



# 5 career-saving principles for ministry entrepreneurs.

By John Pearson

# WISDOM

**YOU KNOW THE DRILL:** A gifted, entrepreneurial ministry leader returns from his mountaintop meeting with God. He has a new vision. He casts the vision. He recruits more staff. He inspires major donors. He leaps tall buildings.

He falls flat on his face.

What's wrong with this picture? Why are entrepreneurial pastors and ministry leaders so misunderstood? This article will explore five career-saving principles for ministry entrepreneurs and look at the best practices for integrating Christian entrepreneurs into the body of Christ.

**Principle #1: Entrepreneurs, recognize that your colleagues view you as very different animals.**

In the leading textbook on entrepreneurship, *Entrepreneurship* (eighth edition, McGraw Hill Irwin, 2010), Robert D. Hisrich defines an entrepreneur as “an individual who takes initiative to bundle resources in innovative ways and is willing to bear the risk and/or uncertainty to act.”

Churches and ministries desperately need initiative and innovation. Yet for all the talk and enthusiasm for entrepreneurship in the marketplace, those who exercise their entrepreneurial gifts in ministry are regularly misunderstood and often marginalized. Why?

First of all, entrepreneurship is a totally different animal. If you consider yourself an entrepreneur, you likely see the world—and ministry opportunities—far differently than others do.

Hisrich, the Garvin Professor of Global Entrepreneurship and director of the Center for Global Entrepreneurship at Thunderbird School of Global Management, also understands the nonprofit ministry world and has led seminars for hundreds of nonprofit leaders over the years. Along with coauthors Michael P. Peters and Dean A. Shepherd, Hisrich has created perhaps the most comprehensive study of entrepreneurial men and women. In this remarkable 602-page book, filled with fascinating sidebar profiles of in-the-trenches entrepreneurs, the authors uncover every entrepreneurial stone imaginable and conclude their work with 17 case studies covering 120 pages, from the Rug Bug Corporation to “Mamma Mia: The Little Show That Could.”

Hisrich cites a study from Howard Stevenson, a Harvard University professor, that says that “entrepreneurship represents a mode of managing an existing firm that is distinct from traditional management in terms of eight dimensions: (1) strategic orientation, (2) commitment to opportunity, (3) commitment of resources, (4) control of resources, (5) management structure, (6) reward philosophy, (7) growth orientation, and (8) entrepreneurial culture.”

So, two questions: First, if you think of yourself as entrepreneurial, how diligent have you been in studying entrepreneurship? Second, have you humbly articulated the advantages (and risks) of an entrepreneurial spirit and culture to your ministry colleagues?

**Principle #2: Be ready. When bold action is needed, God empowers entrepreneurs.**

When entrepreneurs read their Bibles, the adrenaline kicks in. When I reflected recently on the entrepreneurial hole-in-the-roof healing (Luke 5:19–25), I pictured a new and innovative ministry, “Hole in the

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Roof.” Rats! Another ministry entrepreneur already had the website.

But be ready. Be thinking. Know that your gifts are needed.

“Business as usual just won’t cut it anymore,” writes John Jackson in his book *PastorPreneur*. He adds, “The church has been a bedrock foundation of Western society for hundreds of years, but today the church is standing on the edge of irrelevance.”

Jackson quotes George Barna, who warns, “Let’s cut to the chase. After nearly two decades of studying Christian churches in America, I’m convinced that the typical church as we know it today has a rapidly expiring shelf life.”

A *pastorpreneur* (a term coined by Jackson) is “an innovative Christian leader (pastor, lay leader or Christian business person), a creative dreamer who is willing to take great risks in church ministry with the hope of great gain for Christ and his kingdom. Like any good entrepreneur, this kind of leader isn’t wild-eyed and foolish. He assesses goals, opportunities, and risks very carefully, but he is willing to attempt great things for God.”

Jackson admits that the path of a pastorpreneur is often checkered with both successes and defeats, “but his successes touch many more people than if he had chosen to play it safe. And he learns from his failures so even they are stepping-stones to future gains.”

Be encouraged. Since you are a different animal, you have the guts to make a difference. However . . .

**Principle #3: “Ready! Fire! Aim!” gets old after a while.**

In the body of Christ, there is even greater pressure on ministry entrepreneurs than on their colleagues in the marketplace. Ministry entrepreneurs must perform at a high level with limited resources. They must also walk with Jesus.

Because many entrepreneurs are addicted to speed (my wife says I have two speeds: fast and off), they will miss the obvious signs of their own shortcomings. So Christian entrepreneurs need to master the short course in biblical peacemaking—or at least print “I’m sorry” on the back of their business cards.

While “Ready! Fire! Aim!” might be your steady diet, the Steady Eddie team members you need will crumble under the chaos, fast pace, and too-many-balls-in-the-air environment. That doesn’t honor God. Instead, affirm and bless your colleagues. “Encouragement is oxygen to the soul,” wrote George Matthew Adams.

Ask a trusted colleague to give you frank feedback and often. Are

your entrepreneurial gifts a blessing to your coworkers, your family, and the Lord? Hang out with and learn from other entrepreneurs who love Christ and have found that delicate balance.

**Principle #4: Don’t get caged in.**

Caution! The hierarchy and bureaucracy, along with the “kill-it-with-a-committee” torture, of many church and ministry organizations will try to cage you in instead of giving you wings.

Others have gone before you, failed miserably, and poisoned the path. Thick policy manuals have been written to protect organizations from your kind. True, not all Christian entrepreneurs are blessed with the requisite leadership gifts to provide both innovation and that all-important sustainability. Some are expert at risk-taking but lousy at building capacity.

So after enduring one too many trial-and-error fiascos by well-meaning entrepreneurs, many ministries today just don’t have the stomach or the budget for more entrepreneurial risk.

A reminder: The purpose of your church or organization is not to provide a platform or a laboratory for your own self-fulfillment. It’s not about you. It’s about God. If the organization can leverage and maximize your entrepreneurial giftedness, then serve with passion and a whole heart. If not, do not suffer silently or whine incessantly. Move on, but only after seeking wise counsel. As C. S. Lewis reminds us, “To walk out of his will is to walk into nowhere.”

**Principle #5: There are no traffic jams along the extra mile.**

What do people love about Christ-followers who leverage their entrepreneurial gifts? They get it done. The kingdom grows. Ministries meet human and spiritual needs faster, better, and with greater courage.

As NFL football great Roger Staubach once said, “There are no traffic jams along the extra mile.” When you bring your unconstrained optimism and zeal to kingdom work, you are often setting the pace. Because you go the extra mile, you are genuinely needed. So don’t be discouraged with setbacks. (Oh, wait. You’re an entrepreneur—you tunnel over, under, or around setbacks!)

Richard J. Goossen, director of the Centre for Entrepreneurial Leaders at the School of Business at Trinity Western University, has interviewed more than 150 Christian business entrepreneurs. He published his research in four page-turner volumes. In the preface to *Entrepreneurial Leaders: Reflections on Faith at Work, Volume IV*, he writes, “An entrepreneur is one who sees reality clearly—has a good read on the circumstances; but the entrepreneur is also one who can see possibilities, connections, and the ways in which innovation and creativity can alter that reality.”

Goossen adds, “People of hope are not naïve; it is merely that they do not acquiesce to the status quo. They are realists—just like the prophets were realists. But they are convinced that evil does not have the last word, and that a problem is a challenge, an opportunity that calls for innovation and creativity. And persistence!”

So, if you are an entrepreneur, heed this counsel: Be innovative. Be ready. Be thoughtful—do no harm. Be called. And be creative! ●

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