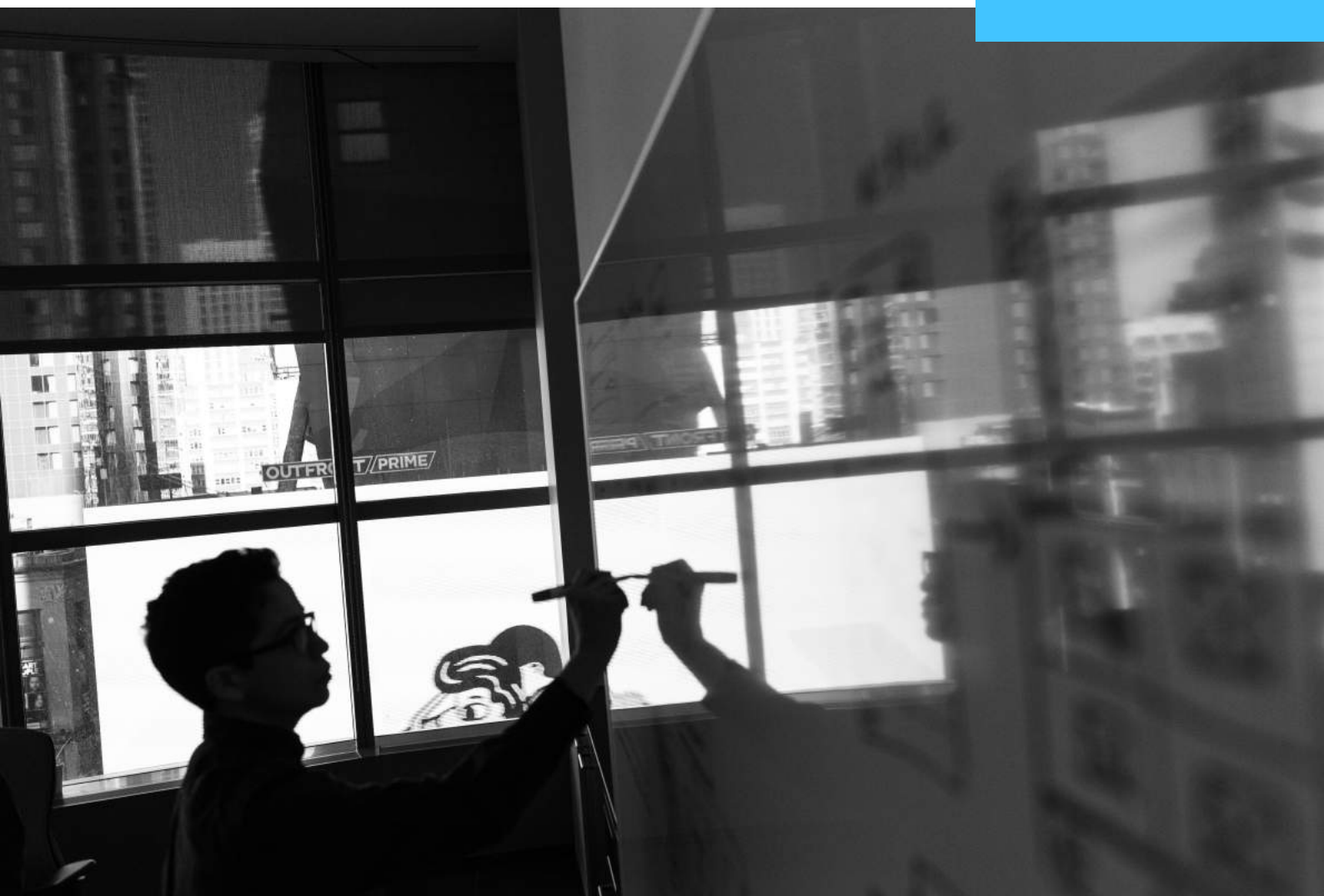


PLAN TO PROFIT THE GOSPEL

THROUGH YOUR WORKPLACE GROUP



By Craig Josling



CITY BIBLE FORUM

Ask the bigger questions

Three fish lived in a river. One was named *Plan Ahead*, another was *Last Minute* and the third was called *Disaster*.

One day they heard a fisherman say he was coming back tomorrow to cast his net into their part of the river.

Plan Ahead said, "I am swimming down the river tonight".

Last Minute said, "nah I'll work it out tomorrow".

Disaster just stared blankly ahead, opening and closing his mouth.

The next day the fisherman came back and cast his net. *Plan Ahead* was long gone but *Last Minute* and *Disaster* were caught by the fisherman.

Last Minute, thinking quickly, his little heart beating, rolled belly up, closed his mouth and pretended to be dead. The fisherman threw him back into the water. "Phew that was close," he thought. His little heart still beating wildly.

However, *Disaster* just stared blankly ahead, opening and closing his mouth. He ended up sizzling in someone's frypan.

The moral of the story is:

If you want to avoid disaster and a lot of last minute stress ... then plan ahead.

In this article I'm going to help you to plan ahead in your workplace group. Not only to avoid disaster and a lot of last minute stress, but so that your group might be more profitable for the gospel.

But why bother to plan if God is sovereign?

God is indeed sovereign and sometimes he grows his Kingdom apart from, or even in spite of, our plans. For example the gospel grew exponentially in China AFTER the foreign missionaries were expelled in 1949. This is not what most of us would have planned to happen.

However, God also uses the brains and plans of his people to work out his sovereign plans and purposes. For example. The apostle Paul went to strategic places like Ephesus and Corinth to spread the gospel. Acts 19:9-10 tells us that Paul set himself up in the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus so that over a 2-year period "all the inhabitants of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the message about the Lord."

While we need to recognise God's sovereignty over all things, we are still responsible to make good plans.

But what is good planning? How do we assess it?

In our paid jobs we assess our plans by measuring profit or by whether we hit our KPIs. But what about in our workplace ministries? How do we assess our plans there?

A simple question I ask when planning is: "What is the profit for the gospel?"

Here are three ways our workplace groups can be profitable for the gospel. Would some careful and thoughtful planning help your workplace group to be more profitable for the gospel in these areas?

1

The first is helping Christians to live out what they already know in the work context. The workplace is a great place to put God's word into practice. For example as we deal with conflict or as we seek to share the good news of Jesus with those around us.

2

The second profitable area of workplace ministry is to 'religious people'. These are people who go to church, or are nominal, but don't yet understand the gospel of grace. They are usually positive to the Bible but have never spent much time studying the Bible. How can we make our groups more welcoming to these people?

3

The third profitable area of workplace ministry is to non-Christians. These might be atheists from mainland China or Hindus from India. Often these people are very interested to learn more about Christianity but are a little shy about approaching us or coming to our group.

THREE PLANNING TIPS

Now it's time to get down to practicalities. I'm going to share three planning tips which have helped me as I've led workplace groups.

1. PLAN TO PLAN

Set aside time in your diary for planning. Gather your leadership team together, say every quarter, to review how things have been going and to plan ahead. At the end of the year set aside even more time to do a thorough review and some big picture planning (see next point).

2. WRITE DOWN YOUR PURPOSE, VISION AND AIMS

Putting your purpose, vision and aims down on paper means you're more likely to work towards them.

Let's go through each of them.

PURPOSE

The purpose of your group is: why you exist

I've just started leading a workplace group at Westpac and, with the help of a purpose statement I saw from the Commonwealth Bank group, I recently wrote out a purpose statement for my Westpac group.

We seek to glorify God and to seek the wellbeing of the people of Westpac through:

- Helping people who are curious about Christianity to find out more.
- Learning from the Bible and discussing its implications for life.
- Enjoyable social and spiritual get togethers.

Note that purpose statements are fairly high level but they do identify areas you want to focus on. Also notice that this purpose statement is couched in language which I think would be acceptable to company management in case you ever wanted to become a recognised group or were quizzed about your group.

VISION

A vision statement is the picture you get in your head when you close your eyes and think: "Under God, if all goes well what will success look like?"

My vision for the Westpac group is this: I picture four groups of five people each in a corner of the meeting room (there are too many people to run the meeting as one large group). In the small groups I notice quite a few people who don't go to church at all or don't go to a good Bible-teaching church. These people are looking relaxed and enjoying themselves as they discuss the Bible.

AIMS

Aims are a list of do-able action steps.

One of the groups I lead in workplace ministry is an Evangelistic Prayer Team (EPT). EPTs have a fairly set purpose: Encouraging one another to share the good news of Jesus with our non-Christian work colleagues.

Because EPTs follow a well defined format each fortnight they don't require much planning. This is a good thing at one level, but leaders can become lazy and complacent.

Recently I spent some time working out some aims for my EPT for this year (we've been meeting together for about three years). This year I'm aiming to:

1. Set up a WhatsApp group so we can communicate with each other between meetings.
2. Go out to lunch at least twice to get to know each other better.
3. Run a session on how to read the Bible 1-1 with an interested non-Christian friend and to challenge the group to find someone to read with.

The fact that I've spent time writing down these aims means I'm more likely to act on them.

3. SPREADSHEET WITH YOUR WEEKLY PLAN

My third planning tip is to set up a spreadsheet and populate it with what you plan to do at each meeting. It is here that I will include when we are going out to lunch and when we will do our 1-1 Bible reading training session.

Planning ahead like this takes time but will lead to saving time (and stress) in the future. Detailed spreadsheet planning also helps you to remember important events such as an evangelistic opportunity. Thirdly, it makes it easier to delegate to other people if, for example, you're going away and need someone else to fill in for you.

Investing time and energy to plan properly for your group can help you avoid disaster, a lot of last minute stress and make your group more profitable for the gospel.

What might you do to improve your planning process?