

Door to Door Sales (Colportage)

Rolf Garborg

It has been my privilege to serve God in the Christian publishing world for over 50 years. During these years I have been involved in many areas of distribution from bookstores throughout the Caribbean and Mexico to launching Editorial Betania, a Spanish publishing house currently part of Grupo Nelson, to personally conducting 300 home book parties (think Tupperware only with Christian products), to heading up international sales with Zondervan Publishing House to building our own publishing house with my brothers and nephew. My travels have now taken me to over 100 countries, most of that related to training on distribution of Christian products.

I will soon turn 75 years old but still have the fire and energy to invest in helping grow the distribution piece for our products. One of my mentors many years ago told me this: "Nothing happens until somebody sells something!" Amen to that. Without sales, the best written, most beautifully designed and produced products are just inventory, and that is a major cost factor.

It is my belief that one major paradigm shift in our thinking and the thinking of all retailers of our products can bring amazing increases in our distribution. This shift is to change how we think about our business from being a building into which people come to buy our goods to that of a base out from which we go to sell our goods. This changes everything. My prayer for each of us is that God will help us to see what can be done when we embrace the challenge of going out to sell our goods.

One of the ways to do this in Africa is through direct sales. This could be colportage (door-to-door), person to person, business to business or any "face-to-face" method which allows the peddler to share about their goods and ask for the sale. The same mentor I mentioned earlier used to tell me, "The key to success in this business is to show the books to a lot of people and ask them to buy them!" Amen to that too.

So much of the effort (and money) of publishers is spent on advertising. This is OK, but there are various ways to do that. I like to say there are 3 kinds of advertising. 1. The kind you pay for. 2. The kind you don't pay for. 3. The kind that pays you!!! And guess which one is the most effective? Here's what I mean. Advertising you pay for is traditional methods of space ads, flyers, etc. Hard to measure and quantify effectiveness. Advertising you don't pay for is publicity. Any article or promotion of your product that is free. You typically can say more and make better connection with the viewer/reader. Advertising that pays you is a satisfied customer. This person simply needs to be encouraged to start a word-of-mouth promotion of your product. This pays you in additional sales with no cost.

When I think of Africa I envision thousands of young, passionate Believers going out with product they can sell and in so doing, grow in their own faith, evangelize and also earn a living. The key to a successful effort to make this change is 3 fold. Start small, find good people and help them grow. In other words, do it yourself and when you find an enthusiastic Believer who is intrigued with you or your products recruit them and then train them to go and do what they saw you do. Does that sound familiar?

Think about Jesus. When he began his ministry at his baptism, the first thing he encountered

was the temptation to not go through with it. He rebuked Satan and began with meeting basic needs of those near him. Healing the sick, changing water into wine, casting out demons and more. He started where he was and small. While he was out "doing the job himself", he found others that he invited to join him, his disciples. They began to follow him around and watch what he was doing. Then he took them aside and trained them. It took him one full year to find the 12 disciples. Then, after they were trained he sent them out two-by-two to do what he had taught them to do, what they had seen him do...and they were successful, except when they got ahead of themselves. Jesus then told them that that kind of work can only be done when you pray and fast. However, when the Romans took Jesus, his disciples denied him and went into hiding for fear of the Jews.

That's when Jesus appeared to them in the Upper Room and said: "Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you". And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Ghost." What happened after that changed the world. We are all here today as Believers in Jesus and his disciples because of this event. Earlier, in Matt 11:28 Jesus said to come unto him and learn of him. Then he said in Mark 16:15 "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Now in John 20 he says, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit."

It's still the same today. Our job as publishers of His Word and other Christian products is to go and multiply just as Jesus did.

I pray that God will put it in the hearts and minds of thousands of young, energetic, faith-filled Africans to go out and make disciples using our wonderful products. If I can be of encouragement to you or even come to your part of the world to help find and train these young believers, please let me know.