

15 Steps to Becoming a Better Publisher

by David Fewster

1. Hire the best. Try and get the best person for the job—and be prepared to pay a good salary. Don't think, "We are a small Christian organization and so we have to make do with whomever comes along." And don't say, "You are a Christian, and we are a Christian organization; therefore, you ought to be willing to work for next to nothing."

2. Get some management training. If you haven't been trained in management, take a course or read books on the subject. Management is an art and good management is essential for a healthy organization.

3. Listen to God. While the Christian organization needs efficiency just like secular organizations, it needs more than that. It is God's organization, so those responsible for decision-making should continually seek God's guidance.

4. Be realistic. Don't inflate the number of copies of a book to be printed (publishers are very optimistic). Use accurate accounting, which, among other things, means allowing for depreciation of stock and assets.

5. Be prepared to make mistakes. A well-known editor in the UK was so concerned about his mistakes in the choice of books during his first six months on the job that he went to see one of the directors. Instead of telling off the editor for his apparent recklessness, the director said, "I would have been more worried if you had not made any mistakes." Some of our "sure-fire best sellers" will go over like lead balloons no matter how hard we try. Don't be discouraged but try and learn from mistakes.

6. Be businesslike. Answer letters promptly and keep detailed records of each book published (date, author, number of pages, cost of translation, cost of printing, royalty payments, advance payment, reprints, etc.).

7. Delegate. John Harvey-Jones stated an obvious, yet often over-looked, fact: "In any large enterprise [and, we might add, enterprises that are not so large] the boss cannot be involved in everything and some means must be found to transfer his belief and commitment to others." The publisher/manager must not run around like a headless chicken.

8. Train others. Don't be afraid of others becoming more capable than you. Send your staff to training courses. It helps their morale, makes life easier for you, and increases efficiency.

9. Have a plan. Know your mission statement. Have goals and work toward them. Don't lurch from one crisis to another.

10. Don't let people dump work on you. This is easier said than done, especially if the publisher is a "willing horse" kind of person. Some people are born with an amazing ability to push onto others jobs for which they should be responsible.

11. Have at least one large project in progress. Bible dictionaries, for example, are not going to be written or translated in a couple of months. Get something you can sink your teeth into and be prepared for the long haul. The result is well worth waiting for.

12. Have a vision. Remember that a grave is only a deep rut. Publishers need to be aware of current needs in the church and in society. Don't be content to answer yesterday's questions. Keep your eyes open and listen to the Spirit of God.

13. Encourage local authors. There will always be the need for translated materials because the Church is universal. But usually, local authors will be able to communicate with their own countrymen more effectively than someone from outside that society.

14. Start where people are. If you publish evangelistic materials but find that many people are not interested enough to read them, begin with pre-evangelistic literature. In Jesus' parable of The Good Shepherd, the shepherd went out to the lost sheep. He didn't stand at the door of the sheepfold and call the lost one back.

15. Care for your staff. Treat them as people. Provide the best benefits that you can. Encourage staff to grow in their job. In other words, "Love them." ❖

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