

A Time and a Place

By Ken Godevenos, MBA, CCP, CHRP

Some otherwise-sincere Christian businesspeople just can't help but sell — even at church.

As pastors, you can likely identify at least one individual in your membership who fits the personal-business-pusher (PBP) description. Merely sharing or letting people know what we're involved in with respect to making a living isn't being a PBP; that spectrum starts when one begins extensively advertising what he or she does to those in the church, either verbally or in writing. It continues with one's seeking to meet with church family individuals for the ultimate purpose of presenting services or products to them, hoping to influence their purchase decisions. It reaches new heights when one starts applying pressure for them to use one's own services. It tops out when the PBP ostracizes them — either directly or indirectly — for using someone else's services or products.

A Scriptural Context

There's nothing wrong with making an honest living. In fact, scripture proclaims it. But there are references to work in scripture that caution us about *how* we pursue the 'labor' God promotes. First, Exodus 20:8-10 tells us in the NAS translation to *[r]emember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work...*

We'd all do well to recognize that work isn't the panacea some of us think it is. Ecclesiastes 6:7 (NAS) states unequivocally that *all a man's labor is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not satisfied.*

While some might disagree, I believe, on balance, that scriptures such as these support the premise that when we come together for worship and communion, we shouldn't seek ways in which we can gain financially from each other.

The Practical Consequences

I've personally experienced the displeasure of a couple whose personal-travel business services were not used by our church when planning a

short-term mission trip. I've also been privy to the regret of a church administrator who chose a particular supplier because of their affiliation with their church, thinking the church would be well served. In an extreme situation, I'm aware of an entire board that suffered great pain — collectively and individually — for years after a member of their congregation lost a large amount of money through an investment that turned sour. Many more examples could be cited.

Luckily, preplanning, teaching and good role-modeling by leaders can prevent many of these circumstances and attitudes:

1. Be aware that personal-business pushing does, and will, occur in your congregation.
2. Make sure you, your staff and board members are neither guilty of "pushing" your own personal businesses nor trying to gain, as a purchaser, from a contact in your church.
3. Teach or preach on the subject specifically, or make reference to possible application of verses when teaching or preaching on those passages.
4. As early as possible, tackle situations in which complaints have reached you as a result of others pushing their products or services too eagerly. Ask the complainer to approach the pusher directly, if at all possible or feasible. When this fails, act in your capacity as a leader to intervene with love and respect, and give fair warning to the PBP.
5. Set ground rules — perhaps in writing — for boards, committees, small groups, various volunteer units, etc. These should clearly spell out that members can expect to be free from harassment by individuals promoting their services or products.
6. Ensure that your electronic or hardcopy directory of church members clearly states the information contained therein may not be used for purposes of soliciting business, directly or indirectly.
7. Ensure that newcomers who eagerly want to get involved in major leadership roles have had enough time to prove themselves as both solid potential volunteer congregants and Christ-followers.
8. View any violation by those new to Christianity or the Church in general as an opportunity to

lovingly show them what being part of the family of God is really about.

9. Let it be known that being asked to provide a service or product by someone in the congregation (vs. one promoting their own products/services) is totally acceptable, assuming all ethical and legal requirements are adhered to.

10. Provide neutral opportunities for your businesspeople to legitimately and equitably promote their products or services by allowing them to purchase advertising for your church photo directory, sponsor some of your outreach program costs, etc.

11. Don't let any congregant's personal-business interests influence you to make a particular product or service purchase decision on behalf of your church.

12. Don't allow any congregant's personal contribution to your church to influence the same type of decision.

Understandably, many congregants can fend for themselves when it comes to dealing with aggressive salespeople, both outside and inside your church. However, our jobs as church leaders go beyond that. We're required to protect those in our care who can't seem to speak for themselves, as well as help ensure an optimum environment in which all people can worship, enjoy fellowship, and effectively serve together.

Ken Godevenos has served on and/or chaired several church boards. He's a human resources and church consultant, mediator, executive director of SCA International (www.scainternational.org), and co-leader of the Take3 ministry (www.take3.org). Contact him by calling 905.853.6228 or by e-mail at kgod@accordconsulting.com. Log on to www.accordconsulting.com for more information.

