



There are intangible costs for people in Christian literature ministry. Reduce these hidden costs.

by Kim Pettit

The Intangible

Cost-cutting is important to publishers. The topic comes up frequently in conversations at seminars, conferences, and exhibits where publishers gather. However, some costs in publishing are overlooked because they are less quantifiable. The business of books, particularly for Christians, is full of intangibles. The number of units sold are not the whole story. The effectiveness of a ministry is hard to quantify.

In the same way, the emotional costs paid by publishers in their personal and professional lives cannot be easily measured. These costs include anxiety, discouragement, fatigue, loneliness, and uncertainty. Although publishing is a rewarding, exciting ministry, sometimes it demands personal sacrifices. If you are struggling in the course of your work, here are some things to consider.

Anxiety

One intangible cost in publishing is anxiety. Persons who are anxious have difficulty concentrating. They may not perform their work well. Their worry may keep them from pursuing opportunities. They lack objectivity about problems and have difficulty in coming up with creative solutions. They overreact. Their unease makes others uncomfortable.

One publisher asked, "How do you avoid fear? It's 5:30 a.m. and I can't sleep because I'm worried that my next book will fail, as did the previous two. I have a project ready to print, I have a news release ready to go, but I'm afraid I'll spend my money in vain."

To cope with anxiety, the apostle Paul encourages the Philippians to pray. Publishers today can also do the same. In addition, Paul suggests thanksgiving. Consider how you can be thankful when you are anxious. The publisher who was awake at 5:30 a.m. could thank God for what she learned in publishing her first two books. Because of her experiences, she is now strengthening her marketing effort for the new title. She plans to send out review copies, offer prepublication sales, and do other things to better her chances of success.

Consider whether you have neglected a critical step in your planning. If you are anxious, you might need to pay attention or to give extra consideration to a project. But do not let anxiety consume you.

A publisher from South America wrote, "After all we learned about publishing at the International Christian Publishing Institute, my partner and I found that our business, which we had pictured as a cuddly teddy bear, turned into a six-headed dragon. Taming this monster is daunting." These publishers recognized their inadequacies in dealing with the tasks required in running their business, but they chose to continue. In their next letter they reported they were too busy working to worry anymore.

Discouragement

After a publishing seminar in Asia, one participant who had been outspoken and full of confidence decided to get out of the publishing business. "It is too difficult," he said. "I am not sure I am cut out to be a publisher."

Production glitches, currency fluctuations, difficulties in finding trained personnel, computer viruses, and numerous other problems can assault a publisher. An exclusive focus on the problems can lead a publisher to forget or to minimize their good experiences. A manager who is discouraged can have difficulty planning for the future, motivating staff, or seeking proactive solutions. Efforts to cut costs can seem futile. Momentum may be lost.

One way to reduce discouragement is to reflect on past struggles and how these were overcome. Consider the milestones that your publishing company has already achieved. If you have just begun, ask another publisher to recount some of the struggles they have faced in Christian literature ministry. The difficulties they faced, and their testimony of how God enabled them to succeed in their circumstances, can provide powerful encouragement for you to persevere in your ministry.

To ward off discouragement, one publisher keeps a file of compliments and testimonies handy. When the cost of putting up with

Costs of Publishing

another day's problems seems too high, she reviews the record of past successes. This helps her to put everything into perspective.

Fatigue

Another intangible cost in publishing is fatigue. Publishing is demanding. It requires constant attention in multiple areas of responsibility. Publishers and administrators often work long hours and experience fatigue. Someone who is exhausted overlooks errors. Books are printed with multiple spelling errors or with printing defects. The quality of the publishing company's products is diminished. If workers are constantly tired, they seek other employment. Turnover rates increase. Fatigue is costly.

Anxiety often leads to fatigue, triggering a physical response. When someone is worried, or afraid, their heart may race, but it can't keep beating more and more quickly forever. Worry may keep you awake, but the human body simply cannot function without sleep for extended periods of time. And when physical exhaustion sets in, problems seem insurmountable.

Fight fatigue. Get enough rest before focusing on problems. Seek a calm and relaxing environment. Strive to work a reasonable number of hours. Consider whether you and your publishing staff might benefit from a retreat or a break from the daily routine.

Loneliness

Loneliness is a fourth intangible cost. It may be exacerbated in countries where Christians are a minority or where few people are engaged in Christian literature ministry.

Realize you are not alone. Seek a mentor. Pursue fellowship with your peers. Publishers who share a faith in Christ can encourage one another. They can commit publishing projects to God. They can pray for one another's success. They can share practical strategies to overcome problems. If you are in an area where it is difficult to travel, seek to fellowship with others through other means. Join a chat room. Participate in e-mail discussions. Subscribe to magazines and journals that connect you to the larger world of publishing. Join publisher's associations in your country. Network. Take part in seminars and conferences. At our International Christian Publishing Institutes, we often hear the participants say it is helpful for them to interact with publishers from other countries. They are encouraged by realizing they are part of a worldwide effort to reach people with the gospel.

Uncertainty

Publishers often experience uncertainty due to factors beyond their control. For example, publishers in China must submit all books for approval by the government prior to publication. A publisher in Africa may be unable to guarantee fulfillment of orders in a neighboring country due to the unpredictability of achieving safe passage for the books. A publisher in Brazil may experience delays in customs. When you are facing uncertainty, pray. Commit your project to God. Seek prayer support from other believers.

At other times, there are ways to reduce uncertainty and its costs. Extensive research prior to starting a project can help. Making contingency plans is also useful.

One publisher said, "I'm afraid I'll be stuck with lots of books, that no one will review the book, and that no one will buy it. And even after selling some books, I have another fear—returns. That is a reality in this business. I have new fears every day. Because when I scrape together the money to pay for the reprint, I fear the interest may die down before the book is ready again. Back orders may be cancelled. I may have miscalculated the risk."

This publisher can take several steps to minimize her anxiety. She can choose a lower print run. She can work with her staff to identify new ways to promote books, or to obtain greater distribution in niche markets. Intelligent risk management, hard work and perseverance increase the chances of success and reduce the toll of uncertainty. This publisher can also choose to trust God.

Some final thoughts

Anxiety, discouragement, fatigue, loneliness, and uncertainty are experienced by publishers around the globe, but there are ways to minimize these intangible costs. Consider also spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and fasting. Remember that as Christians we face opposition in serving God. There could be spiritual factors affecting your work. Ask God for insight. Seek counsel for your particular situation. God, who is faithful, will lift you up.

When the mental, emotional and physical toll of publishing seems too high, remember God has called you to this ministry. He knows your strengths and weaknesses. He knows the eternal impact of your work. Throughout the world, people engaged in Christian literature work are not generally there "by accident." They are called. They make Christ known.❖