

Monitor Vital Signs

by Kevin Engel

In examining a patient, a doctor begins by checking the vital signs such as blood pressure, heart rate, temperature, and so forth. What vital signs indicate the state of health of a publishing house? Some indicators are: the financial position of the business, its production schedules, performance, marketing progress, stock levels, staff, facilities, and technology. An examination of each of these will demonstrate which areas of the publishing house are in good shape, and which require attention.

Routine Procedures

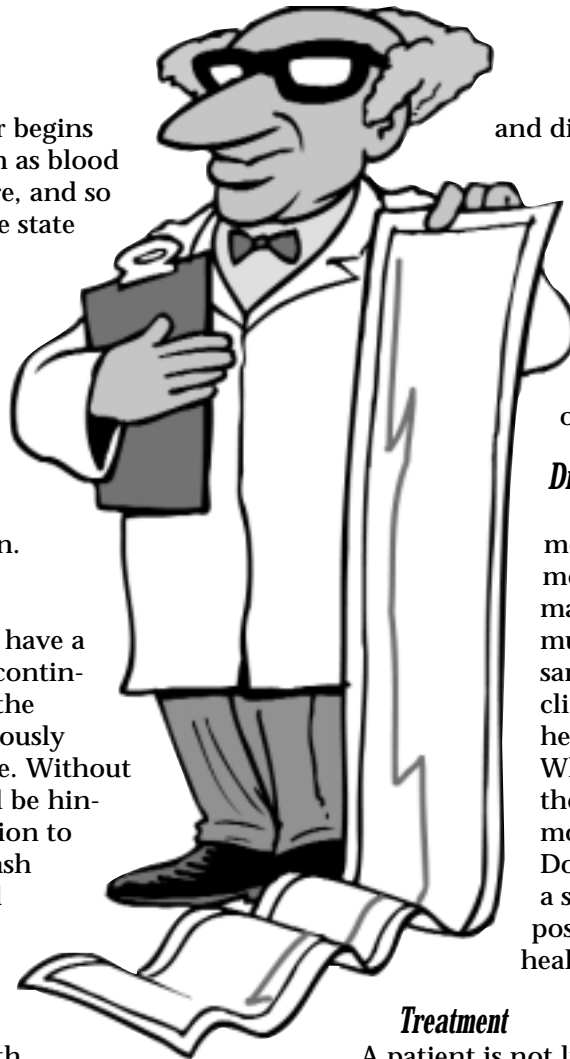
Every publishing house should have a system of routine procedures, for continuous monitoring of the health of the business. Adequate finance is obviously the lifeblood of a publishing house. Without a good cash flow, the business will be hindered in every other part. In addition to a daily review of the company's cash flow projections, managers should review production and marketing schedules, and performance.

Emergencies

In daily life publishers cope with "normal" emergencies (such as when an essential editor comes down with a serious illness prior to a critical deadline, or when a printer finds he cannot deliver a product in time for a key event). Real crises—like the earthquake in Taiwan, the political crisis in Zimbabwe, the drastic drop in the value of Argentina's currency—call for immediate and sometimes dramatic action. Routine check-ups alert publishers to problems early, enabling them to take corrective steps. In times of crisis, however, daily systems may not be enough.

Specialists

At times doctors must consult specialists to find the real cause of a patient's illness. Similarly, a publisher may need expert assistance. What daily and monthly reports does he or she see? Does the publisher analyze



and discuss them with others on staff who can offer other points of view? Do they have a network of friendly "specialists" that they can ask to give a second opinion on certain problem areas? Do they consult their colleagues in a Christian publishing association, resources on the Web, or other sources?

Diagnosis

Often, it is the last part of a medical examination that is the most difficult. The doctor has made a diagnosis and must communicate it to the patient. In the same way, a publisher must make a clinical, realistic assessment of the health of the publishing house. What are the current problems? Do they require additional staffing, more money, or better leadership? Do they call for radical surgery? Is a specialist needed? What are the possibilities of a good recovery and healthy growth?

Treatment

A patient is not likely to recover from an illness without following the treatment the doctor has prescribed. Once a clinical assessment has been made, the patient must take the appropriate medicine, follow the prescribed regimen, engage in therapy, and so on. Publishers, likewise, must face reality and take appropriate action. ❖

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