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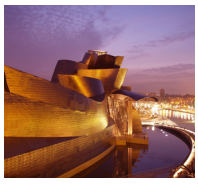

ON THE COVER

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, which opened in 1997 in Bilbao, Spain, is noted as one of the most innovative structures of our era.

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Traditional markets were once bustling places full of life and humanity. Local owners would cry out to passers-by to examine their wares or taste their delicacies. Shoppers were neighbors and business transactions were direct social exchanges among members of community. Today, reaching customers is a much more daunting effort for some businesses. Many of today's successful companies, however, have found there is wisdom in tradition as they find new ways to approach customers and consider them members of a community. As Christians, we are exhorted to build relationships through the development of community so that we may value, nurture, and encourage our brothers and sisters, wherever they may be.

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Customers are the lifeblood of every company. Customer service includes all corporate activities that support the delivery of products or services. Everett Rogers' diffusion and adoption theory is historically used to explain the rate of adoption for innovations. The attributes of an innovation—relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability—directly affect its rate of adoption. The rate of acceptance is proportionate to the degree to which each attribute is present in the innovation or product. If customer service is considered the innovation, then these five attributes may be proactively used to strategically plan for and predict customer service outcomes.

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Organizations have long prided themselves on physical growth and expansion as a sign of success. Yet no sooner than the recent collapse of the U.S. financial markets, have organizations recognized that size is less significant than the impact and magnitude of one's ideas. Smart companies can do more with less. They are drawn to the freedom of greater control of ideas with less layers and hierarchy. In this new era of business, smaller is greater.

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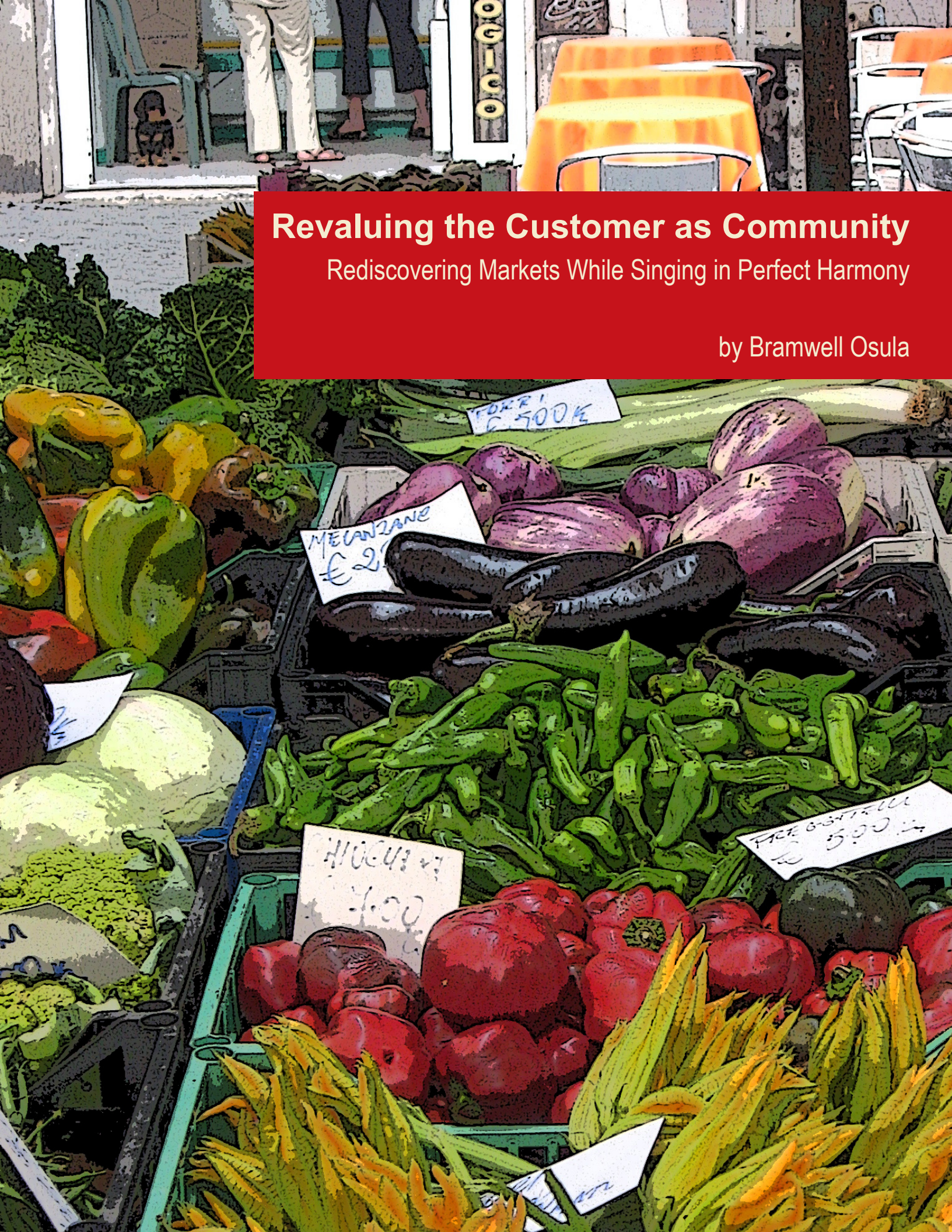
Many faith traditions have ably informed the process of innovation through the centuries. Christians have a unique perspective on the Source of imagination and creativity because they possess the record of God's remarkable innovations through the millennia as recorded in scripture, a world-view that supports and encourages innovation, and innovation methods that often contrast with those of other faith traditions. Innovation is not Christian only when it deals with religious subject matter or is accomplished by a professing Christian: innovation is Christian when it is ultimately aligned with God's purposes and methods. Scripture and the personal experience of Christians worldwide show that God uses innovation for humans to know more of Him, to communicate with Him, and to ultimately accomplish His earthly will for mankind.



Revaluing the Customer as Community

Rediscovering Markets While Singing in Perfect Harmony

by Bramwell Osula

During the early seventies while living in Lagos, Nigeria, one of my favorite pastimes was visiting a market located in one of the many suburbs of the sprawling city. The market was a large, bustling, place with dozens of small make-shift stalls constructed of cardboard, wood, and zinc roofing. Most of the stalls were owned and operated by women, who were the mainstay of the market, as they are in many other areas of West Africa. Wandering through the market's narrow aisles, I admired the overflowing trays of food stuffs, detergent, fresh produce, and other consumables. Occasionally, I frequented the row of small lean-to sheds that housed the cheap restaurants selling bean pottage and hunks of fresh bread (an early variety of fast food). However, what struck me most was the sound, or should I say, the sounds of the market.

The persistent drone of human traffic mingles with voices raised in mock argument, disputing the price of goods, children zigzagging in and out of the crowds, suppliers making their deliveries, and an assortment of shoppers— some of them with house girls or houseboys in tow— itinerant preachers, and the almost incessant cry of babies strapped to their mother's backs. If anyone had asked for my interpretation of market, this would have been it: this unique combination of sights and sounds. This was the energy or the pulse of the market (more about this later).

Like any other market, Sabo, as it was known, was a place of business. Stall owners conducted a brisk trade with shoppers who knew where to go for the best bargains. Marketing and advertising were as direct as you can imagine. Stall owners enticed or cajoled potential customers as best they could. Experience and a quick physical assessment of the customer were usually all it took to confirm which approach to take and, for the most part, it worked. However, the most consistent way of signaling presence and diverting shoppers to their stall was simply to call out "Customer, customer!" To this they would sometimes add a direct "Come buy!" As I navigated the narrow lanes of the market, I'd be greeted by one market stall owner after another, each appealing to me with cries of "Customer, customer!" Once I had been reeled in they switched to making exaggerated remarks about my intelligence and good sense. The final strategy was to declare the ostensibly better value and superior quality of their wares.

Travelers to Kasbahs, markets and bazaars all over the world will have had their own market place experiences and have their own experiences that resemble, even if they do not exactly mirror mine in Lagos. If Sabo Market is an extension of these other "trading places" then "Customer, come buy!" possibly captures the essential purpose of markets everywhere. In time I learned to shut out the invasive background market noises and filter out the calls of market criers whose goods held no special interest for me. I share this story only because I believe that the concept of the customer, or the marketplace for that matter, is an expression of relationships. This offers a first hint at where elements of the Christian faith might fit into the marketing equation. Beyond this expression of a relationship, an appreciation and understanding of one's customers is rooted in an expression of caring concern and heartfelt commitment. Both of these expressions of the customer relationship are deeply founded on authenticity and anchored in community.

Let me pause here and reflect on the word customer. Avoiding the raft of dictionary definitions I close my eyes to see what words come to mind. Moving quickly past the fuzziness of an unorthodox challenge to my typical left-brain approach to thinking, the following are the first words that come to mind:

Custom, Costume, Customize, Consume, Commune, Commute, Communitas

With the possible exception of "costume" the first three words can be seen as cognates of customer. The dictionary would soon clarify that point. But staying with the left-brain experiment a moment longer, we arrive at the word "consume" that itself probably comes from my association of customer with shopping and consumers. All is well until get to "commune," "commute," and *communitas*. Exploring the meaning of each of these words would make for an interesting experiment in the association of ideas to specific words and action. If we pushed hard enough we might even come up with a creative exegesis of customer relations or etymology of customer development. Communitas, which we can take as the expanded form of community and which invokes a spirit of cooperation and togetherness, nudges us in the direction of a broader interpretation of customer.

In one sense telecommunications are the contemporary motor of the marketplace and renew efforts to establish contact between individuals and their communities. In many developing countries it is possible to acquire a cell phone, by-passing the landline stage that was the traditional route in the West. Today all across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America the mobile phone is a growing phenomenon. In some places where running water and electricity are foreign concepts the tell-tale sign of personalized ringtones can be heard. This is Celtel's world, the company founded in 1998 by the Sudanese-born Mo Ibrahim. When Celtel introduced its "One Network" in 2006 it was billed as the world's first borderless network service. The Network allowed subscribers in East Africa to roam freely across borders without incurring roaming charges. Incoming calls were also free of charge. Since then Celtel has expanded its service to include other countries in Africa. Today it has an estimated 24 million subscribers in 14 African countries. As a measure of Celtel's reach, the company has more subscribers than Sprint (22.2m), T-Mobile (17.3m) or Nextel (15.3) in the United States. In Europe, only Germany and Russia exceed

The concept of the customer, or the marketplace for that matter, is an expression of relationships

its numbers. On the world stage Celtel's numbers are dwarfed by major players like China Mobile (158.6m subscribers), Vodafone (151.8 m subscribers) and T-Mobile 1 (65m subscribers). However, as we know, the market is not only about numbers. People matter too. In Africa fluid borders and trans-national identities reflect the legacy of colonial rule and the creation of artificial national boundaries. Celtel and other mobile operators are leading the charge in creating open marketplace where buyers and sellers "cross borders" freely. This is important in a world where there are still more cell phone than Internet users. The chances are that Celtel's opening of borders, coupled with its re-designation of cell phone users as mobile citizens, will encourage social activism and

how do we move from an in-group/out-group conceptualization of customer relations to one in which customers and businesses occupy the same social arena as partners or collaborators? Recasting customers as people seems an obvious solution. As a consultant I go to great lengths in an attempt to build firm relationships with my clients, although I seldom use the clinical word "client." But is it enough simply to see customers as people? In any case what does it mean to be seen as a person? The Christian response is as straightforward as the call of my Lagos market stall owners. Persons are created in the image of God. For this reason they are to be valued, nurtured, and encouraged. Throughout the Bible witness emphasis is placed on people. Whether expressed in God's dealings

people. While many of these efforts have stopped just short of the communitas suggested in this paper, it may if nothing else suggests possibilities.

In 1971 Coca Cola ran its tremendously successful "I'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony" commercials. These were recorded by the popular UK group the New Seekers and inspired by Bill Backer, the creative director for McCann-Erickson who had the important Coca-Cola account. The story is that McCann saw Coca Cola as much more than just a bottle of soda. To him it was a way of communicating, sharing, and keeping company with others. TV ads featuring young, fresh-faced men and women and representing every continent on the globe presented an image of vitality, togetherness, and community.

African regional development. In an interesting re-branding postscript, Mobile Telecommunications Company (MTC), the parent company of Celtel, changed its name in September 2007 to Zain, which is Arabic for 'beautiful, good and wonderful."

In a world driven by bottom-line imperatives and supposedly savvy consumers who are quick to smell a rat in every new product or service, "beautiful, good, and wonderful" aren't adjectives in the average customer's lexicon. In a world where oil prices are rising and everyone could use a break, bringing people back into the marketing equation as Celtel is doing may seem almost too simple a solution. "The customer is king" mantra remains a foreign concept and in any case was never really applicable to women, who comprise just over half of the consumer population globally. The immediate problem seems to be

with a recalcitrant Israel, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, or Paul's letters to the fledgling Churches, the message is the same. As summarized in the Golden Commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matthew 22: 37-39). Even if it isn't conceived in these terms, the Sabo market sellers call of "Customer, come buy!" fits very well into this theology. Christians are encouraged, nay, exhorted to build community with God and one's neighbors. Customers and marketing are in many ways therefore not so far removed from a core tenet of Christian values; emphasizing relationships through the building of community. In the world of advertising there is a long history of attempting to build bridges that connect products to

In a similar vein the Italian clothing retailer Benetton's edgy " United Colors of Benetton," AT& T's (1979) "Reach out and touch someone" or Ronald Reagan's 1984 "It's morning again in America" political commercial somehow capture the imagination of the customer as community.

These ad campaigns (to which we could add Wendy's popular 1984, "Where's the beef?" or Quaker Life cereal's 1972 "Hey, Mikey" commercial) suggest that people and communities, even if they are not always fully embraced, remain part of an American and possibly global advertising zeitgeist. But zeitgeist and reality are not the same thing. The themes suggested by each of the commercials listed above resonate with the honest, thinking, feeling individual. Moving beyond the 70s and 80's Geico's popular caveman campaign seems to raise darker questions

about everything from humanity and intelligence to political correctness and negotiated meanings. One of the top Super Bowl commercials is Frito-Lays Doritos ad in which two Doritos lovers converge on the street. The chance encounter of two individuals who discover that they share something in common could be a powerful motif for community in the 21st century. Interestingly, this commercial wasn't a product of Madison Avenue and was created on a shoestring budget of around $12 by an amateur who submitted the ad in response to Frito-Lays, "make your own Doritos Super Bowl ad." Whether this will signal a rush to ads produced by so-called ordinary people is doubtful. However, the Doritos commercial, which aired before the Super Bowl audience in February and helped to boost sales of chips in a novel way, reintroduces the concept of the customer as ordinary; an ordinary individual with basic instincts. In this case the street is the marketplace. Perhaps the real truth is that ordinary is everywhere and located somewhere in each of us. The availability of cheap digital cameras, the capabilities for uploading and downloading material, added to the presence of sites like You Tube increases the potential for people advertising. So far few companies have shown a willingness to venture into this innovative space in terms of revising their market strategies. The Doritos Super Bowl 2007 ad may yet help to set a new advertising standard. Traditionally though, behind the scenes we continue to imagine how many focus group sessions and consumer research dollars are spent on the average ad. With all this focus on the human side of the equation and the popularity of Customer Relationship Management (CRM) technology that supposedly improves customer alignment, why does the language of marketing still seem somewhat sterile with customers represented as one or at best two-dimensional cut-out characters?

Investing consumers with names, heart, and ultimately with meaning, is an experiment that seems to have largely failed. Most of us see through the slick advertising, whether on television, radio, newsprint, billboards, junk mail, or, increasingly these days, the Internet. Yet, because we are consumer driven or, believe the programmed hype, we play along, resisting our more rational sides that say "Don't!" This is part of the presumed freedom of the marketplace. Customers remain captive if not captivated. Of course corporations, small businesses and consulting agencies are to varying degrees attentive to the needs of their customers. This remains one of the laws of good business: Take care of your customers and they'll take care of you. So customers are taken care of, lavished with surveys that aim to discover what they really want and jumbo-sized products of such and such are repackaged in containers that actually hold less than they did before they went jumbo (if that makes any sense). Elsewhere, prices are slashed and organic, sugar-free, natural, low-fat, 0 grams trans fat, is emblazoned on everything. Information awareness gives way to misinformation overkill leaving the hapless consumer with a king-size headache known as the surfeit of choice.

These are the joys of the customer, the consumer-sated customer. How else do we characterize the relationship between purveyors and purchasers of goods and services? While the marketplace and the bargaining (even the haggling) table remain popular (take a look at the trading floors of stock exchanges all around the globe), the language of marketing has been refined, spruced up, and made more "professional." What better than a return to the physical reality of the market place? Like our farmer's and flea markets, even our garage sale "markets," the market is defined by more than the goods and services available there. It is people who make the difference. The great markets of antiquity, whether located in Asia Minor and Medieval Europe or along African trade routes, spawned tremendous political, social, and economic opportunities. Augmented by traveling fairs and specialist bazaars these markets were the "happening places" within local communities. In a few special cases the intersection of community and geography was the springboard for the birth of great cities and civilizations.

A return to the market and to the people one meets there is a promising journey. Along the way we rediscover the very communities that gave us the concept of the customer and bump head-on into the link between faith and marketing, relationships and community. Interesting things happen when customers re-discover community. Big words like "humanization," heart, emotion, and transformation creep back into the equation. Here right and left-brain thinking is permitted to play an active role in redefining the terms of discourse. Values, innovation, caring, and concern are invested with real meaning. In-group/out-group boundaries dissolve or become more fluid. Even in a global market community becomes an achievable reality as communities of like-minded individuals, interest and people groups band together to achieve shared purposes. The result of all this is a basic realization that people and communities are the driving force of business and society. The ultimate benefit of recasting customers as community is the introduction of values into the marketing equation. Questions about community inevitably invite questions about ones neighbors. Who is my neighbor? Christians respond to the question in inclusive terms. Yesterday's customer becomes today's neighbor, part of my community.

Finally, if like Celtel, Singapore Airlines, Aunt Annie pretzels, or even Disney Corporation, we allow ourselves to think in terms of community and imagine people rather than clients, then a revolution or transformation of ideas is possible. Rather than talking about building ones customer base we can, instead, speak of developing a community base. From here it becomes possible to reduce the deeper purpose of marketing, customer relations and the Christian faith journey to a simple question: Do you know your community?

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10 ATTRIBUTES OF INNOVATION

Ten rules for creating values-based customer service

By A. Gregory Stone

Evelyn's Gown Emporium had been the dream of Evelyn Woodard for well over two decades. She grew up dressing her dolls in formal gowns, and modeled her own elegant gowns for her playmates as a youngster. She enjoyed seeing others beam with beauty from wearing gorgeously expensive gowns. The sale of her most expensive $7,295 gown on the opening day of her business came as no surprise. "I was on cloud nine!" she explained. She was meant for this retail venture. Life couldn't get any better.

But it could get worse! Ten days later, the customer returned with the expensive gown and wanted her money back. As Evelyn took it out of the box, it was evident it had been intentionally misused and damaged. It was no longer salable; not even salvageable! Before Evelyn could get the first sentence of protest out of her mouth, the customer simply pointed to her sign sitting on the counter: "If for any reason you are not 100% satisfied with your purchase, return it anytime within 90 days for a full refund—No questions asked!"

"I locked the shop door, went to the back to the storeroom, and cried for three hours over my stupid customer service policy," Evelyn lamented. Every small business owner talks about providing good customer service. Few, however, consider the cost of customer service until they experience it directly as Evelyn did.

So, how does the customer service function sour for so many small businesses, prompting their customers to seek another seller? It's a values-

based core issue that finds its roots in the Judeo-Christian principles of service leadership.

Rule #1:

People do business with people.

The products and services sold and delivered are really the ideas and thoughts of individuals—an extension of their personalities. To dispel the more common notion, people do not do business with businesses.

Customer service often ends up being pseudo customer service. It is something companies have in place because they know they need to have it, but it's poorly designed, implemented through misdirected managers, and gets delivered by poor-quality employees. Why do entrepreneurs have so much trouble with the concept of customer service?

Rule #2:

Customers don't leave companies, but they do leave the people who represent the company.

That is often the owner in the case of a small enterprise. The owner is the business leader, and in every case in which customers are involved, there is a service component of that leadership. It is required, needs to be genuine, and must originate from the heart, not the mind. Otherwise, customer service can be insensitive, even incompetent, if the employees are unable to manage the expectations of the customer.

Everett Rogers' diffusion theory provides a framework for customer service planning. His diffusion and adoption theory is used to explain the rate of adoption for innovations. While most often used to historically examine the rate of adoption for an innovation, the model can be effectively used to strategically plan for diffusion (distribution or sale) of a product or service through a small business with the adoption (purchase decision) by customers.

Converting customer service talk into a win-win actionable policy does not need to be costly. It does, however, take planning on the front end of business operations to ensure no surprises along the way that will compromise the best of intentions. Failure to plan, however, will put the fortitude of even the most-crusty entrepreneurial personality to the test.

Customer service is all about the identifiable, but sometimes intangible, activities undertaken by a business in conjunction with the basic goods and services it sells. It is customer service activities that support the delivery of products or services. More accurately put, it is the process by which a business provides support service to customers before, during, and after a purchase.

We hear customers complain of businesses where the employees are arrogant, condescending, and aggressive—yes, aggressive! Customers complain of businesses where employees shout, get angry, are abrupt and rude, or snap their fingers at people.

Is customer service about personalities? Not really.

Rule #3:

Customer service is about implementing a true value system and code of conduct.

If you step back and look objectively, core values form the basis of any company, and define the culture of a business. Core values come from the owner. If you despise dealing with people, that will be communicated in your behavior, and those of your employees. More importantly, values are very strategic, and represent standards around which service components can be planned.

Attributes of Innovation

Customer service is the manner in which a business meets its customer's needs via its various different methods before, during, and after the sale of a product or service. It can be delivered via the telephone or the Internet, or in person in the case of retail or entertainment.

Rogers outlines five attributes of innovation that help determine how quickly they are adopted. These same attributes are directly related to products, and how quickly they are purchased. These attributes of an innovation—relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability—directly affect its rate of adoption.

In other words, the rate of acceptance is proportionate to the degree to which each attribute is present in the innovation or product. If customer service is considered the innovation, then these five attributes should not only explain its adoptability rate (acceptance by customers), but could be proactively used to plan and predict customer service outcomes.

In other words, these five attributes of a product or service can impact the rate of adoption (acceptance) by customers. That means customer service processes can be strategically planned around these attributes.

Relative Advantage

Rogers defined relative advantage as how much better an innovation is than the idea that came before it. A customer service process or policy can supersede that which came before it. It can be designed to be more attractive than a competitor's, thereby differentiating itself from every other business. Evelyn's shop listed the criteria for the return of a product. That was a relative advantage over a competitor business whose customer service return policy had more bureaucratic steps involved. Rogers listed several criteria that people can use to determine whether the relative advantage of a customer service policy can be improved:

• Economic profitability: Does the customer service policy or process increase the company's financial benefits, or decrease its costs?

10 Rules for Values-Based Customer Service
Rule 1: People do business with people.
Rule 2: Customers don't leave companies, but they do leave the people who represent the company.
Rule 3: Customer service is about implementing a true value system(s), and code of conduct.
Rule 4: Customers who know their "investment" in a product or service in protected by a customer service policy are more likely to make additional purchases from that company.
Rule 5: Use relative advantage to carve a customer service policy that truly differentiates your business form your competitors.
Rule 6: Customer Service positioning, and presenting how it is both like and unlike other more familiar policies are proactive compatibility strategies.
Rule 7: When felt needs are met, products and services generally are adopted at a faster rate.
Rule 8: The less complex a customer service Policy is, the greater the acceptance by customers.
Rule 9: Use a customer complaint as an opportunity for personalized customer service.
Rule 10: Create a customer service policy that incorporates values to differentiate how you do business from the way everyone else does it.

Rule #4:

Customers who know their "investment" in a product or service in protected by a customer service policy are more likely to make additional purchases from that company.

Even a defective product or return provides an opportunity for additional person-to-person customer contact to solve a problem. These are the things from which return customers are generated.

• Low initial cost: Does my customer service cost the customer anything up front, or is it less costly to purchase? Customer service is not a commodity, but more of an arena where value can be added into those "intangible" areas such as "feeling good," or "happy outcomes." For example, Evelyn's return policy did not cost her customers anything, but certainly provided "peace of mind" (an intangible) should she encounter a problem.

• Decrease in discomfort: A customer service policy should make life easier for the business owner, and for the customer. The owner should sleep soundly at night knowing that his or her customers have the support they need for the products and services they purchase. Customers should never have to think twice about whether or not to call your company about a product or service issue or problem. Yet, people every day will share a negative product experience that they won't contact the business about because of the belief it will be a waste of time.

• Social prestige: Will people think better of your business and your employees because of your customer service policy? Most of us can already name one or two businesses with whom we associate high quality customer service. Nordstrom's is one such store, with their customer raving with stories about the personalized ways in which they were treated. This is an easy list to put your business's name onto in the mind of the customer.

• Savings in time and effort: A customer service policy should be easier and quicker to use for both the business and the customer? Evelyn's shop would deliver the dress to the customer's home after alternations were finished. Time and money are commodities people never have enough of, so look for ways your customer service policy can save them a bit of both.

• Immediacy of the reward: Does the customer service benefit my customers now, or do they have to wait for the benefit to come about some time (and a lot of bureaucracy) later? Ask anyone who has been here, and you will hear how easily the horror stories roll off their tongues. Take action first, then ask questions later—if at all.

Rule #5:

Use relative advantage to carve a customer service policy that truly differentiates your business form your competitors.

Compatibility

Compatibility is defined by Rogers as the degree to which an innovation is consistent with a person's or group's values, experiences, or needs. Remember the "values-based customer service" premise mentioned at the beginning of this article? It's the thread that should run through everything you do in your business.

If your customer purchased an evening gown for several thousand dollars, then there are some intrinsic expectations as to what the quality and level of customer service should be. If your business comes up short on meeting this expectation, then your customers will decide not to make a subsequent purchase. Rogers identifies three areas in which compatibility can be cultivated:

Compatibility with Values or Beliefs

A customer service policy that conflict with deeply held values or beliefs are adopted much more slowly. The business owner's values and beliefs have to be in sync with the performance and behavior of the company, as well as those of the customers. The most basic of customer service policies has to be based in the "do unto others" premise. It's the easiest measure to determine if you have a standard that differentiates you you're your competitors.

For example, labeling your company as Christian owned or managed creates a spectrum of preconceptions as to anticipated levels of service in a customer's mind who has similar values. The business values and performance will have to be based on those standards. An owner who does not reinforce the preconceived values and beliefs with supportive behaviors will create incompatibility, and begin losing that customer demographic.

Certainly a technological development or innovation "transplanting" from one culture into a very different culture can also result in value conflicts. Champions of some technological innovations have been guilty of the "empty vessel fallacy" according to Rogers. They assume that they are introducing the product to a group with no preexisting beliefs or values. Ignorance of indigenous value systems can quickly undermine the most promising product.

The introduction of the personal computer in the beginning years was a failure as technology based people were introducing it into a non-technical population. The result was a very slow-diffusing products in the beginning.

Compatibility with Previously Introduced Ideas

Old ideas are the main mental tools that people use to evaluate new ideas. People tackle new products and services on the basis of their familiar with them, which often leads to problems.

• Sometimes the product seems more similar than it really is and is utilized according to the previous ideas. Columbian farmers, for example, applied new chemical fertilizer products to the tops of their potato plants (as they had done with manure), thereby damaging the plants.

• Sometimes the product is so different that adopters simply do not understand how to utilize it. The Punjabi farmers covered their new tractors with blankets to keep them warm as they had previously done their steers. They never thought to replace the oil or air filters, however, which caused the tractors to break down.

The similarity of an innovation to older ideas does not necessarily mean that it will be adopted more quickly. While this may be the case for many technological innovations, the opposite appears to be true in the area of art. The more radical a piece of art may be, the more quickly it is sometimes disseminated into the population. Evelyn's customer service policy was not radical in the traditional sense of the word, but it was from the perspective of being a very broad sweeping policy.

Rule #6:

Customer Service positioning, and presenting how it is both like and unlike other more familiar policies are proactive compatibility strategies.

Compatibility with Needs

There are two aspects of needs compatibility according to Rogers:

• Sometimes it is necessary for the business to offer a customer service

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policy that matches a population's felt needs. While this is not easy, there are several methods for determining just what the members of a population feel that they need. The strategy then is to match that need to an customer service policy.

• Sometimes it is necessary for a business to customers aware of a need. Members of a customer population are not always cognizant of a need. A business can increase awareness by introducing a customer service policy and its benefits.

Rule #7:

When felt needs are met, products and services generally are adopted at a faster rate.

A bad customer service experience with can make people skeptical about all of them. Rogers refers to this phenomenon as "innovation negativism." He uses the example of the disastrous experience that India had with the IUD birth control device in the 1960s. Indians developed a product negativism toward birth control that they have yet to overcome to this day.

Complexity

Complexity is the degree to which an innovation is difficult to understand or use.

Rule #8:

The less complex a customer service policy is, the greater the acceptance by customers.

Evelyn's customer service return policy was about as easy to use as a policy can be—even to the point of what appeared to be financial detriment to her. Simplicity, however, is a standard that makes sense to customers.

During the late 1970s when home computers first became available, they were used primarily by people who played with technological gadgets as a hobby. Many were engineers or others who had extensive experience with mainframe or mini computers. For these early adopters, home computers were not complex.

When less technically proficient users began to buy home computers in the early 1980s, studies found that their level of frustration during the initial period was extremely high. The computer hardware, software, and jargon were simply too complex for most people to understand. So, the rate of adoption of computers was quite slow. The rate of adoption soared, however, as computers became easier to use and understand.

Some companies try to overcome quality customer service with process. Process is not bad, but if the customer service process dominates, and the 'customer' part of the equation is ignored, your customers will walk directly to your competitors.

Trialability

Trialability is the degree to which an innovation can be experimented with on a limited basis.

Trialability is particularly important for early adopters and innovators according to Rogers. Trialability gives customers a way to understand the customer service through actual contact with employees. New customers can rely on the experiences and knowledge of the earlier customers. It can also be associated with "word-of-mouth advertising." It is in the perceived quality of the customer service experience that customers will communicate either positively or negatively to others. Consequently, trialability is of less importance to late adopting customers. It is significant to those who are assertively looking to purchase of a specific product or service as this word-of-mouth communication can be a significant influence.

Observability

Observability is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others. In our context, customer service needs to have clearly visible outcomes. That results in customers adopting at a faster rate.

For instance, new fire fighting gear can have the obvious benefit of getting a fire fighter out of a dangerous situation alive. The same fire fighter may not be as likely to wear a condom to protect himself from HIV infection because the benefit (getting out of a dangerous situation alive) may not be so obvious.

People Do Business with People

Customer service doesn't mean trying to be perfect. It does mean using a complaint regarding a defective product or service as an opportunity to deliver personalized service. While there is merit to the opportunity argument, how many great opportunities are there for improved customer service? Probably more than most think about.

Most businesses are the same—same kind of people, and the same kind of products and services. Differentiation, for the most part, just does not exist. Even with "sameness" across businesses, customers usually only consider going elsewhere, if they are unhappy with a negative experience, and see no prospects of improvement! At a customer level, if you find your values do not allow you to shop in such an environment, you leave. If your values match, customers often stay committed to shop there forever. At the business level, the equation is disastrous: Bad Service + Bad Culture = Bad Company. Eventually everyone leaves! If there are no customers, there is no business

Rule #9:

Use a customer complaint as an opportunity for personalized customer service.

Rule #10:

Create a customer service policy that incorporates values to differentiate how you do business from the way everyone else does it.

By the way, Evelyn's customer service policy was not a failure. While it was a major financial setback at that time in her star-up when every penny counted, sticking to her values and treating others the way she would want to be treated—event under stressful circumstances—paid off. Adherence to the policy she set for herself and her company created a major financial setback at that time in her start-up when every penny counted, sticking to her values and treating others the way she would want to be treated—event under stressful circumstances—paid off. Adherence to the policy she set for herself and her company created a values-based corporate culture. Over the next three years, that same customer returned—again and again to purchase well over a dozen gowns, with a retail value of well over $90,000.

Evelyn will never know whether the customer was testing her policy, testing her values, or testing the store's values. It really doesn't matter, because they were all one in the same—but they were tested to the limit.

Holding firm to her values during the troubled times created customer loyalty beyond anything Evelyn could have anticipated. "I think back about how close I came to telling that lady off," Evelyn reflected. "It would have been justified, warranted, and the 'me centered' thing to do—and I would have been totally wrong to do it. Sticking to my values helped me swim against the stream of what all my competitors do every day. And today I have the customers to prove it!"

Dr. A. Gregory Stone is an associate professor in the School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship. His primary research areas are servant leadership and exploring the use of entrepreneurship as an economic development tool to remove people with disabilities from welfare. He can be reached at gregsto@regent.edu for comment.

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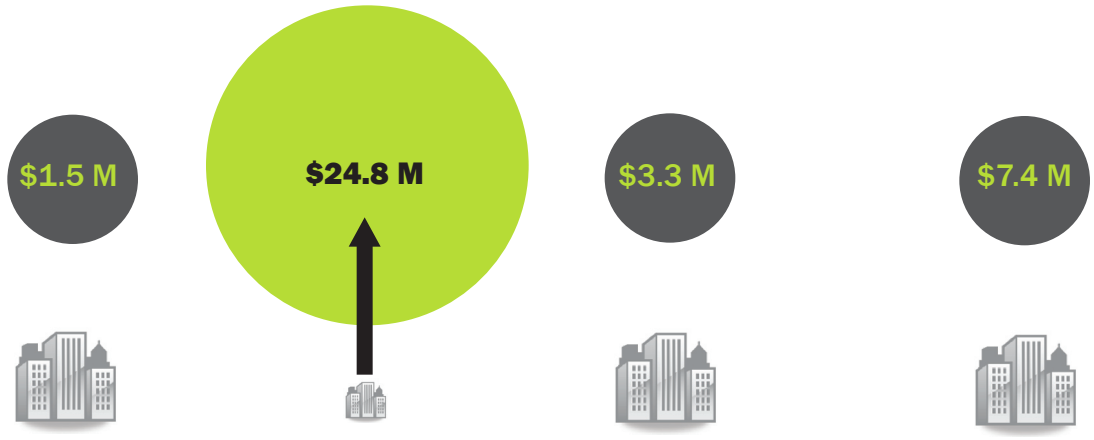
Small. The New Big.

by Seth Godin



Getting Small

Big used to matter. Big meant economies of scale. People, usually guys, often ex-Marines, wanted to be CEO of a big company. The Fortune 500 is where people went to make a fortune.

There was a good reason for this. Value was added in ways that big organizations were good at providing. Value was added with efficient manufacturing, widespread distribution and very large R&D staffs. Value came from hundreds of operators standing by and from nine-figure TV ad budgets. Value came from a huge sales force.

Of course, it's not just big organizations that added value. Big planes were better than small ones, because they were faster and more efficient. Big buildings were better than small ones because they facilitated communications and used downtown land quite efficiently. Bigger computers could handle more simultaneous users, as well.

Get Big Fast was the motto for startups, because big companies can go public and get more access to capital and use that capital to get even bigger. Big accounting firms were the place to go to get audited if you were a big company, because a big accounting firm could be trusted. Big law firms were the place to find the right lawyer, because big law firms were a one-stop shop.

And Then Small Happened

Enron (big) got audited by Andersen (big) and failed (big). The World Trade Center was a target. TV advertising is collapsing so fast you can hear it. American Airlines (big) is getting creamed by Jet Blue (think small). BoingBoing (four people) has a readership growing a hundred times faster than the New Yorker (hundreds of people).

Big computers are silly. They use lots of power and are not nearly as efficient as properly networked Dell boxes (at least that's the way it works at Yahoo and Google). Big boom boxes are replaced by tiny iPod shuffles.

I'm writing this on a laptop at a skateboard park that added wi-fi for parents. They did it because they wanted to. It took them a few minutes and $50. No big meetings, corporate policies or feasibility studies. They just did it.

Today, little companies often make more money than big companies. Little churches grow faster than worldwide ones. Little jets are way faster door-to-door than big ones.

Today, Craigslist (18 employees) is the fourth most visited site according to some measures. They are partly owned by eBay (more than 4,000 employees), which hopes to stay in the same league, traffic-wise. They're certainly not growing nearly as fast.

Small means the founder makes a far greater percentage of the customer interactions. Small means the founder is close to the decisions that matter and can make them, quickly.

Small is the new big because small gives

you the flexibility to change the business model when your competition changes theirs. Small means you can tell the truth on your blog. Small means that you can answer e-mail from your customers.

Small means that you will outsource the boring, low-impact stuff like manufacturing and shipping and billing and packing to others, while you keep the power because you invent the remarkable and tell stories to people who want to hear them.

A small law firm or accounting firm or ad agency is succeeding because they're good, not because they're big. So smart small companies are happy to hire them.

A small restaurant has an owner who greets you by name. A small venture fund doesn't have to fund big bad ideas in order to get capital doing work. They can make small investments in tiny companies with good (big) ideas.

A small church has a minister with the time to visit you in the hospital when you're sick. Is it better to be the head of Craigslist or the head of UPS?

Small is the new big only when the person running the small thinks big. Don't wait. Get small. Think big.

Seth Godin is author of ten books that have been bestsellers around the world and changed the way people think about marketing, change and work. His books have been translated into more than 20 languages, and his ebooks are among the most popular ever published. Seth's latest book, Tribes, is a nationwide bestseller, appearing on the Amazon, New York Times, BusinessWeek and Wall Street Journal bestseller lists. It's about the most powerful form of marketing--leadership--and how anyone can now become a leader, creating movements that matter. The Miami Herald listed it among the best business books of 2008. **You can read more on his blog at www.sethgodin.com. He may be reached for comment at seth@sethgodin.com.**

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Christian **Innovation**

Descending Into the Abyss of Light

by Gary W. Oster

"The Christian is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars."[1]

~Francis A. Schaeffer

Innovation is the creative development of a specific product, service, or idea with the goal of pleasing customers and extracting value from its commercialization. To a corporation competing in the dynamic global economic environment, innovation is a matter of life or death. Innovation scholar Tony Davila observed, "Superior innovation provides a company the opportunities to grow faster, better, and smarter than their competitors—and ultimately to influence the direction of their industry…In the long run, the only reliable security for any company is the ability to innovate better and longer than competitors."[2]

Beyond the struggle for corporate viability, engaging in the act of innovation allows individuals a unique mechanism to experience and communicate with God. Whether developing products or services for business clients or pursuing artistic endeavors for personal enjoyment, innovation encourages insight. Christians do not own innovation, which has also been ably informed within many other faith traditions through the centuries. Christians do, however, have a unique perspective on the source of imagination and creativity. They possess the record of God's remarkable innovations through the millennia as recorded in scripture, a world-view that supports and encourages innovation, and innovation methods that often contrast with those of other faith traditions. This paper surveys the unique elements of Christian innovation.

Christian Innovation?

Is innovation simply a collection of methods to make customers happy and generate cash for a company, or might it be more? Can innovation be considered in the same breath as a Michelangelo painting or a Henry Moore sculpture? Should the imaginative process of innovation be classed with the arts, e.g. design, music, sculpture, graphic arts, etc.? As renown psychiatrist Rollo May questioned, "Suppose the apprehension of beauty is itself a way to truth? Suppose that elegance—as the word is used by physicists to describe their discoveries—is a key to ultimate reality?"3 As Grudin notes, "The generation of ideas involves factors that are not exclusively cerebral, factors that include the physiology, the emotions, and the outer world. We do not create, nor even learn, by conscious concentration alone…Original thought is the product not of the brain, but of the full self."4

Faith would accordingly be included in that self. Innovation may be redemptive. Scripture and the personal experience of Christians worldwide show that God uses innovation for humans to know more of Him, to communicate with Him, and to ultimately accomplish His

earthly will for mankind. What makes innovation Christian innovation? As Francis Schaeffer said of art, "The factor which makes art Christian is not that it necessarily deals with religious subject matter."5 It also is not because the innovation was accomplished by a professing Christian. Instead, innovation is Christian when it is ultimately aligned with God's purposes and methods.

Creator Vs. Created

It is important to recognize that, while man can make things different or better, only God makes something entirely new. Remember that only God can imagine and make something out of nothing. In this sense, he is the only One who deserves the title of Creator. We are merely creative. That is, we can only imagine and make something out of something else—something that has already been imagined and made, whether in the creation itself, or from the work of creative people."6 Human innovation only vaguely mirrors the uniquely transformative act of God's salvation, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."7 There is an important contrast between the creator and the created.

Innovation Flows From World-View

Everyone has a personal world-view, which emerges from the enduring values learned by each individual. Values are constant, passionate, fundamental beliefs that propel the actions of individuals and organizations. They are acquired through education, observation, and experiences, and may be taught or influenced by parents, friends, work associates, religious institutions, community, culture, personality, and significant societal events. An individual's values frame his or her worldview, "Worldview is the lens that people use to interpret their reality and assign meaning to events, experiences, and relationships."8

Thinking

Christians develop and act upon a Christian worldview. "The term means literally a view of the world, a biblically informed perspective on all reality. A worldview is like a mental map that tells us how to navigate the world effectively. It is the imprint of God's objective truth in our inner life. We might say that each of us carries a model of the universe inside our heads that tells us what the world is like and how we should live in it."9

For Christians, faith influences their entire lives. As theologian and philosopher J. P. Moreland asserts "To live Christianity is to allow Jesus Christ to be the Lord of every aspect of my life. There is no room for a secular/sacred separation in the life of Jesus' followers."10 Similarly,

Innovation may be redemptive. Scripture and the personal experience of Christians worldwide show that God uses innovation for humans to know more of Him, to communicate with Him, and to ultimately accomplish His earthly will for mankind.

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philosopher Francis Schaeffer agrees "It is not only that true spirituality covers all of life, but it covers all parts of the spectrum of life equally. In this sense there is nothing concerning reality that is not spiritual."11 Holmes similarly noted, "To bring our every thought into captivity to Christ, to think Christianly, to see all of life in relationship to the Creator and Lord of all, this is not an optional appendage of secondary importance, but is at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian."12 And Noll adds, "The much more important matter is what it means to think like a Christian about the nature and workings of the physical world, the character of human social structures like government and the economy, the meaning of the past, the nature of artistic creation, and the circumstances attending our perception of the world outside ourselves."13

In all things (including their innovation efforts) Christians are called to think and to act like Jesus. Making decisions in business is not a simple function of running anticipated actions through a formula or process…We are called to be like Christ and to think like he would think (Philippians 2:1-8). Christians know that this is made possible by the presence and inner work of the Holy Spirit, not by our efforts alone."14

God's Innovation Reveals Himself to Mankind

Our first glimpse of God in scripture says, "In the beginning, God created…"15 God's character is revealed to mankind through His innovation, "Significantly, the world he created is complex and elegant – filled with clues about the character and nature of its creator. The more we learn about this created order, the more sophisticated its designer appears. The magnificent design of the solar system and all the many galaxies we are now able to observe make it clear just how creative the creator must be."16 We cannot possibly ignore the elegance of God's innovation.

As Scripture says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time,"17 "We are God's masterpieces, poems…",18 and "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God will shine forth."19 As Michael Card noted, "A thousand examples speak of a deep, inner hunger for beauty that, at its heart, is a hunger for God. We hunger for beauty because it is a beautiful God whom we serve… The deep-down interior of a red-wood or a geode or the DNA molecule or, for that matter, our own body, is a song of elegance."20

Engaging God Through Innovation

We are not satisfied to observe God's innovative perfection, but seek to lovingly mimic Him, "Creativity is worship insofar as it is, at its essence, a response…In the call to be creative, a call that goes out to all God's children, we sense the call to listen to him and, in childlike naiveté, to imitate our father by creating works that will magnify his

praise,"21 Grudin says.

But independent insight in all fields involves in some way the experience of beauty. In fact, the thrill conveyed by inspiration in any field is perhaps best described as coming from a sense of participation in beauty, a momentary unity between a perceived beauty of

experience and a perceiving beauty of mind."22 Our response to God's glorious innovation is praise-filled creativity, "A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God, not just as tracts, mind you, but as things of beauty to the praise of God. An art work can be a doxology of itself."23 The Apostle Paul noted that everyone is given unique abilities to engage God through innovation, "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people!"24 At specific times throughout history, God has chosen to communicate with and direct man during the innovation process.25 Through our own innovative efforts, we find a special way to connect with our creator, "All artists experience the unbridgeable gap which lies between the work of their hands, however successful it may be, and the dazzling perfection of the beauty glimpsed in the ardor of the creative moment. What they manage to express in their painting, their sculpting, their creating is no more than a glimmer of the splendor which flared for a moment before the eyes of their spirit. Believers find nothing strange in this – they know that they have had a momentary glimpse of the abyss of light which has its original wellspring in God."26

Obligations of Christian Innovation

The freedom God provides to Christian innovators comes with concomitant obligations, "The artist as a Christian is free, but not with a purposeless freedom. He is free in order to praise God and love his neighbors."27 As the Apostle Paul said, "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."28 This certainly extends beyond the wise use of God-given abilities,29 efficient acquisition of revenue for a corporation, and even beyond the "Do no evil" admonishment of Google, Inc., "Those who perceive in themselves this kind of divine spark which is the artistic vocation—as poet, writer, sculptor, architect, musician, actor, and so on—feel at the same time the obligation not to waste this talent but to develop it, in order to put it at the service of their neighbor and of humanity as a whole."30 As Barna summarizes, "God encourages us to show genuine love by blessing others through affirmation and encouragement, by meeting their physical and emotional needs, and by living and working in a faith-driven community."31

Photo by: Sarah Stanfield

All innovation begins and ends with the needs of end-users. Christian innovators cannot have customers, with the disposable mentality the word implies. Instead, they have clients, with a special relationship of deep concern ordained by God and specifically outlined in the Bible, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."32 In the Gospel of Luke, we read, "And he [Jesus] answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself' (Luke 10:27, NASB).

The Greek that we translate in Luke 10:27 is agapao which carries with it a sense of doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason, or in other words,loving someone like a friend. The word occurs 110 times in the New Testament, specifically for behavior between people."33 Agapao love consistently focuses upon the best interests of clients, "This Greek word refers to a moral love…to love in a social or moral sense, embracing the judgement and the deliberate assent of will as a matter of principle, duty, and propriety."34 Agapao love that a concerned innovator has for clients has been described as being "selfless," "altruistic," or "unconditional." Whereas, "Agapao love is alive and well today and may be best understood in light of the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have themdo unto you, and even more to do with the Platinum Rule of Do unto others as they want you to do unto them.'"35 Christian love for clients is the context for care for them, "The goal is thus to be broadly benefits driven—constantly searching for, investing in, and mastering the technology that will bring unanticipated benefits to humankind."36 Because of *agapao* love, corporations are obligated to develop an innovation agenda that not only meets profit targets but also intentionally aligns with the actual needs of clients and society as a whole. As Chewning demonstrates, "Business should approach customers as people of dignity whom they genuinely want to serve. From God's perspective the purpose of business transactions is to serve people."37

Windows To God

In consideration of the innovative media of literature, C. S. Lewis says, "Each of us by nature sees the whole world from one point of view with a perspective and a selectiveness peculiar to himself…We want to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as with our own… We demand windows. Literature as Logos is a series of windows, even of doors…"38

As Card adds, "If what we create, write, dance, or sing can open up such a space in time through which God may speak, imagine the possibilities! Painting might

become a window through which a onfused world looks and sees the sane order of God's creation. Music could become an orchestrated echo of the Voice the tired ears of humankind have longed for ages to hear. This is art through which God is seen and heard, in which he is incarnate, is fleshed out in paint and ink, in stone, in creative movement…The art that naturally flows out of our obedient response to the call of God on our lives, as a result of the imprint of the creative mandate, can, by grace, become water to wash the feet of sisters and brothers, cold water to quench the thirst of a unbelieving world."39

The work of our hands and the example of our being should draw others to God. "The Christian's life is to be an art work. The Christian's life is to be a thing of truth and also a thing of beauty in the midst of a lost and despairing world."40 Pope John Paul II notes, "As Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make it a work of art, a masterpiece."41

Completing God's Kingdom

Judaism has long held an interesting concept called Tikkun Olam, which originated in the early rabbinic period. Although altered in modern times to support primarily social goals, the Hebrew phrase refers to "repairing" or "perfecting" the world. In brief, it

was thought that God intentionally left undone some creative work in the world so that mankind could joyfully partner with Him in its completion. God continues to use humans, no matter how frail or unprepared, to innovatively accomplish even those things which are "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think."42 Like the Psalmist of old, to those who yield their minds, hearts, and hands to His will, God will "Put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God."43 We can be the instruments of God's innovation, "With loving regard, the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of his own surpassing wisdom, calling him to share in his creative power."44

Innovate Yourself First

A person who is eager to enhance their relationship with God through innovation must first intentionally innovate themselves. Specifically, they should ask God to use their innovation efforts to provide insight, and then be open to whatever His response might be. They should carefully study the Holy Bible to learn how God has innovatively changed people and circumstances throughout history.

Next, they should set quantum objectives for themselves and intentionally confront wicked problems that often confound

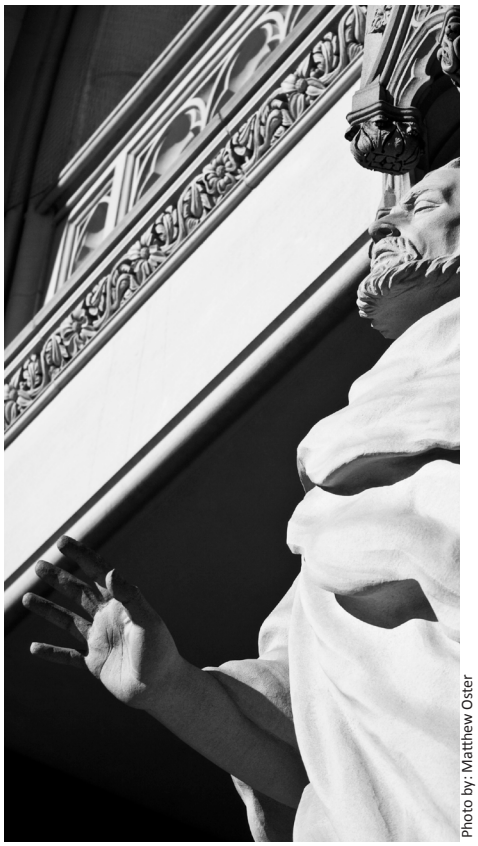

Photo by: Matthew Oster

people. They should study and engage new and unusual things, let their natural curiosity run wild and "get wet" by diving deeply into other cultures, ideas, relationships, and localities. Similarly, they must learn as much as possible about current and prospective clients.

Finally, Christian innovators should journal about their efforts to see God in innovation and communicate with others who share the same journey.

Rough Road of Innovation

Christians willing to be innovative and willing to do God's will on earth must have courage: "Creativity is dangerous. We cannot open ourselves to new insight without endangering the security of our prior assumptions. We cannot propose new ideas without risking disapproval and rejection. Creative achievement is the boldest initiative of mind, an adventure that takes its hero simultaneously to the rim of knowledge and the limits of propriety."45 Because of the Fall, people have a natural and sometimes rabid antipathy to any change brought about through innovation. As Von Krogh said, "People are loath to accommodate new knowledge that undermines or runs counter to their stories, especially if that knowledge is conveyed by other group participants with different backgrounds,"46 mirrored by Grudin when he noted, "Many valid new ideas endanger the interests vested in established theories and no professional field, no matter how enthusiastically it endorses innovation, is free from a nagging and purely self-interested resentment of newness."47 Might we occasionally fail in our innovation efforts? Absolutely! As Grudin clarifies, "To think creatively is to walk at the edge of chaos. In thinking the original, we risk thinking the ridiculous. In opening the way for a few good ideas, we open the way for many bad ones, lopsided equations, false syllogisms, and pure nonsense dished up by unhindered impulse."48 Schwartz similarly echoes, "Failure is the rule rather than the exception, and every failure contains information… Perseverance must be accompanied by the embrace of failure. Failure is what moves you forward. Listen to failure."49 Failure is neither a reflection upon the intensity of our faith nor of the power of the One we serve, "a God who makes all things new."50

Innovation, like all other elements of our lives, must be considered in its eternal context, "The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born by his purpose and for his purpose."51 Creative innovation is a path we may take to know, praise, communicate, and partner with the remarkably innovative God who made us all.

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