



A Redefined Ministry

By Rosely Fornoles

“What should we do? What should we change? What should we stop?” These questions kept ringing in my mind,” says Rosely Fornoles, vice president for operations of Christian Growth Ministries (www.cgm.net.ph), when the organization faced a crisis in 2001.

Peter Lau, chairman of Giordano, a well-known retail clothing chain in Asia, once said, “Hong Kong’s historic advantage is over. It will have to take inventory of its strengths and redefine its role. The goal is not to recover but to redefine.”

The same can be said for Christian Growth Ministries’ literature ministry. Christian Growth Ministries, or CGM, was established in 1962 to reach the masses with the gospel. It conducted evangelistic camps and events, distributed Bibles, and produced gospel tracts.

When CGM began, it depended on imported Christian literature to supply pastors and lay workers. These were sold, starting in 1972, through book tables in local churches. This ministry eventually led to the establishment of a bookstore at our headquarters. It began with one staff member and two volunteers and eventually employed five full-time workers. The

bookstore reached annual sales of almost 4 million pesos (U.S. \$80,000).

Demand for Christian literature in the Philippines increased, so we organized a publishing department in 1986. We wanted to print affordable books addressing local needs. We created CLAIM, an acronym for Christian Literature for Asians In Ministry, and asked foreign publishers if we could reprint their books. We want to provide pastors, Christian workers, and Bible school students with books, reference materials they can afford. We began with one Bible commentary and now have more than 50 titles, from reference to Christian living, leadership, prayer, and devotionals. This ministry employs four staff members.

While the publishing progressed, our bookstore did not. Following the Asian financial crisis, customer priorities changed... and sales dropped. In the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, the bookstore

experienced declining sales, until it reached a deficit of 0.6 million pesos (U.S.\$12,000). Each day, fewer people came to the bookstore. Even Lau admits, “The consumer market today is no longer the throwaway market we experienced in the early to mid-1990s.”

Other factors contributed to our losses: high rent costs, high inventory levels, and locations that were not very strategic. By 2001 we determined that we could not afford further losses.

Some hindrances we faced as we contemplated our bookstore’s decline decision were:

1. *Tradition.* We wanted to retain the ministry’s original structure. CGM was known because of its bookstore. If we closed it, we could lose credibility and the loyalty of our supporters. It was important that the changes be sensitively presented.

2. *Lack of vision.* The purpose of the change was not understood by all involved. When we announced our plans to close the bookstore, those most affected were upset. Insufficient information regarding a proposed change can foment negative attitudes and encourage rumors detrimental to the implementation of the change.

3. *Risk.* Closing the bookstore involved altering our organization’s strategy and

operations. We had to replace what we wiped out with a new and energizing vision. This was a tough task. The greater the perceived risk, the more difficult it is to effectively implement and manage change.

4. *Fear.* We feared for those employees who were laid off. It was not easy to let them go, but I’d heard a speaker say, “When we prevent change because of our fears, our worst fears will always come true.”

5. *Cost.* This was the biggest hindrance we faced. We wanted to recover from our losses but as we implemented changes, we found that these had costs too. The ability to implement change is greatly hindered when people believe it will be too expensive, so it is vital to show the plans are feasible.

After much deliberation, we closed the bookstore to concentrate on publishing. It was a very hard decision, but we deemed it necessary. The right attitude is vital for success. If management sees changes positively, others will too. Communication is key.

How did this change affect our organization? It injected new life and energy. Our publishing department is doing very well. Because the change meant we had to look for new distribution channels, we established good relationships with local bookstores, and our books gained wider

readership. This is exciting! Most of all,
CGM recovered from its financial losses.
Change became an avenue for growth.

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