
FIVE LESSONS BUSINESSES CAN LEARN FROM A TEAM OF MISSIONARIES BY BRENT KASSING

This summer I'll be heading out for my ninth international mission trip having previously visited Haiti twice and Brazil six times. I work with an organization called Ray of Hope Amazon that meets the needs of the people who live along the Amazon River.

When this all started in 2011, I never anticipated drawing insightful business lessons that I could share with my business colleagues. But every time I come back, I am struck with the amazing teamwork and accomplishments that would make most managers envious; especially if they understood that these teams barely knew each other before heading off to another country.

So, what can businesses learn from a team of missionaries?



- 1 Personnel Optimization
- 2 Quick Decision Making and Flexibility
- 3 Selflessness
- 4 Relaxation
- 5 Understanding the Big Picture





1 Personnel Optimization

The average company spends significant dollars and burns numerous hours to hire that exact perfect fit for their open positions. They conduct multiple interviews, look at past work history and accomplishments, and may make the candidates take tests prior to reaching a decision. At some point, perhaps in a quarter or two; you figure out if the hire turned out well.

Do you realize how a missionary team is put together? Someone at the church or organization announces a trip to some place, and an informational meeting is held which discusses the purpose, agenda and costs. Then generic recruiting takes place and sign-ups are held. That's it.



Once the team is assembled, members will gather several times prior to the departure date to learn each other's names and backgrounds and the leaders will also discuss the plans for the trip. These plans, of course, will change multiple times over the upcoming months and even during the trip.

As a result of these meetings, the leaders get a good idea of who should be doing particular activities and how the team can best meet the overall goals of the trip. What's also important is that through these discussions, the team members also know their particular skills and limitations.



It's amazing and rewarding to see the team come together and actively step into their roles. And likewise, there is team encouragement for people to develop new skills and roles such as speaking or singing. As we come to a close, the team's performance is amazing. This is all done without a single interview, reference check, resume or test. It's a result of the attitude and the ability as trip leaders to understand the skills of a team...and how to meet the goals of the mission using the skillsets available.

Are you aware of the gifts and skills of your team? Are you putting people in roles that will make them successful? Or are you putting people into boxes that don't do anything for them or the company, but it fills a role you need in your department?



2

Quick Decision Making and Flexibility

Based upon my experience, no company, perhaps except those in the nuclear energy industry, prides itself on being slow and methodical. Quite the contrast, what all companies want you to believe is that they are quick and nimble, and they are able to adjust to competitors or market pressures faster than anyone else out there. Not only that, they believe they ARE the one setting the pace of change in their industry, and everyone else is playing catch up.

But we all know the truth. Most companies in most industries are not quick or nimble. They are slow and at times impossible to change. Their idea of making a quick decision is to change the direction next year. The budgets are already set for this year, and any sort of change in their industry or competition can be addressed in the future.

In the meantime, your competitor has taken market share and clients from you that you will never get back. Or even worse, a disruptive new approach to your industry has been introduced and your core business has just been compromised.

Mission teams have a general idea of what they are going to do; however, it's never as clear as it may appear to be during those first informational sessions. In fact, most of the time what you end up doing is nothing like what you've prepared for at all.

You may have been working on a message to share with a group of people to find out those people won't be able to come. A skit or a craft may have been developed only to discover all your supplies were lost. Mission teams also face weather changes and individuals may encounter a sickness or get hurt. All of these events require quick thinking to move forward.

Prior to the trip, we focus on preparing the team to be flexible. No matter what we encounter, team members must be able to flip the script and meet the needs of that village or tribe. Period. And lots of times that means a change of plans.



Is your company really nimble? If something were to happen are you really able to flip the switch and address? Do you have protocols in place to quickly make decisions? Are you empowering your management team to move and develop ahead of the curve?



3

Selflessness

When a mission team heads off with a cornucopia of personalities and skills, we understand the big picture at play. With regards to the work we do in the Amazon, it's to follow the direction of the Ray of Hope Amazon leadership; team and to meet as best we can the objectives of the organization with everyone we come across.

As we visit the people groups who live along the Amazon, there are opportunities to speak, play music, dance, play sports, or simply talk and get to know them. Our job on these trips is to show everyone we come in contact with that they are special, that we care about them, and for that single day attempt to make it one of their best days ever.

When we wrap up the adventure and head back to the boat for the evening, there is no tallying up of what people did (or didn't do). We all understood the bigger vision of the mission and how each of us play a role in being successful whether that be up front or in the back.

I know and have been a part of organizations where the belief is to foster competition within the organization in order to force the best to rise to the top. What this does in my experience is eliminate any sense of teamwork or community and certainly the vision of the firm falls behind the desires of the individual. And for some firms, that works out just fine for them.



However, the places that most appeal to me forge a more common set of company goals that brings everyone along for the ride. Clearly, the best is identified and rewarded within this set up as well with incentives that include corporate, departmental and individual goals.



Does your organization spend more time worrying about how to divide the pie or are you more focused on how to make that pie enormous? Do you see people working and doing activities for other people and departments even though that may not be in their best personal interest?

How can you adjust your management approach and compensation plan to get everyone to buy in to the bigger goals?



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Relaxation

Let's go get it done. Now!

One of the key draws for me in the consulting world is the project work we encounter. There is always a project(s) going on with multiple tasks and the opportunity to complete said tasks. And when you are not delivering projects, you are putting together sales and marketing material to land the next project. It's a cycle that our business (and many others) run through on a regular basis. The need to get that next piece of work can often lead me and others like me to not know when to stop.

On mission trips, there is often the opposite problem. We sometimes don't even know how to start. Being on time is optional. The locals we are visiting or are working with may or may not be available. Logistics, whether it's supplies or traffic, can halt us for hours. Sometimes, there simply is the distance to get from Point A to Point B.

All this can rub a "let's get going" type of personality like me the wrong way....until it doesn't. My time in the mission field has allowed me to learn how to relax and appreciate thinking as a discipline vs thinking being something you did while working.

This forced break of peace and quiet allows for the necessary down time to reflect and review where you have been and what is next. It also provides some time to simply think. And that's a good thing.

Does your firm let people "think"? Or must everyone be doing something all the time to show that they are working? Are vacations optional? Do you have people who attend meetings all day?





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Understanding the Big Picture

In the classic movie called Office Space, there is a great scene where a consultant asks an employee, “What would say.....you do here?” The employee becomes incredibly and hilariously flustered by such a simple inquiry. But I’ll ask you and your company, “What is it that YOU do here?”

On these trips, our true mission is to act as the eyes and ears, hands and feet of Jesus, and show His love to the people who live along the river. It’s as simple (and potentially complex) as that. We know we can’t solve all their problems. We know we can’t come in with aggressive personalities and “fix” things. We are there to listen, to teach, to sing, to dance, to love, to hug, to cry, and to laugh. Despite all the challenges they may face on a day to day or



week to week basis, our goal is to make that time we spend with them as special a day as they will ever encounter.

Because our team understands the big picture, it’s clear to each of us those things we will do and those things we don’t do. And most importantly, if we need to change what we planned, we can do so quickly as long as our efforts don’t contradict or deviate from our Big Picture.

How many of the people in your organization understand the Big Picture? My experience tells me that number is very small, and it gets smaller and smaller as your company grows in size. The employee’s interests become more focused on their own performance vs their department’s and/or company’s.

What are you doing to ensure your culture and employees can easily answer the question, “What is it that you do here?”





SUMMING UP

Now obviously mission trips are not like our day-to-day work environments. Mission trips don't require sales and marketing campaigns, large capital investments, offices or the plethora of personnel and skill sets to run a successful business. However, the lessons I've learned from them continues to remain true today. I'm forever thankful for taking that step to move beyond my comfort zone and look to serve others by using my business background. For those of you who have never done it, what are you waiting for?

About Brent Kassing.....

Brent has spent his entire professional career as a consultant in the energy industry. Little did he know his professional work as a consultant has been training him for international mission work all along. In 2017, Brent, along with several friends of Ray of Hope Amazon formed Ray of Hope Amazon in the United States as an official 501(c)(3) charity where Brent serves as President. The U.S. based organization provides financial and organizational support to the Brazilian based charity that is headquartered in Manaus.

If you'd like to hear more about the work being done at Ray of Hope Amazon, you can reach Brent at brent.kassing@rayofhopeamazonusa.com.

