

SonRise Café`s very beginnings

When our team started the café we had no previous training in business or knowledge of coffee. But one thing I have learned is that God is sovereign and provides what you need each step of the way. Faithful is He who calls us and He does bring it to pass, for the sake of His glory among in the world.

Some observations based on my personal experience...starting a new ministry like this is a:

- Spiritual journey. And God wants to meet us and grow us through it. My desire to start a coffee shop ministry was borne out of prayer for God to show us what to do, so it began with heartfelt prayer. It was also borne out of a calling that I know many of you have already experienced in your life. God is saying “go” in your heart and you know the call will not leave until you move forward. Another way it is a spiritual journey is how God speaks to you encouragement or directions through the Scriptures. God gave me so many Scriptures of hope and promise, and He fueled my passion for ministry with Scriptures about His power and His heart for the world. So, one thing I am glad I did was, keep a journal. I didn`t write in it every day, and I only wrote in it when I wanted to write about plans or progress that were taking place, or when I read something in my daily devotional or other Scriptures that I wanted to pray back to God. I am so glad I did that or I would have forgotten so much by now. So, I suggest having a journal because this isn`t just a thing you are doing but something that God is going to do in you as well.
- Faith journey. Know that if God has laid this burden on your heart He will bring it to pass. There will be a lot of empty space and darkness, but as God gives light or insight just keep moving and trusting Him. We have seen so many miracles. You will too. I took small steps forward praying for God to open or close the doors. It took a good bit of time and research, but in it all God clarified the vision He had given me. Some of the ways God brought the vision that was in my heart to pass:
 - ✚ While taking small steps forward (researching potential rentals in Tokyo, etc.) we happened to have lunch in west Japan with a TEAM missionary couple and found out they also had a vision for café ministry...by the end of the year we went through team-building and formed the Tokyo

Metro Ministry Initiative, a church planting initiative based initially in the 2 of the 7 least-reached wards of Tokyo, Nerima Ku and Itabashi Ku. Even though they left for a year Home Assignment, we began praying and planning via email. This gave us time to get to know each other our expectations and plans.

✚ Over the 2 years before we began the café, I happened to attend some seminars that were key in encouraging me and fueling the passion to go forward with café ministry....I attended a CPI seminar led by Jonathan Wilson focusing on Ministry in the Community where He talked about the church not being a wall but being a bridge from Christ to our community...I attended an Acts 29 boot camp in Seattle that encouraged me in incarnational type ministry, “taking the church into the community”....my husband and I went to a Resurgence training at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York while on a Home Assignment where Ed Stetzer talked about how we should approach ministry with 2 hands. One hand is closed, that is our doctrine/the truth of the Bible, the fact that Jesus is God – it is closed, it never changes. But the other hand is open. This is our method. And our methods must change as the culture changes. This had a huge impact on me as I wrestled with doing church planting in an unconventional way. These are just a few examples of how God fueled the passion that He had given me – it reminds me that the passion is not mine but His and He knows just how to move it forward.

Moving onto a few practical things that I think might be helpful as people begin. Some of them we did “well”, others, we figured out as we went along:

- (1) WHO are you? We were a church planting team with the The Evangelical Alliance Mission, or TEAM. As part of a shuukyouhoujin, we are not permitted to earn money in Japan. Also, we are considered nonprofit. The auditor of TEAM submits our financial records each year to the Japanese government just as he might submit the financial records of an English School or a yochien. Café ministry like this had never been done before and it was very confusing for our auditor. The Japanese government recognizes English schools and Yochien as something churches do in Japan. So

far, and probably because we are not profitable and half of our income has come from contributions, the government seems happy with our status. So, if you are thinking of going Business as Mission, keep that in mind. If you are married to a Japanese, are Japanese or have aijukken then I think it is fine to have for profit business. So, I guess that needs to be decided and researched first – do you want to move toward profitability like a business, be a ministry center that serves some coffee a few days a week as part of a church, be a coffee shop that teaches some English? Hire people or use volunteers?

- (2) Know your vision and values and write a vision statement. People call these different things. When we began we had an **Objective** and **Values**, but they were centered around church planting in the beginning. Our **objective** was: to establish innovative churches that bring Christ to the least-reached communities of Japan`s largest metropolis” Then we listed our **values** which included, dependent upon and directed by God, incarnational and holistic, innovative and culturally relevant, team-oriented. Then we had at the bottom that to accomplish all of this, our first project was going to be a cafe. While that is all well and good in theory, I think something we lacked in the beginning was clear vision for the café itself. So, while I think it is important to have a broad objective and values of your ministry, I suggest taking time to write out a vision for what you want the café ministry itself to accomplish. Now, we have a Vision for the café which is, “to see SonRise Café become an excellent, profitable business fully led and staffed by Japanese, continuing to be a positive, Christian community presence for years to come.” (at the same time, it is aiding church planting...) Then, we have our Purpose which is “to bring glory to Jesus Christ through expanding His kingdom on earth through business by”, then we listed some of the values of the business such as “conducting business in an excellent way with honesty and integrity” and “empowering Japanese Christians to develop their creative gifts.” I suggest firstly writing out your vision and making it very long and full of every passion you have for your café space. This was very helpful to me when I attended a Refocused Living Retreat (CRM, Church Resource Ministries). WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE GOD IS CALLING YOU TO ACCOMPLISH FOR HIS GLORY? I listed everything imaginable in my vision for the café. This helped me articulate all of the

passion that God had given me and helped me know exactly what kind of outreach I want to have. Then, as I our team discussed our vision and values, I was able to contribute these things to the discussion.

- (3) Next we had to decide WHERE. We began thinking it would be great to have the café in Shibuya, Harajuku, etc. but found out it was too expensive, and we noticed that people move “through” these places but, from our limited research, it seemed hard to locate a community to reach out into. Thanks to some research with the Church Information Service, (CIS) we found out church to population ratios for the 23 wards of downtown Tokyo. Since our team-mates were needing to live in Nerima Ku, which was the 6th least-churched ward of Tokyo, and we needed to be somewhat close to them, we felt we should live in Itabashi Ku which at that time was the 7th least-churched ward in Tokyo. This also helped our supporters latch onto our vision when we would tell them that we are working in 2 of the 7 least-churched wards of Tokyo. Not a super strategic plan but helped us have a focus. So, knowing we would need to have the café in Itabashi Ku, where we were moving, I started attending churches in the local area to see if there was a community attached to a “shopping street” along the Tobu Tojo Train Line...long story short, happened to see the Happy Road shopping arcade from the window of the train as I was heading to a church in Tobu Nerima. Stopped off there (the Oyama train stop, 3 stops from Ikebukuro) and saw it had a community (old, young, schools, etc.) but also had a shopping street which would be great for a café. We are 3 minutes from the train station, just off the shopping street. Another of God`s leadings, divine directions!
- (4) Are you ready to be an entrepreneur?? This type of ministry is innovative and new. And requires an incredible amount of research and work. We didn`t do all the research we should have from the beginning probably, and I under-estimated the amount of work that would be required (and how my personal/family time would be affected). So this is just something to ask yourself – if you are up to the task (I highly recommend a team to help shaping vision, to help in the work load and just because I can`t imagine ever having done this myself and have loved working as part of a team). Whatever you read online about “start-ups” or starting a café business

is pretty accurate as far as the impact this type of thing could have on your daily life.

- (5) Need a **business plan** (the real value of the BP is not the finished product but the process) and **executive summary** (2 pages you write after you`ve finished the BP, everything you would cover in a 5 minute interview) and a **start-up budget and an operating budget. Quicken or other accounting program..employee or volunteer handbook/code of conduct**
- (6) **Volunteers vs. paid staff...**if you don`t need to pay high rent and utilities you will not need a lot of income to cover costs. But if you do have a lot of costs or plan to hire people you need a business model that works. We had to make changes in December. Laying off people/”moving to adapt to our reality”/now have a workable budget. Our rent and utilities drove our need for higher profit...and we found within about 6 months that we missionaries could not handle it ourselves. Volunteers: we developed a document explaining who we were and what we were doing. And that we had a kingdom mentality and would not take people from their churches. We had their pastor sign the document before they ever began. So we had about 10 volunteers over the first year (paid their travel) and they were vital to that first year of success. But we found volunteers think more short-term...and eventually they leave for a real job – they are great but affect the momentum and continuity of the cafe. We ended up hiring Midori part-time 6 months after we opened because the missionaries simply could not handle the workload (open 6 days a week, etc.) and we desperately needed advice, insight, help, flier translation, communication with the public, you name it, from a native Japanese.

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