is structured differently, you may not be able to anticipate some of their requests. Registration requirements, work permit applications and tax codes will most likely be written in a language that you don't understand, and once completed the paperwork may take much longer to be processed than you would expect. Bank accounts may or may not be available to new foreigners. Huge amounts of capital are required in some countries before foreigners can do business. As a self-employed person, you will need to investigate insurance options, tax implications (both in the U.S. and the host country), retirement plans, housing, education options for your children, and scores of other details all on your own. It is less complicated to do this kind of legwork before leaving the U.S. One tentmaker's comment on preparation for starting a business overseas is that he tries to "plan for the worst but have faith for the best". With this in mind, don't let a little reality stop you! Your faith will stretch and grow as you see God open impossible doors and provide for your every need.

Careful research is essential before you start a business overseas, and input from national businessmen will prove to be invaluable. Small business development is a component of community development, along with cooperatives, credit unions, low cost housing, agriculture, literacy, informal education, public health, sanitation, etc. Priorities are determined by the people. Valuable information may be obtained from the your Chamber of Commerce and from the local national government. Secular international businesses (such as Price Waterhouse) are established in many large cities and publish helpful guides on doing business in various foreign counties. Take advantage of the Internet and begin collecting material (usually free) before leaving . Christians organizations (such as GO) can link you with other tentmakers who have "been there" already. What insight you will gain in networking with others who share the same missions heart. And what a rich resource these Christian contacts will be once you are out on the field; there may already be tentmaker missionaries in the area you will be going!

An investigative trip to the country that you are considering starting a business in may be a worthwhile investment by you and your spouse. You will be able to evaluate the business climate more accurately during your visit and establish business contacts. Your exploratory trip can be an opportunity to pray and seek God's will as a team. Both of you will be adjusting to this new culture and may have different observations as to how this move will affect your family. And, your fresh perspective will help you communicate clearly with your prayer supporters at home how to pray for the overseas business and ministry that God is leading you in.