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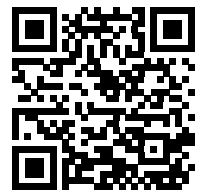
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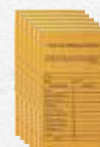
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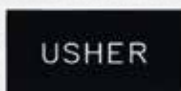
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In the End

I'm typically not one of those readers who will skip to the last chapter of a book because they want to know how it ends. But every now and then, I do, just so I can make sense of what is happening with the rest of the story. Since last fall, I've been doing a study through the book of Revelation with Bible Study Fellowship. And although we're not to the last chapter yet, I am glad that we already know how it all ends.

In Revelation 21:5a, John writes, "He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'" The rest of the chapter describes what God will make new and that we can trust God has the power and authority to do it because He is "the Beginning and the End." In fact, God has already proven that He can do this as clearly evidenced through the resurrection of Jesus. Because Jesus defeated sin and death, we can have a new life in Him, now and for eternity.

I don't know about you, but the promise of all things being made new sounds pretty amazing! I'm tired of things falling apart, wearing out, not working—and not just material things, but all things affected by the struggle with sin.

In this edition of *CRA Today*, each of the articles holds an opportunity for you to experience something new in your business, ministry and life.

Discover new products with features that highlight new vendors and new ways to display products in your store (and online) by cross merchandising.

Generate new foot traffic in your store by utilizing direct marketing, which is still one of the most effective ways to engage customers, or by planning a new in-store experience this summer. For some fun activities, take a look at the ideas, starting on page 38.

Make new connections through mentoring or by applying a new approach to reaching younger customers, which is a bonus for you and for them.

Create all new business by opening a new location or an additional location. If this is something you've been thinking about, be sure to check out the advice from experienced retailers in the article on page 34.

As you read through this issue, find one thing new you'd like to try this spring. This year, I've started some remodeling in my house, and it's a costly, time-consuming process. But the end result will be worth it. Likewise, trying something new in your business may be costly and time consuming. But it will be worth it in the end.



Sincerely,

Andrea Stock

Andrea Stock



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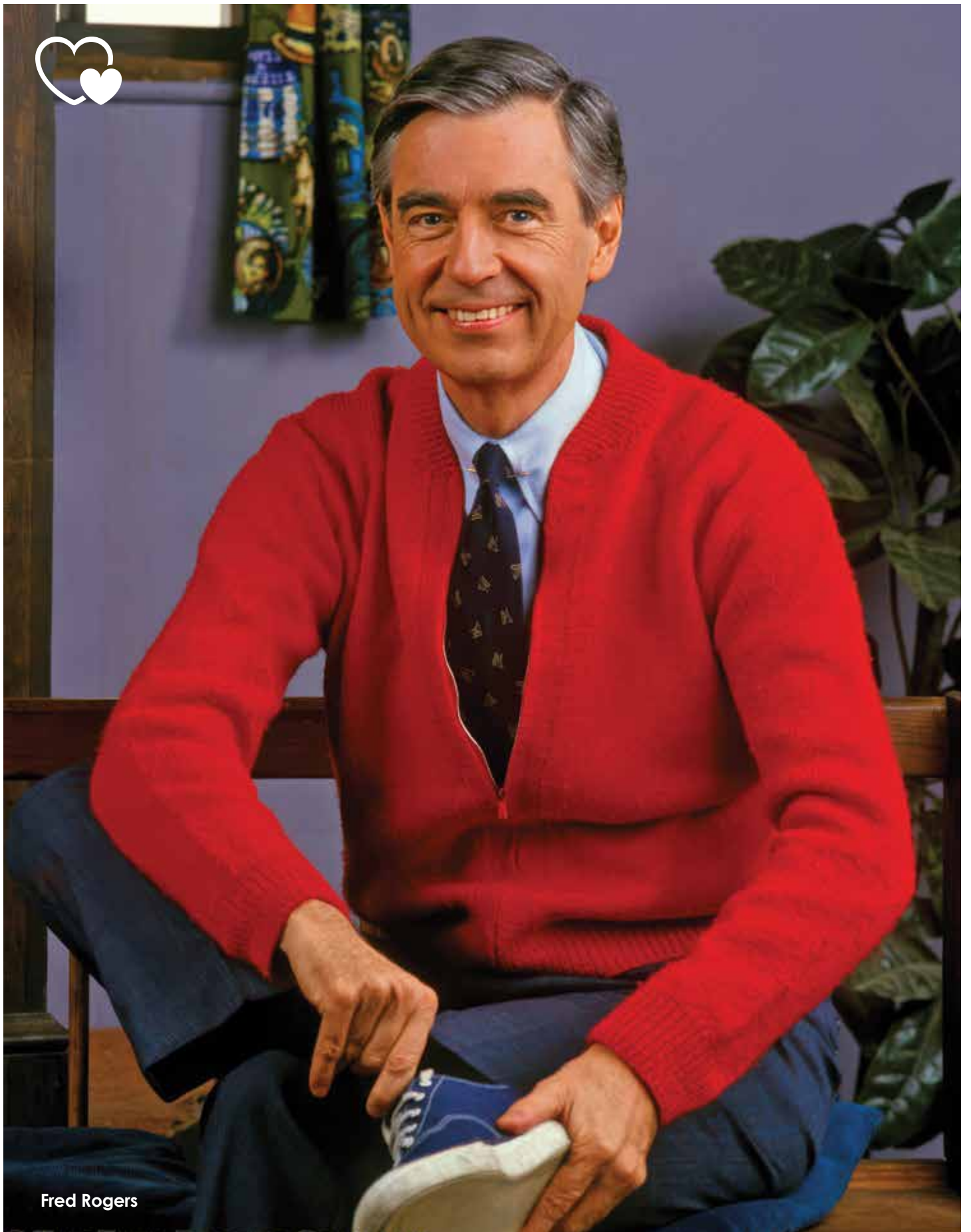
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Fred Rogers

Binge-Worthy Biographies That Show Christians How to Glorify God at Work

by Jordan Raynor

If neckties could tell tales, the one Fred Rogers is buried in would tell an epic one.

With a black and blue tartan pattern, it was the style traditionally worn by ordained Presbyterian ministers as they preached from the pulpit.

But Fred Rogers was no pastor. He was the host of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, an educational children's show that ran on public television for over 30 years.

In the mid-1980s, when the show was at its peak, nearly 10 percent of American households tuned in on a regular basis.¹ By that point, the show seemed inevitable. But the truth is that *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* almost never happened at all.

In 1955, just as his career in television was first taking off, Fred felt conflicted. He enjoyed his work as a writer and co-host of a program called *The Children's Corner*. He loved working with children and was a natural in front of the camera. But according to one biographer, "He couldn't quite give up the idea of service through the church he'd found attractive as a young boy sitting in the pews with his mother."²

And so he enrolled in Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, located across town from the television station where he worked.

Every weekday for eight years, he arrived at the station early to begin work. He stopped midday to drive thirty blocks to

class, then returned to the studio for a live broadcast.

But somewhere in the midst of all those drives back and forth between seminary and the studio, an idea began to form within him.

What if his career and calling weren't opposite trajectories after all? What if he was called not to choose but to combine? To carry the work of ministry onto a television set? To serve a congregation of young children behind puppets rather than pulpits?

The idea was radical. And the elders of the Pittsburgh Presbytery were not on board. They urged Fred to pursue a traditional path of ministry, preaching on Sundays in a church body and ministering to the congregation the rest of the week.

But Fred couldn't let the idea go. Fortunately, Fred wasn't alone in his conviction that there is more to Christian ministry than giving sermons and pastoring a congregation. His friend Reverend Bill Barker was teaching part time at the seminary and decided to go before the elders to challenge their decision.

Barker argued on behalf of Fred: "Look, here's an individual who has his pulpit proudly in front of a TV camera. His congregation are little people from the ages of about two or three on up to about seven or eight. And this is a whole

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Fannie Lou Hamer

congregation of hundreds of thousands if not millions of kids, and this is a man who has been authentically called by the Lord as much as any of you guys sitting out there.”³

Barker’s plea was a success, and in June of 1963, Fred was ordained in front of his family, friends and fellow ministers.

Not long after that service, Barker went on a trip to Scotland and returned with a gift for his newly ordained friend: a black-and-blue, tartan-patterned tie which a delighted Fred declared his “clergy tie.”

“I like to wear this on [*Neighborhood*] to give a subliminal message,” Fred once shared with a conspiratorial smile.⁴ Eventually, he chose to be buried in the tie—but not until he’d lived a life that changed the world.

If we want to see God’s kingdom expand throughout the earth, we need more than just pastors and missionaries working towards that end. We need what I call “mere Christians”: believers like Fred Rogers who don’t lead ministries full-time, but who work as entrepreneurs, teachers and baristas.



Ole Kirk Christiansen

Most of these believers deeply want to glorify God in everything they do—including their work—but they’re not sure what that looks like practically. That’s where examples like Mister Rogers can serve as a powerful tool.

Tim Keller once said, “You never learn anything spiritually valuable by being told. You have to be shown.” I think that’s part of the reason “the Word became flesh” (see John 1:14). Because while God knew that you and I needed to be *told* how to glorify Him through His written Word, He also knew that we needed to be *shown* how to glorify Him through the lived Word of Jesus Christ.

God knew that we humans need flesh-and-bone, three-dimensional models to understand what it looks like *practically* to glorify Him. Of course, we have the perfect model in Jesus Christ. But we also have imperfect yet helpful models in Jesus’ followers.



Hannah Moore

If you want to know what it looks like practically to glorify God, look first to Christ and second to Christ’s followers

This is why the apostle Paul said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” in 1 Corinthians 11:1. Paul’s words point to an important principle: If you want to know what it looks like practically to glorify God, look first to Christ and second to Christ’s followers. And that is what biographies can help us do.



C.S. Lewis

I wrote *Five Mere Christians* to bring your customers powerful stories and practical takeaways they can apply in their own work today:

- Fred Rogers, the TV host from *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, demonstrates how selfless service of others can reveal glimpses of heaven on earth.
- Fannie Lou Hamer, the courageous civil rights activist, models how to pursue justice without hating the unjust.
- Ole Kirk Christiansen, the founder of LEGO, shows how to persevere through life's most difficult trials and find God's purpose in play.
- Hannah More, the audacious poet largely credited for abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire, exemplifies how to change the world through culture and not just politics.
- C.S. Lewis, the literature professor and bestselling author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity*, invites readers to embrace their unique opportunities to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples.

By following Christ in their careers, these men and women changed the world. And the same Holy Spirit who worked through them is now at work in your customers!

With these heroes of the faith as their guides, modern “mere Christians” can embrace their vocations with confidence, knowing that their work—whether in a bookstore, a bakery or a boardroom—is a sacred means of glorifying God and serving others. **CRA**

¹ Maxwell King, *The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers* (New York: Abrams Press, 2018), 355.

² Ibid, 112.

³ Ibid, 123.

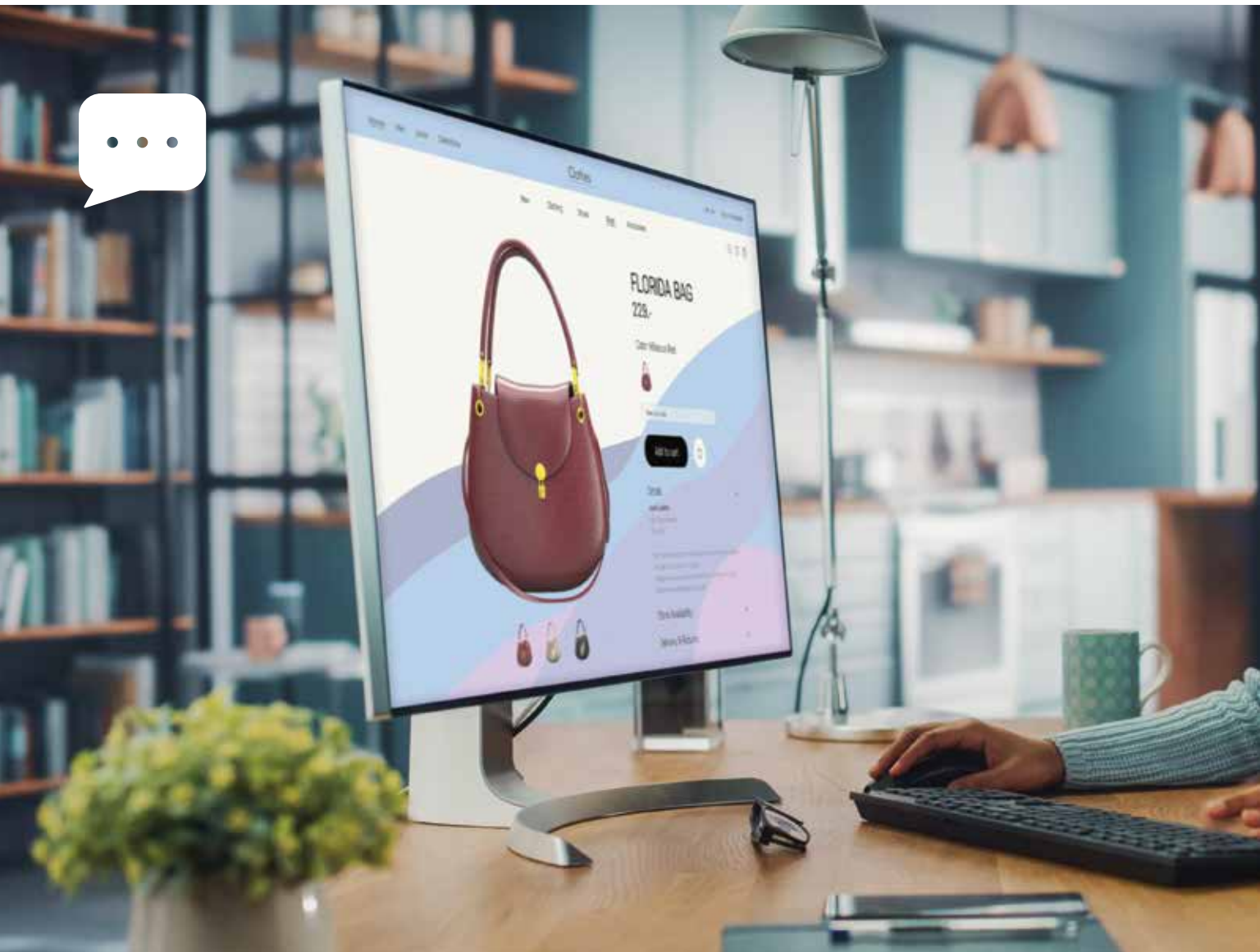
⁴ Amy Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers: Spiritual Insights from the World's Most Beloved Neighbor* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), xxviii.



Jordan Raynor is a leading voice of the faith and work movement. Through his bestselling books, podcasts and devotionals, Jordan has helped millions of Christians in every country on Earth connect the gospel to their work.

In addition to his writing, Jordan serves as the Executive Chairman of Threshold 360, a venture-backed tech startup that Jordan previously ran as CEO following a string of his own successful ventures.

Jordan has twice been selected as a Google Fellow and served in The White House under President George W. Bush. A sixth-generation Floridian, Jordan lives in Tampa with his wife and their three young daughters. The Raynors are proud members of The Church at Odessa where Jordan serves as an elder.



What is Faire?

You might have heard chatter about an online wholesale marketplace called Faire and wondered what all the hype is about this seemingly new platform. Andrea Koenning of Legacy Goods Christian Retailer in Victoria, TX, says she has actually used Faire for years, but that the number of vendors participating has exploded recently.



According to Faire CEO Max Rhodes, “We created Faire in 2017 with a simple vision: to help small businesses come together to compete on a more level playing field with the likes of Walmart and Amazon.”

Now, via their website (faire.com), Faire connects independent retailers with 100,000 brands from around the world.

Faire connects independent retailers with 100,000 brands from around the world

So what does this mean for those in the Christian retail industry? Faire is another viable option for stocking your store with inspirational and bestselling gift products, along with buying direct, from a distributor or from a repping group.

For regular Faire users like Mindy Uitermarkt from Stepping Stones Christian Bookstores in Grinnell, IA, the advantages are twofold.

First, “It’s an opportunity to try new companies,” Mindy starts. If customers come into Mindy’s store, looking for a specific gift item that she doesn’t carry, Mindy says she is likely able to find it and order it on Faire. As a result, Mindy not only makes the sale and keeps the customer happy but also orders other items from that gift line to have in her store for future or returning customers. Plus, if you’re unsure about ordering from a new company, Faire offers free returns on your opening order with a brand that you’ve never ordered from before. If you’re wondering what to order, check out Christian Retail Help Center Facebook page for recommended vendors from other retailers who use Faire. “One of the things that’s great about the industry is that stores share and help each other find great new products,” Mindy adds.

Second, “It’s like going to the Gift Market without leaving home,” Mindy says. For small stores who can’t take the time off to go to Atlanta or Dallas, this is a convenient way to see new products and get deals through the ease of online shopping. Rather than going to the big gift marts, Mindy does gift buying through Faire, CPE and sales reps like Genesis. Likewise, Andrea Koenning saves the time and money of attending a larger show by using Faire and going to both CPE shows instead.



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It's like going to the Gift Market without leaving home

So how does Faire work?

To order products on faire.com, you can sign up for free as a retailer. But most retailers who use Faire pay a monthly fee of \$19.99 to become an Insider member. Becoming an Insider member is the only way to qualify for free freight with select vendors; however, it's important to note that not all vendors offer free shipping and you may have to hit minimum costs to qualify. Still, if you intend to use Faire regularly, the cost of membership would essentially pay for itself.

For instance, Mindy says if she places an order for \$100 with Dicksons, she gets free shipping, which makes up for the monthly fee. Also, Dicksons gives Mindy's sales rep credit for the sale, so she is not cutting out her sales rep. Unfortunately, this is not the case with all vendors on Faire. When in doubt, be sure to reach out to your rep first.

If Mindy has a question about a product, she will use Faire to message a vendor. One time in particular, she could not find an item on Faire that she would normally order from a vendor. Mindy messaged the vendor and asked for that specific product to be added to Faire. The rep added it, and Mindy was able to place her order and receive the free freight.

While Faire is mainly an online marketplace for gifts, some

publishers are also available and offer free shipping at a certain purchase minimum.

Insider members also receive additional savings with net 60 billing. With this extended billing, retailers could potentially sell products before the bill is due. For extra savings twice a year, some vendors offer extra discounts during the "Faire Market" virtual trade show. Products might have an additional 3-25% discount on the normal wholesale price, which is a big deal contributing to more margin for your store.

How does Faire compare to other options?

While Faire offers convenience, a wide breadth of products and the potential for free freight, in terms of everyday discounts, Faire does not appear to be any cheaper than ordering direct from most gift companies or repping groups. Think of it like ordering through a distributor but getting vendor-direct pricing. If you're looking for the best discounts, Vicki Geist of Cedar Springs Christian Store in Knoxville, TN, suggests going directly to your rep who can offer you better discounts and dependable customer service. Faire may not be your new one-stop ordering destination, but it is another avenue for stocking your store with gifts to inspire your customers. **CRA**



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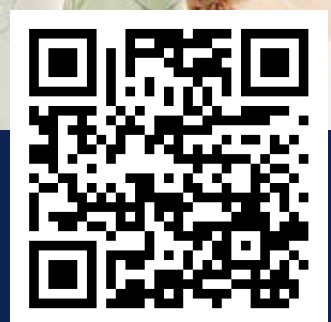




Photo courtesy of Blessings, A Christian Bookstore

Better Together

Keys to Cross Merchandising

What do you get when you cross a pen, a journal and a Bible in your store? A good example of cross merchandising. Some things are good on their own, but some things are just better together.

Cross merchandising is an effective retail technique that involves displaying products from different categories to promote multi-product purchases. In addition to adding visual appeal to your store, the advantages of cross merchandising include increasing sales, clearing out dead inventory and improving customer satisfaction.



Photo courtesy of New Life Christian Bookstore



Photo courtesy of Blessings, A Christian Bookstore

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Increasing Sales

By grouping complementary products together, you can entice customers to purchase ancillary products in addition to their primary purchase item. Tami Sarver from Galilean Bookstore in Leesville, LA, says, “We have started cross merchandising, and it is great. You can make add-on sales so easy, and most people like to see a collection of items that can go together. We do a display with journals, mugs, bookmarks, Bible cases and pens that all match. Just about anything that complements each other...put it together!”

Most people like to see a collection of items that can go together

Clearing Dead Product

For a product that may be a slow seller, try pairing it with one of your bestsellers. For example, display Bible covers and Bible tabs by Bibles. Cross merchandising can help draw attention to items that customers may not have noticed, increasing the likelihood of a sale. At Bible Supplies in North Platte, NE, the Bible wall is right next to their Bible accessories and Bible covers. Alyssa Fabik says this is their biggest cross merchandising concept and one they have on a daily basis.

Improving Customer Satisfaction

Cross merchandising makes shopping more convenient for customers, saving them time by helping them find other items they might enjoy or by inspiring gift-giving ideas. If you’ve ever shopped at Ikea, you know how well this works. The top floor is set up with various showrooms, decorated in different styles, helping shoppers visualize how each bookcase, chair, pillow, frame and bud vase looks together. Often times, the same product may be used in multiple rooms. Customers can then find all of those items for sale on the bottom floor just before checkout.

When Karen Welch from New Life Christian Bookstore, Murray KY, does cross merchandising, she will use the same products on different displays throughout the store. She said it may be more trouble to keep up with, but in the end, customers might not see an item on one display, but they could see it on another display.

While any product can be cross merchandised, the types of products that work best are the ones that make sense together. To do this, group products by occasion, theme or shoppers’ habits.

OCCASION

“When I pull a display, I will find anything and everything I might need for that occasion or season,” Karen Welch says. One display in Karen’s store has four different themes, one on each side, including “male birthday” and “female birthday” displays.

Alyssa Fabik also does cross merchandising with children’s books and matching stuffed animals for baby showers or first birthday gifts. And on their front or seasonal display, they will group products such as Nativities with Christmas books and other Christmas items during the Christmas season.

THEME

A theme can be anything such as a product line, color or interest. Alyssa says Kerusso does a wonderful job of cross merchandising products for the retailer by making matching shirts, hats, mugs and jewelry. And in June, her town celebrates NebraskaLand Day with all things Western. So Alyssa creates a display with Western books (fiction and non-fiction), mugs, jewelry, bookmarks and other items.

At New Life Christian Bookstore, one thing that has worked well is a “pet section” for dogs and cats. Karen says when a customer comes in looking for a gift and doesn’t know what to get, she will ask if the person has a pet. If the customer says yes, they can nearly always find something in the pet section.



Photo courtesy of Blessings, A Christian Bookstore

SHOPPERS’ HABITS

If you notice women mostly buying Bible studies, add tote bags or women’s Bibles in this area. If men are shopping in your store to buy gift items such as lotions or jewelry for the women in their lives, try adding T-shirts or other items that might appeal to their interests as well.

In addition to cross merchandising in your store, you can also highlight different products online. Alyssa Fabik says, “I find Facebook/social media to be an easy place to cross merchandise on purpose or by accident.” Often Alyssa and her staff will wear shirts or drink coffee from mugs they sell in their store while making videos for social media. “This commonly happens by accident, but I am getting better at doing it on purpose,” she jokes. They also like to cross

merchandise with books, jewelry or drinkware in pictures they post on Facebook.

Once you know the types of products you will cross merchandise, another key to consider is how to creatively display those products. A rule of thumb in design is to group in odd numbers. Karen recommends grouping products in threes.

Karen says she stays on top of color trends for inspiration. She is always looking at decorating magazines and visiting furniture showrooms and other shops to get ideas. Her goal is to make a customer stop and look and maybe even ask “why.”

One of the ways she does this is with different textiles and colors. She has storage drawers with fabrics for draping over empty boxes that will give depth and shape to a table display. Karen always adds depth to her displays in order to break up the line. She also looks for “props” she can use. For Christmas, she received a gift in a small crate. That crate is now part of a current display. And last year, Lifeway VBS had an inflatable orca whale and beach balls, which she used for a “beach theme” display.

“Necessity is the mother of invention oftentimes,” Lori Bowdoin says. At Blessings, A Christian Store, Lori always layers displays using crates, small shelves, benches, old books and other pieces she has collected over time. Many of these she has found at local antique and flea

markets, or even her husband’s scrap pile. She also watches vendor closeout sections for display options like trays, bowls, baskets and floral. Rather than using traditional displays, Lori says she prefers to use unique “found objects” as it’s easier to cross merchandise this way. And since she doesn’t keep much backstock, the store’s storage area is mostly full of display pieces.

Lori also uses a lot of floral and greenery to finish out displays and fill holes. “I believe that just like in your home, a piece of greenery can pull everything together,” she says. Her display pieces and floral stems are priced to be sold, too. In fact, Lori says that as they’ve done more lifestyle displays, they are selling more and more floral, trays, baskets and easels, and she is ordering those things with resale in mind now.

Some of Lori’s favorite recent cross merchandising displays include a Bible study themed table using a drop-down desk with Bibles and study materials tucked inside. At Christmastime, they had to pull a loveseat off the floor to add more space. They had nowhere to store it, so they put the loveseat on top of a table and displayed on top of and around it.

When it comes to cross merchandising, one other thing to remember is to have fun. Recruit a friend or make it a team building project. It’s a good way to train up a staff member for the future. After all, some things are better together! **CRA**

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Reflections on the CPE Winter 2025 Show

by Christy Dollins, Chief Operating Officer, The Munce Group

Who would've thought that Florida, known for its hot and humid weather, could offer chilly mornings and especially cool nights in February? Yet, that's exactly what greeted me each day as I made my way to the exhibit halls. Despite the unexpected chill, the warmth of the sunshine, the soothing gulf breeze, the chirping birds and the gentle bubbling of fountains provided an atmosphere of calm. It truly didn't feel like a typical business trip. Every morning, the golf course was empty, dew still on the greens, birds were singing in the on-site sanctuary and as the sun rose, there was a peacefulness that set the tone for the day ahead.

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This year's Winter CPE show, held at a resort, had an unusual blend of business and relaxation. Even though we accomplished a great deal—writing a record-breaking 2,191 orders (the largest number ever for a Winter show)—the atmosphere was one of camaraderie and relaxation.

We were excited to welcome 38 stores that registered for CPE for the very first time. Along with 20 vendors exhibiting for the first time. The change in venue has made the event more accessible to a wider audience, and we're seeing the benefits. This year, we introduced orientation sessions for first-time attendees and seminars focused on opening new stores and expanding existing ones. It's encouraging to see our industry growing slowly but surely, with two stores attending that hadn't yet opened, and several others considering a second location.



Jonathan Pokluda

Sunday morning kicked off with a time of Praise & Worship, featuring keynote speaker Jonathan Pokluda, sponsored by HarperCollins Christian Publishing. I've heard great things about JP as a pastor, especially to young adults, but his session truly exceeded expectations. He was engaging, relatable, and his message about making wise decisions resonated with everyone, no matter their stage in life. The birds that kept flying in through the open doors added a humorous and memorable touch to the morning—so much so that we named one of the birds “Bob” in honor of the unexpected guest. JP took it in stride, even joking about adding birds to his rider.



Bob Munce

Speaking of memorable moments, it was a privilege for CRA to honor Bob Munce with our Lifetime Achievement Award. Bob has been a cornerstone of our industry for over 30 years, and we were thrilled he could join us at the show. His leadership, especially in founding CPE over 20 years ago, continues to shape our industry today.



Other show highlights included a Sunday evening event with Ruth Chou Simons and Matt Hammitt, sponsored by HarperCollins Christian Publishing and Yellow Cover Press. Both led us in a beautiful evening of worship and reflection on using our talents for God's glory.



Matt Hammitt



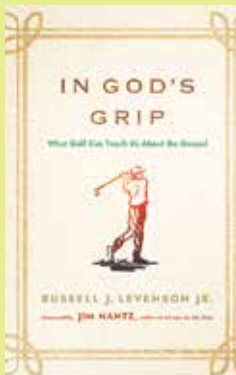
Ruth Chou Simons

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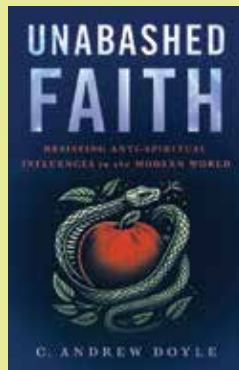
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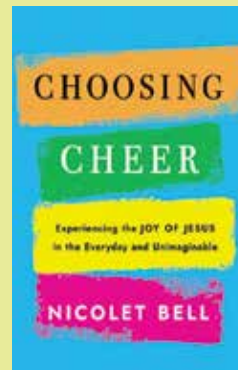
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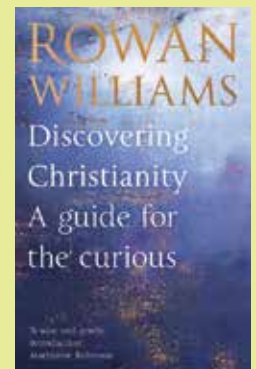
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The final evening together was one to remember, as we hosted a luau on the fairway, complete with Bob Smiley's comedic brilliance, sponsored by Tyndale House Publishers, and a spectacular fire-dancing performance. The show wasn't just about doing business—it was a celebration of faith, community and fun. In addition to the large number of orders written, first-time attendees and 20 new vendors, it was clear that everyone came not only to work but also to worship, encourage one another and enjoy each other's company.



Whitney Newby

Each morning started with devotions, which always set a positive and reflective tone for the day. Whitney Newby, sponsored by Harvest House Publishers, and Asheritah Ciuciu, sponsored by Moody Publishers, led us in worship, reminding us of the importance of renewing our spirits before diving into work. There was also plenty of laughter, shared moments and fun memories throughout the event. One new event this year was the Saturday evening welcome reception, where attendees enjoyed live steel drum music, delicious donuts courtesy of DonutNV and even a glow-in-the-dark putt-putt golf game with dinner.



I had the chance to sit with Karen and Mark Welch, who were reminiscing about their friendship with Peggy and Monte Knudsen. They shared how they met at a previous CPE show—a testament to the lasting connections made at these events. I was reminded of a heartwarming story from a few years ago at a Munce-hosted dinner at the Kentucky Castle. As we toured the castle, one of the staff members was frantically trying to block off the entrance to a turret, as a surprise proposal was about to take place! The Welch and Knudsens found themselves hiding behind small brick walls, sharing in the excitement of that unforgettable moment. It's memories like these that remind me why CPE is so special—not just for the business connections, but for the friendships, the laughter and the lasting impact.



Bob Smiley



CPE is so much more than a tradeshow. Yes, we did business, we learned together and we strategized for future success. But we also took time to worship, to encourage one another and to make lasting memories. Every year, I walk away with not only professional insights but personal connections that touch my heart and refresh my soul. I can't wait to see what the future holds for CPE! **CRA**



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After All These Years, Catalogs Still Work!

by Tim Morgan

Despite the dominance of digital marketing, physical catalogs have re-emerged as one of the most valuable tools for engaging customers. Physical retailers realize that by offering a tactile experience, catalogs enhance brand recall, foster deeper emotional connections and drive traffic and sales. Studies confirm that consumers receiving both physical catalogs and digital promotions (email, social media, etc.) are significantly more likely to make purchases than those exposed solely to digital campaigns.¹ This approach resonates strongly with customers who prefer in-store shopping and evokes a sense of nostalgia tied to print materials.²

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KEY ADVANTAGES OF PHYSICAL CATALOGS

1) Higher Engagement:

Physical catalogs command more attention and are browsed for longer periods compared to digital ads, resulting in greater product awareness and consideration.³

2) Brand Storytelling:

Catalogs offer brands a unique platform to narrate their stories, leveraging their tangible nature to build emotional connections with customers.⁴

3) Increased Purchase Intent:

Research highlights that receiving a catalog increases purchase intent.⁵

4) Enhanced Trust and Credibility:

Consumers frequently view physical catalogs as more credible and trustworthy than digital advertisements, boosting brand reputation.⁶

5) Targeted Reach:

Physical catalogs can be carefully tailored to specific demographics and interests, showcasing products to resonate with target audiences.⁷

6) Multi-Channel Synergy:

By incorporating website links, catalogs seamlessly bridge the gap between print and digital, enhancing the customer journey.⁸

EXAMPLES OF SUCCESS

Several leading brands have embraced catalogs as part of their marketing strategies:

- **Amazon:** After the closure of Toys “R” Us in 2018, Amazon launched a toy catalog, leveraging print to tap into a new market segment. The catalog, aimed at evoking nostalgia and engaging families, has become a cornerstone of their holiday marketing.⁹
- **J.Crew:** Following its bankruptcy in 2020, J.Crew relaunched its iconic catalog, drawing on its heritage to attract multi-generational customers. This effort is credited with contributing to the company’s resurgence and projected \$3 billion revenue in 2023.¹⁰
- **Patagonia:** Known for sustainability, Patagonia transformed its catalog into a “journal” that highlights the stories behind its products, emphasizing values and purpose over mere sales.¹¹
- **IKEA:** While IKEA ceased its traditional catalog in 2020, it introduced a zine titled *Catalogue!!!* as a creative evolution of print marketing.¹²



*Research highlights
that receiving a
catalog increases
purchase intent*



WHY PRINT WORKS

Print catalogs evoke nostalgia and create emotional connections with consumers. Brendon Babenzien, J.Crew Men's Creative Director, noted that physical catalogs carry more gravitas than digital media, offering a richer, more memorable experience.¹³ Nostalgia marketing has been shown to increase spending, with 57% of consumers reporting they are more likely to buy from a brand they feel emotionally connected to.¹⁴

Beyond sentiment, the tangible nature of catalogs often leads to higher sales. A *Harvard Business Review* study revealed that customers receiving both email and physical catalogs spent 24% more than those exposed solely to email, and the ROI for catalogs was even higher for customers categorized as "physical-prone," meaning that they made most of their purchases in-store.¹⁵

BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE CATALOG MARKETING

- **Design Quality:**
High-resolution images, compelling layouts and clear descriptions are essential to making catalogs visually appealing and informative.¹⁶
- **Targeted Distribution:**
Mailing catalogs to well-curated audiences ensures cost-effectiveness and higher ROI, focusing on customers likely to value the physical medium.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

The renewed interest in physical catalogs highlights their enduring appeal in modern marketing. By combining nostalgia, emotional resonance and multi-channel integration, catalogs offer businesses a powerful tool for engaging customers, building trust and driving sales by creating foot traffic for retail outlets. When executed strategically and professionally, they can deliver both measurable results and lasting customer connections. **CRA**



continued on page 32 >>

Footnotes

- 1 Sprout Social, *Consumer Sentiment Report*, 2022.
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- 3 Branding Journal, “Storytelling Through Print Media,” 2021.
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*The tangible nature
of catalogs often
leads to higher sales*



Tim Morgan is the CEO of Genesis Marketing Group, Palmetto Fortis Marketing and Munce Group Marketing, where he leads a diverse portfolio of businesses servicing partnerships nationwide. Tim’s mission statement is “whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men” (Col.

3:23). With over two decades of experience in C-level roles across both start-ups and Fortune 500 companies, Tim brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to his work. In addition to his executive roles, he serves as a business coach for senior executives nationwide and contributes his strategic insights on several corporate and non-profit boards.

Tim’s professional journey even includes a successful stint as a University Administrator, reflecting his versatile skill set and leadership capabilities. His entrepreneurial ventures have equipped him with a deep understanding of launching, managing and scaling businesses. Tim is passionate about developing leaders and excels at identifying individual strengths, creating culture for growth and building cohesion within dynamic teams.

Outside of his professional life, Tim has been happily married to his wife Michele for over 37 years. Together, they are proud parents of three children and six grandchildren. Tim is also an active member and deacon at Cornerstone Baptist Church, where he continues to contribute to his community with dedication and service.



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Expanding Your Reach



This year at CPE, retailers could attend two new pre-show seminars, one focused on opening a new store and the other on opening an additional location. The workshop for opening a new store was led by Lorraine Valk, Kevin VanDuyne and Karen Bilbrey. And the session for opening another location was led by Mindy Uitermarkt and Heidi Kuhlman.

Over a handful of interested retailers joined these sessions, which is a good indication of something that was illustrated in *CRA Today* Winter 2025—God is still opening doors. In the previous edition, we shared how God closed one door and opened another for veteran store owner Lorraine Valk. After over 30 years of business and ministry in Parable of St. Joseph's, Lorraine closed the door to her family's 6,000-square-foot store and opened the door to Sonlight Gifts, a new boutique store in a downtown area that is closer to her home.

In this issue of *CRA Today*, we'd like to share some takeaways from the sessions at CPE and things for you to consider if you've been feeling the nudge to open a new store or a second location.

OPENING A NEW STORE

From her recent experience, Lorraine gained a few valuable insights. The following are the top 10 things she recommends putting on your checklist if you are contemplating a new business venture:

- 1) Make a sheet with all pertinent information (e.g., tax ID, resale license, address, etc.) to make setting up direct accounts easier!
- 2) Set a reasonable budget for inventory and stick to it!
- 3) Research location and pricing before signing a lease.
- 4) Plan how you will drive traffic and have a line-item budget for both touching repeat customers as well as driving new customers through your doors.
- 5) Choose which website platform is best for your situation.
- 6) Set up accounts with distributors to use when you need to fill in products.
- 7) Get connected with other booksellers (Christian Retail Help Center on Facebook is a great tool and a good place to ask questions).
- 8) Consider attending a CPE event.
- 9) Save, save, save for a tough second year. This is when you will need to purchase new inventory while you're still paying for initial starting products (assuming you took a loan).
- 10) Pray for wisdom every day!

OPENING ANOTHER LOCATION

Mindy Uitermarkt is the owner of Stepping Stones Christian Bookstores in Grinnell and Marshalltown, IA. But about three years ago, she felt the Lord leading her to add a third store location. Mindy says God put on her heart to visit the owner of Eagle's Nest Christian Bookstore, a store that was near to where she grew up in Oskaloosa, IA, and let him know that when he was ready to retire, she might be interested in buying the store and continuing his ministry. At first, Mindy put it off. But after God's persistent knocking, she eventually went to talk to the owner Phyl and his wife, Lona. A year later Phyl contacted her and said he was ready to retire. Mindy began praying and God began showing her that the idea made perfect sense.

Mindy needed bank funding, but since she already had two stores, she was unsure if they would help. After talking to a banker, they agreed to help with 75% of the loan, but she needed 25% as a down payment. Not knowing what to do next, the Lord prompted her to start a GoFundMe campaign. "God revealed that I was not to do this alone and that He wanted to use others to help keep this ministry in Oskaloosa," she shares.

God revealed that I was not to do this alone and that He wanted to use others to help

Mindy's goal was to raise \$25,000 for the down payment. Through time and connections, she was introduced to local churches that wanted to see the bookstore remain open. With their contributions, along with donations from industry partners like CRA, who is dedicated to supporting its members, Mindy raised more than \$30,000. As a result of the generosity of over 100 donors, she was able to purchase the store.

With Jeremiah 29:11 in mind, Mindy says, "Everything was God orchestrated." God is faithful! This new location is now her number one store, and she has been able to move closer to it since she has great managers at the other two locations.

Likewise, Heide Kuhlman, owner of Blessings Big & Small in Watertown, SD, also saw the need for a Christian store in a neighboring town. In early 2022, she opened a second location in the Uptown Aberdeen Mall, where the community warmly welcomed it.

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If you are considering opening another store location, here are five important recommendations that Heide mentioned:

Examine your motive. As Christian retailers, we aren't in this for the money. Our mission is to praise, worship and glorify God in every way, every day.

Spend significant time on market research. Before opening my second store and before scaling two stores to a larger square footage last year, I did several pop-up events in the area and then did a pop-up holiday shop to see if the community was accepting of my niche. Then, based on the tried and true, I moved forward. I believe you should do everything that is reasonable, realistic and healthy to ensure your decision to move forward is a good one.

Traffic flow is vital to success

Location, location, location! My advice to someone opening a new store or scaling an existing one is to definitely make sure your location is a good one! One of my stores is placed in a dying mall, but because of my niche and marketing it works. It just takes more work. My second store is in a busy mall where I don't need to work so hard to make things happen. The difference between the two with regards to marketing and inventory management is significant. Traffic flow is vital to success!

Timing is everything. I caution against anyone moving too fast with their decisions and actions. I scaled two stores in three months in 2024. Then summer hit with slower sales, then fall hit where I had to pay for my holiday inventory. Financially, 2024 was a stressful year! But I finished the year 35 percent up in sales for both stores. It was definitely worth it, but stressful for a while. On the flip side, sometimes you can wait too long. I had been in business for 10 years when I finally took the plunge and moved to a larger location. It was immediately obvious that because I waited so long, I lost thousands of dollars in sales over the years. Timing means a lot.



Make sure you have dependable staff. Finally, and most importantly, staffing is a huge issue when you have two stores. Unless you have staff who are invested in the store mission and take responsibility for retail best practices, you're dead in the water. You have to be able to trust that your staff will handle customers and business the way you would when you aren't there. If you're a micromanager or obsessive-compulsive, opening a second location isn't for you. Your staff need to feel like



they have ownership in the business. If they feel like they aren't contributing to the store mission and management, it's just a job to them and things will fall apart. Because I have awesome staff, I was recently able to enjoy 10 days in Mexico without worrying about things deteriorating while I was gone. I know for a fact when I get home things won't be perfect, and I'll have fires to put out. But I also am confident that my customers were treated with kindness and respect and were taken care of—which is obviously the most important thing.

If you are interested in expanding your market, take these things into consideration. In Luke 14:28, Jesus said, "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it." By first counting the cost and learning from those who have already found success, you can confidently take steps in the direction God is leading you. **CRA**



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**Make This
Summer One
for the Books**

As a retailer, you're busy throughout the year. And while some seasons are busier than others, summertime is your chance to have a little fun outside of your normal routine. Whether you're hosting an in-store experience, exclusive sales or family-friendly activities, these events are a great way to drive foot traffic, gain new clientele and keep them coming back. Think of it like the perfect summer vacation. You can provide a new experience to connect with your customers and create lasting memories. But like any good vacation, it begins with a little planning. That's why now is the perfect time to start.

If you're looking for some fresh ideas, here are some things that your fellow retailers have done to make their store the go-to destination for summer.

Host a Storytime for Kids

A designated storytime can open a world of possibilities in your store. Make it a weekly event with summer activity kits and crafts. Host a local author for a celebrity reading. To create a splash, pull out beach blankets and decorate with pool floats and a kiddie pool filled with rubber ducks for kids to pick a duck and win a prize.

A designated storytime can open a world of possibilities in your store

Last summer, we did a kids' storytime hour once a week. One of my team members chose the book and a craft to go with each book. The kiddos came with mom or nanny and sat on carpet squares. They had a great time! Sometimes we had just a few kiddos, and sometimes we were overflowing the corner space where we held storytime!

-Joyce Barbatti, TJ's Christian Bookstore, Cedar Falls, IA



Last summer, we did a Tuesday morning reading session. We asked local Sunday school teachers as well as local elementary teachers to come in and read a book or two from our shelves. We provided each kid with a goodie bag (snacks and a toy) along with each parent/guardian a 20% off coupon to spend in the store. It worked very well—some weeks we only had two and some weeks we had 10. It was a lot of fun and we will definitely do that again this year.

-Karen Phibbs, Emmanuel Gift Shop, Pulaski, VA

During the summer, we like to throw in a few kids' storytime events for children ages 3-12 years old that includes a fun story, craft and snack. Our first one to kick us off is in April, and we will be sharing the resurrection of Christ through the resurrection eggs. That one is always a hit for the kids!

-Candice Redmond, Christian Book & Gift Shop, Greeneville, TN



Partner with Your Community

Coordinate with other local businesses to create a "Summer Pass" card that includes free ice cream, free cookies or other local offerings.

Summer is a slower time but still an active time for us. In June, our town has a 10-day celebration, called NebraskaLand Days, and we participate in a few events. We help with a Kid's Costume Parade which allows kids to dress up and walk around the shopping center. They can enter to win a bike and get treat bags (which are assembled in our store). Afterwards, the kids and their families can get a hot dog, cookies and more. Also, we have a Rodeo Queen signing autographs. This is a crazy, fun event for the kids and families.

We also partner with several of our nursing homes to provide prizes for the Senior Game during NebraskaLand Days. This event is targeted for the 55 and older community. We provide prizes for this event from leftover 2-year calendars to other fun items for

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older people, but the best prize we give is lots of \$5 and \$10 gift cards to our store. For these people, this is extra cash that they can use to spread love to their loved ones. Most of them are on limited incomes, and being able to get a small gift or card is a treat. It is a blast to have them come in and use them. It can even be an amazing joy to have them share how they won them (e.g., Plinko, blackjack, mini golf, steer roping, bowling and more).

We have done different summer events in our shopping center in July. We have hosted a "Who Let the Dogs Out" event in partnership with Pawsitive Partners Humane Society. They have a painted ceramic dog which travels through the town, and the event lasts from 10-14 days. Normally we host the stop before the final adoptions. On the last day, we serve food or ice cream and have other activities such as storytime or a petting zoo. We have also done a Christmas in July event which is similar to our Christmas in the Neighborhood with Santa, a petting zoo, storytime, treats and a canned food drive.

-Alyssa Fabik, Bible Supplies, North Platte, NE



We are so blessed in our community to have a week-long Bible conference. This year will be the 104th consecutive one! Our store has a large pop-up store there all week. Most of the speakers who have books allow us to sell them there as well. We've had J. Warner Wallace, Greg Koukl, Sean McDowell, Daryl Strawberry and other well-known Christian authors.

-Joyce Barbatti, TJ's Christian Bookstore, Cedar Falls, IA

Try a New Twist on VBS

Churches are still doing VBS during the summer. And regardless of whether they order a kit from you, you can still partner with them in a way that will bring customers through your door.

Most churches purchase online on their own or they share with each other. We do however partner with three local churches during VBS. We set up tables and display Bibles with coupons where parents can come to the store and purchase with a discount. We also set up our tables with whatever theme they are using for VBS.

-Mike Huffstutler, Believer's Christian Gifts, Rio Rancho, NM

Vacation Bible School is a main event for this summer. We recently hosted a viewing party for our churches to come and see the VBS themes available, and what they were about. That was a big hit!

-Candice Redmond, Christian Book & Gift Shop, Greeneville, TN

Start a Summer Reading Program

Make summer reading rewarding by turning it into a game with a prize at the end. Create a reading Bingo card with incentives for completed books. Have a mystery-themed scavenger hunt with books to read along the way.

We started a summer reading program about six years ago and it has grown every year

We started a summer reading program about six years ago and it has grown every year. We invite kidlets ages 3-13 to read 10 books during the summer (parents read to the younger ones). The parents come in for the form, which has space for each title read. The only criteria is that the parents must sign the form at the completion. We give children a prize after reading the first five books, then a \$10 gift card when finished with the next five. Our staff engages the children, asking which title they liked best, and it's just fun for all. In April, I reach out to our wonderful vendors and ask for donations for prizes. They have never let me down! I also send out a letter to the Christian schools in the area with a copy of the form for parents. The schools really appreciate it.

-Kathi Broughton, Sower Bible Bookstore, Coeur d'Alene, ID

Last summer, we hosted a reading challenge for kids, to read one book a week, to encourage them to continue reading during the summer. We plan on hosting another reading challenge this summer as well. I'm sure more fun things will pop up throughout the summer. Summer at the bookstore is always full of surprises.

-Candice Redmond, Christian Book & Gift Shop, Greeneville, TN



We do a summer reading special, Buy 2 Books Get 1 Free (lowest price book), which encourages reading of all ages during the summer.

-Alyssa Fabik, Bible Supplies, North Platte, NE

Plan for Christmas

Use one of your slowest seasons to prepare for your busiest season. Plan your Christmas displays, marketing materials and promotions. And make room for new products and clear out inventory with a summer blowout sale.

We are trying a couple of things this summer. We're doing a Christmas in July sale, taking some of the things from the past year and discounting them, and promoting it via Facebook, email and texts. We are also going to try grab bags. We heard about this idea from other stores. We'll put some older items in a pretty bag—each containing at least one book—and mark them at a discounted price.

-Joyce Barbatti, TJ's Christian Bookstore, Cedar Falls, IA

I'm planning to use summer to prep, prep, prep for all things Christmas! We'll have a vision board for themes and displays, store merchandise that comes in early by those themes/displays, get our Christmas gift wrap prepped, load products and pricing in our POS, wrap up Christmas ordering, identify and clearance out older merchandise, train staff, plan out events and get as many graphics and posts ready to go as possible for the events, social media, etc.

-Lori Bowdoin, Blessings, A Christian Store, Prattville, AL

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Whether you totally get Millennials and Gen Z (or if you “can’t even”), one thing is for sure, you need them. This next generation is crucial for a term we can all understand—sustainability. They are the secret sauce to your business staying relevant and thriving.

So, how do you turn your future customers into your current ones?

First, let’s get to know a little bit about who they are. Millennials (born roughly 1981-1996) are primarily in their 30s and Gen Z (born roughly 1997-2012) are primarily high school and college-aged students. Collectively, you could refer to these two groups as young adults.

When it comes to their purchasing habits, a study by the National Retail Federation says that Millennials prioritize personalization, “looking for brands that engage them meaningfully across platforms.” And Gen Z are socially conscious shoppers who “will seek authenticity and social responsibility, favoring brands that align with their ethical standards.”¹

Growing up in an age of technology, both groups are tech savvy and prefer to be highly connected. While this generation is digitally engaged, the good news is that this same study shows that “younger shoppers are returning to physical stores.”

We are seeing a trend in our young adult and college-aged community going back toward purchasing in store

Tracey Williamson has noticed this resurgence at Central Christian College Bookstore in Moberly, MO. “We are seeing a trend in our young adult and college-aged community going back toward purchasing in store and going away from digital products,” she explains. “They like the feel of the book or Bible in their hands and want to get away from being on their phones or devices all the time.”

With these patterns in mind, having a multichannel approach can be highly effective with this demographic.

Donna McCollough of Dove Christian Supply in Dothan, AL, is passionate about this topic as she has been working on ways to target younger customers and has seen some encouraging results. According to Donna, reaching high school, college and young adults (15-25) has come down to three things: **social media strategy, product selection and utilizing staff.**

Social Media Engagement

Donna says that utilizing Instagram and TikTok have been the key. But more than just posting, they’ve focused on using trending audio, strong text hooks and consistently sharing engaging content. According to Donna, based on these factors, their February reel challenge resulted in their highest reach in the 18-24 age bracket (30.2%) and the 25-34 group (26%). Those numbers tell her that this approach is working.



Here are some helpful ideas that Donna has used:

- **Reels & Stories on TikTok & Instagram:** Post staff recommendations for products, aesthetic store walkthroughs and unboxings of new arrivals in a conversational way. Use trending sounds with a faith-based or in-store twist. Engage with customers using polls, Q&As and responding to DMs (direct messages) quickly.
- **Hashtag Challenges:** Create a challenge like #BookHaulTuesday where customers post their latest finds.
- **Collabs with Student Influencers:** Partner with local student influencers to promote book reviews or gift items.

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Purposeful Product Selection

According to Tracey, “Young shoppers are seeking out small businesses and want their purchases to mean something more than just the product that they are buying.” Tracey explains that often equates to shopping local or buying a product that supports a mission. Additionally, she says young shoppers love to have products that are interactive like the Tap To Pray™ items from Versible or the nail polish that doubles as a devotion time from Reminder or the products that help women escape human trafficking.

Young shoppers are seeking out small businesses and want their purchases to mean something more than just the product that they are buying



This generation gravitates toward faith-based products that feel modern, personal and applicable to their daily lives. Here are some top sellers:

- **Faith-Based Devotionals, Apologetics & Young Adult Books** that speak to their season of life and offer faith-based guidance on relationships, career and mental health. *Examples: Jesus Calling for Teens or Live in Grace, Walk in Love by Bob Goff, Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis or The Case for Christ by Lee Strobel.*
- **Journaling Bibles & Study Bibles** that “speak their language” in modern translations like ESV and NLT and include space for notes, art and reflection and study guides. *Examples: CSB She Reads Truth and ESV Student Study Bible*
- **Bible Study Tools** like highlighters, pens and tabbed indexes that make studying easier.
- **Apparel & Accessories** that let them express their faith in a natural way. *Examples: Tees and hoodies with subtle faith-based messages like “Faith Over Fear” or “God is Greater” and trendy jewelry like permanent bracelets*
- **Other Faith-Based Items** such as inspirational stickers for water bottles and laptops, tumblers, totes, candles and essential oils

Also consider creating themed promotions and bundles, such as a “Finals Survival Kit” with a devotional, sticky notes and bookmarks with Bible verses and uplifting messages, stress relief gifts and snacks. At Christian Book & Gift Shop in Greeneville, TN, Candice Redmond says, “To effectively engage our young adult demographic, we focus on creating aesthetically pleasing displays.” They do this by highlighting products with complementary colors and selecting trending items to resonate with current market preferences.



In-Store Experiences

The next generation of shoppers appreciates an in-store experience with a personal connection. “It is the relationships and the interaction of the shopping experience that they crave,” Tracey says.

At her store, they highlight those opportunities, often by reminding customers that they are “purchasing with a purpose.”

“These are all things that most Christian retailers are already doing,” Tracey shares. “But by highlighting the ‘why,’ we can reach a group of people that are seeking a connection.”

Here are some ways to create a personalized in-store experience:

- **Study & Chill Zones:** Set up cozy reading nooks with Wi-Fi to encourage students to hang out.
- **Workshops:** Host workshops on journaling or bullet planning.
- **Book Clubs:** Work with your church’s youth and young adult groups to host themed book nights.
- **Student Discounts:** Offer a special discount for students with a college ID.

Our younger staff members have made a big impact in connecting with this age group

If reaching the next generation seems like learning a new language, don’t be afraid to ask for help from one of them. “Our younger staff members have made a big impact in connecting with this age group,” Donna shares. She will often let them take the lead in creating social media content, sharing what they love, and engaging with customers online. “When customers feel like they ‘know’ the people behind the store, they’re more likely to engage,” she concludes. **CRA**

¹ “25 Predictions for the Retail Industry in 2025,” National Retail Federation, <https://nrf.com/blog/25-predictions-for-the-retail-industry-in-2025>




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The Power of Mentoring Relationships

by Becky Harling

Mentorship is one of the most beneficial investments you can make in yourself as a believer and business person. It will benefit you professionally, emotionally and spiritually. It could even be life changing.

My journey of mentoring began 25 years ago. At the time, I was serving on staff at a large church in the role of director of women's ministries. For our spring conference, I brought in Linda Dillow as a guest speaker. Because Linda was a successful author and speaker and I had read many of her books, I was excited to have her there. The night before the opening of the conference, I took Linda out to dinner to discuss the details of the conference . . . but actually we never did discuss those details. Across the dinner table, Linda began asking me questions about my life in ministry and where I wanted to be in five years. I began to share my heart about writing books and speaking around the country. At the time, I was doing some speaking and writing small group material for our church, but I hadn't published a book yet.

Linda began talking with me about the publishing process and what that had looked like in her life. She asked me about my book ideas and my teaching ministry. Our conversation shifted to the Lord and all He was teaching her about experiencing His presence. I remember thinking, "I want what she has!" So, I impulsively blurted out the question burning in my heart, "Will you mentor me?" Linda paused and I felt sure she would say no—that she was too busy. But instead, she leaned across the table, grabbed my hand, and said yes! That began a seven-year journey of learning for me.

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Linda mentored me not only professionally on book writing but also in the realm of my spiritual life and my emotional life. In the process as her mentee, I had to humble myself and be honest about my strengths and weaknesses. As my mentor, she opened doors for me and cheered me on in my journey. I will never forget the day that NavPress called me and said, “Hi, we hear you want to write a book!” Nor will I forget how Linda connected me with one of America’s top editors. In addition to mentoring me professionally, she got down on her knees with me many times and we prayed together.

Twenty-five years later, Linda and I are still good friends. I still call her, and we still get on our knees and pray together. Through the years, I have also had other mentors: those who have challenged me to better business practices through my coaching practice and those who have challenged me to be more assertive in my speaking ministry. Each mentor has poured into my life, challenging me to become all that God has called me to be and cheering me toward that goal. I am eternally grateful to each one. I now mentor others and help them professionally, spiritually and emotionally.

Mentoring Is Biblical

Mentoring is a biblical concept. In the book of Titus, older women are encouraged to mentor younger women. In the book of Acts, Barnabas mentored Paul in faith and ministry (Acts 11:25-26). Paul then went on to mentor Timothy and Titus. When we take the time to walk with someone who is further ahead of us, we benefit. Similarly, when we take the time to encourage someone who is behind us, we are also encouraged. The truth is that as the book of Proverbs

says, “Iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (Proverbs 27:17). If you want to grow professionally, emotionally or spiritually, I strongly urge you to find a mentor whom you respect to lead the way. At the same time, find someone whom you can encourage and propel forward. I believe God wants us to have strong connections with those ahead of us and those behind us.

Mentoring is a biblical concept

The question that comes to mind is what do mentors do?

Mentors Do Three Things:

They advise you how to move forward. Whether professionally, spiritually or emotionally, a wise mentor will be able to offer advice on how to get unstuck and move forward. Just as Linda came alongside me, now I come alongside others. Some want to move further in their spiritual journeys or grow deeper in their marriages. Others aspire to write a book or to grow in their leadership. Just as Linda taught me more about experiencing God’s presence, now I pass that on to every person I mentor. When much has been given to us, we must give much away (Luke 12:48).

Second, they open doors of opportunity for you. Every good mentor will connect you with others in their circles of influence who can help you move toward your goals. The apostle Paul opened doors for both Timothy and Titus. He provided opportunities for them to preach and gave them positions of leadership in churches.

Every good mentor will connect you with others in their circles of influence who can help you move toward your goals





In addition to Linda, at different seasons in my journey I have sought out those who are further ahead. I remember a time when I felt completely overwhelmed by trying to figure out a marketing strategy for one of my books. A different mentor opened the door for me to speak with one of Michael Hyatt's team members and ask for advice. That connection was invaluable for me and provided the necessary steps I needed to market effectively.

Lastly, they cheer you on spiritually, emotionally and professionally. All of us get stuck from time to time. You might be wrestling with a decision concerning your bookstore or you might be struggling to go further in your walk with God. My suggestion is to find a mentor in your lane who has integrity and a strong walk with God. Ask them to mentor you. On the other hand, perhaps there is someone who has asked you to mentor them. Create the space to be with them and cheer them on in their spiritual journey, in their emotional health and in their professional journey.

Mentoring was God's idea, and it is one of the best ways I know to grow spiritually, emotionally and professionally.

CRA



A bestselling author, **Becky Harling** has written 15 books. She is a popular speaker at conferences, retreats and other events. Becky is a John Maxwell leadership and communications coach and has been a guest on many media outlets including Focus on the Family, Family Life Today, 100 Huntley Street, Moody Radio and the Total Christ Television Today Show. Becky is the host of The Connected Mom Podcast and loves encouraging other moms to connect more intentionally. She loves hiking with her husband, playing with her 14 grandkids, shopping with her daughters, hanging out with her son and having coffee with friends.

VENDOR spotlight



Versible

Like other well-known start-ups, Versible's origin story began in a garage with a father and son team. Their goal was to create products that would remind people to trust God, lean on His truths and share them with others on a daily basis. At the same time, they felt called to go a step further. They wanted to use their merchandise as a means to drive awareness to fight human trafficking.

In early 2023, Brian Hobbs and his son, Evan, sat down to form a business plan. Brian had stepped down from his position as president of a major corporation after 25 years in the corporate world. "The Lord made it clear that He had something different for me," he says. Evan was 13 years old at the time. "[Evan] played a pivotal role in every aspect of launching Versible and still does today (when he's not in school or sports)," Brian shares.

By December 2023, Versible was founded. Two months later, in February 2024, they attended their first CPE show.

Today they have outgrown their garage and now operate their family-run business in a barn on their property. "God willing, we will outgrow that space too and will continue to expand our operations," Brian adds.

Versible creates products that are focused on God's Word and prayer. They began with their Versible® bracelets, which feature a specific Bible





verse on the inside. Now they have added the new Tap To Pray™ bracelets, keychains and stickers which allow people to use their phones to tap the item for a new Bible verse and prayer every day.

“We hope our products encourage this generation to lean in on the Word of God, to be in prayer daily and to point others to Jesus,” Brian says. Creating products that do just that, as well as delight retailers and customers, is what Brian enjoys most about the work he does.

We hope our products encourage this generation to lean in on the Word of God, to be in prayer daily and to point others to Jesus

According to Brian, Versible’s mission can be summed up in three words: Glorify. Testify. Magnify.

Glorify: “Everything we do is done with a mission to glorify our Heavenly Father and to point people back to His Word, His truths and His promises.”

Testify: “We hope our products help strengthen people’s faith and create opportunities to share Jesus with others; to testify.”

Magnify: “We want to magnify the Kingdom by giving generously to organizations that are being the light and fighting back the darkness of human trafficking.”

To help fight human trafficking, Versible donates 20% of their profits to organizations that prevent, rescue and restore survivors of exploitation. The three organizations they have partnered with to date are The Tim Tebow Foundation, Serving Orphans Worldwide and A21.

“We hope the work we’re doing, as well as so many others, creates an urgency for this generation to increase awareness, support and resources to fight human trafficking,” Brian explains.

Versible is doing their part to bring attention to this injustice. In their first year of business, their biggest milestone was being able to donate over \$40,000 to non-profit organizations. “Sales are important because they drive everything else, but the milestone we’re most proud of is what we were able to give back in our first year,” Brian says.

The milestone we’re most proud of is what we were able to give back in our first year

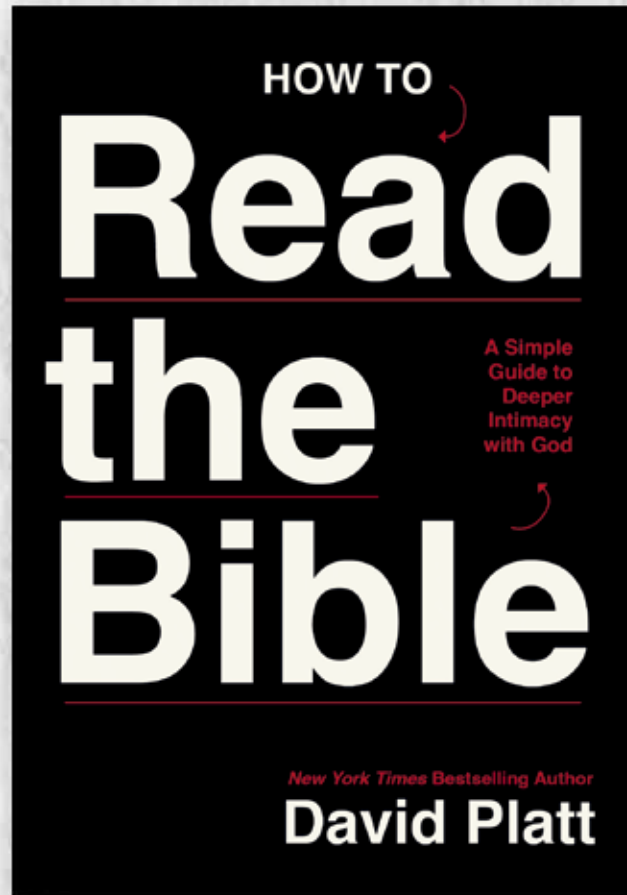


Five years from now, Brian’s hope and prayer is that Versible can donate \$1 million to fighting human trafficking in one year alone. “We know we can’t outgive God,” he says. “And if we are in a position to donate that big, every other metric that matters will be right where it needs to be.”

As a small family-owned start-up, they’ve gained valuable lessons along the way. One of those lessons is that they can learn something new every day.

“We reserve the right to get smarter every day,” Brian concludes. “That lesson is rooted in humility and forgiveness. We’ll never have all the answers. Stay humble, be open-minded, forgive others and forgive yourself. We’re going to make mistakes, that’s okay! Try not to repeat them. We often learn more from our mistakes than our successes.” **CRA**

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