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By Rick Boxx

UNCONVENTIONAL STRATEGIES

In the 1880s, entrepreneur Henry Crowell bought an oat mill to produce feed for horses. Even though Crowell had high expectations when he started, the business was struggling and he resolved to turn to God in prayer, seeking a creative solution for his business woes. He had run out of ideas for expanding his horse feed enterprise.

In answer to his prayers, God led Henry to embark of an concept that few people, if any, had ever imagined. Crowell would change his “market” for oats, beginning to sell his oats to people – as a breakfast cereal. This was an unconventional strategy, because oats were traditionally sold from insect-infested barrels in general stores as horse feed. No reasonable human being would want to buy oats infested with bugs!

Selling oats for human consumption seemed foolish at best, crazy at worst, and Crowell’s critics were having a good laugh at his expense. However, again in response to his prayers, God gave him another idea: He would design a cardboard box that could be filled with rolled oats to place on grocery store shelves. The cardboard boxes would be sealed, impenetrable to the insects that would desire to devour the oats as food.

Today, Crowell’s enterprise has become prominent in the food retailing world and is widely known as Quaker Oats. The company now sells not only oats and oatmeal, but a variety of other cereals and food products. All because he was unable to sell enough oats for horse feed!

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Too often, we try to face our business challenges alone, determined to rely on our own innovation and ingenuity. This, the Bible tells us, is true foolishness when we can call on the wisdom and resources of the Creator God. As *Proverbs 16:9* says, *"In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps."* To state it another way, many times we find ourselves inclined to think, "I know what I need to do. I've got this," while God is waiting for us to ask so He can respond, "I have a much better idea." Here is some more wisdom from the Scriptures:

Do not insist on figuring everything out. Sometimes in our pride, arrogance or stubbornness, we feel we must understand exactly what we must do and why. God, however, has a different perspective: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight"* (*Proverbs 3:5-6*).

Commit your work to God and trust He will guide you. When tempted to "compartmentalize" our faith, restricting it to spiritual settings like a worship service or private devotional reading, we should remember God wants to be involved in every area of our lives, including the work we do. *"Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun"* (*Psalms 37:3-6*).

Moral of this story: If you need fresh ideas or an unconventional strategy for your workplace, pray, listen, and let God guide your steps.

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Reflection/Discussion Question

1. Had you previously heard about Henry Crowell and his oat manufacturing business? Would you consider the shift in focus – from horses to people – an unconventional strategy? Why or why not?
2. When, if ever, have you seen someone – perhaps even yourself – adopt an unconventional strategy to revive a failing business, or to resolve a major business dilemma? Where do you think the idea for that strategy came from?
3. How would you restate or paraphrase Proverbs 16:9, which says, “In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps”? How can you apply this teaching to your circumstances where you work?
4. Why, in seeking to make a major decision – especially if time seems to be an important factor in the process – does it seem so difficult to “trust in the Lord,” as Proverbs 37 instructs us to do?

NOTE:

If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Jeremiah 29:11-13; Ephesians 2:10; Colossians 3:17, 23-24; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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