

12 Things I Learned as a Publisher 12/1//2008

By Ramon Rocha III



1. Instrument. It is really all about God: We are just His cracked vessels, His instrument. People can enter the kingdom or grow spiritually through the books we publish, thanks to God.

I eagerly look for testimonies of people touched by our books. OMF Lit intentionally seeks feedback by printing an invitation at the back of each book with our contact information: "Please share how this book has helped or blessed you."

We read the testimonies from our readers to our staff during weekly devotions to encourage them.

2. Balance. Balancing ministry and business is a daily challenge. I have felt this tension at several decision points: what titles to print, pricing, market segments to target, inventory, cash flow, accounts receivable, HR concerns and so on. It is difficult but not impossible. The tension, in fact, forces you to be prayerful.

3. Risk. It is exciting to grow the business (and its ministry), to see what works and what doesn't, to be competitive and pursue excellence. I have taken calculated risks and tried not to be paralyzed by fear. Some ventures were failures but most were successful — only by God's grace!

4. Titles. It's a big challenge to find the right "portfolio" — the right titles to publish each year.

Some titles have been sure sellers. Others turned out to be "lemons" despite our research. Lord, help us! Keeping 'ministry' titles in the backlist has limits, but we should still do it. These titles, though they may not be bestsellers, are what we feel the Church needs to grow and mature.

5. Numbers. After deciding which titles to publish, how many copies is the right quantity? We should not print too many and imperil our cash flow, nor too few and miss an opportunity. Because of the prospect of higher sales, I have been tempted not to follow the rule to print less.

6. Advertising. How to inform people of our titles using the most effective means at the least possible cost is a big question mark — but it pays to advertise.

7. Places. We have to make sure the right people can buy our books at the places they shop and when they need them. Readers should be able to find our books without difficulty.

8. Records. It takes discipline to keep and maintain accurate records of all our transactions. A good, reliable accounting software helps. In record keeping, I've learned that integrity should not be compromised at any time.

9. Assets. The right people are a company's best asset. Do they possess the skills and the attitudes that will propel your company toward growth? Make sure they do.

10. Leadership. Leading by example as CEO is vital for me to help keep the staff motivated. I strive hard, in God's mercy, to be a model employee and a disciplined follower of Christ.

11. Prayer. Helping my staff stay spiritually strong can only be achieved through prayer and an intentionally wholistic program. Our leadership encourages each staff member to attend a local church regularly and participate in small group Bible study. We also set aside a budget for our annual four-day

staff retreat and outing, which we held in different resorts outside of Manila. These times are always great fun and spiritually refreshing, too.

12. Bottom line. All of the above lessons will only matter if the Christian publishing house aims to be faithful, depends on God's grace for results and works for His glory alone. This is the true bottom line.

Ramon Rocha III is former CEO of OMF Literature, Philippines, and head of MAI Asia. He and his wife Grace are in the process of becoming members of OMF International.