

## **Come back OXO, all is forgiven!**

### **Rob White**

There might just be a chance that you know this because Marion often mentions it in introducing us when we're speaking, but one of my early jobs, in my business life, was as a sales rep for OXO & Fray Bentos products. Honest, no word of a lie!

That could seem a million miles away from Baptist Minister, let alone peripatetic Mainstream Minister! And, on many counts, you'd be right: salary **and** commission (how about £25 for every new church member?), new company car & loads of samples! However, on other things I learnt a lot that I've never forgotten and, indeed, have built into my life from then on. I want to share one of those with you.

It's nothing new, but it seems that when it comes to working out mission in churches it's often absent. In that sales job we were constantly told, 'Plan your sell; sell your plan'. In other words, raise a strategy and you have a good chance of achieving your objectives. That has always been at the heart of all I've sought to do, with greater or less success.

Here's the (obvious) link with mission church: why do so many churches try to do mission without a strategy? Simply put in two words, it's hopeless and daft. So many churches strongly convinced of the need to be mission centres, have a kind of scatter-gun approach – try a few things and see what we hit. And, by God's grace, often there are a few hits, but no lasting impact. Surely we need a strategy, and for two main reasons.

The first reason is for encouragement and hope in our own lives as leaders. Heaven knows how frustrated and disappointed we often feel about the extent, depth and success of our church's mission! Strategy is not a cure-all, but it does keep us on track and brings great encouragement as we see it unfolding before us. By the way, all of this of course is only any good if initiated and sustained in prayer. All strategy must be birthed in listening to the missionary God and open to be changed according to revelation.

The second reason, I believe, is the main one, and that is that strategy is extremely important for engaging the people of the church, encouraging, inspiring them and making them realise that it's not mission impossible. How many questions do we hear from our people, such as: where do I fit in to this church's mission? The whole idea of mission scares me; where on earth do I start? I've never been used in any meaningful way in outreach, what's likely to change? Those questions, and loads more, I suggest all point to the need for strategy.

Strategy brings clarity. Why are we running Alpha courses – where do they fit in? Why have we suddenly decided to have a men's breakfast? The Carers & Toddlers mornings get a lot of people, but how do we build on that? It should be an enjoyable evening, but what led to our having that cabaret supper with that Christian musician (we've been assured he won't 'go for it') and what happens after that? All those things are well-intentioned, but are the scatter-gun approach. No wonder church people feel all at sea! No long-term thinking; no reasons given as to why we're taking that direction, therefore no security or encouragement for people to assure them that they have a part to play in

this and they can actually be fruitful. When a church has a strategy, well thought through and communicated, with clear reasons given and ongoing feedback, it brings great clarity, understanding and hope for every individual who has a heart to be involved in mission.

You may be thinking, 'Help! Just give me a mug of hot OXO and let me rest before having to think this lot through!' Part of Mainstream's ministry, through apostolic input (or help from outside, if that falls easier on the ear), is to help you and your Leadership team to think through a strategy. After all, 'Get stuck into God's mission' is one of Mainstream's three values. Bouncing it off someone else can be very helpful, so give us a shout if we can help.

Talk May 2007