

Business Solutions to Human Trafficking

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Wilberforce and the Abolitionists

In the 1700's the slave trade was widely accepted and legal. It was, in fact, a backbone of the economy of the British Empire. It was a big, organised and transnational business.

William Wilberforce and the Clapham group decided to fight this evil trade. They chose to attack the systemic issue – the legality of slave trade and slavery. To that end they organized a decades long campaign focusing on justice, aiming at a root cause. They worked politically to change unjust and ungodly laws that permitted the dehumanizing trade.

They could have chosen an easier route of awareness campaigns and a boycott of sugar from plantations in Jamaica, but they knew such initiatives in themselves would not free the slaves or bring about lasting change. The feel good factor may have been higher, but the long-term outcomes would have been meager.

Charity and justice

Today the slave trade and slavery are illegal, but not dead. Human trafficking is modern day slavery, and it is a lucrative and evil business. Just like Wilberforce and his colleagues, we need to ask what the systemic issue is today - and we need to go beyond charitable actions to fight for justice.

We visited St. Andrew Catholic Church in Clemson, South Carolina early 2016, and their vision statement¹ struck us:

“Charity” is the generosity that alleviates needs that are immediate. “Justice” is the process by which generosity configures our ways of providing education, delivering health care, doing business, and creating laws that lessen the need for charity. There will always be immediate needs even in the most just of worlds.

Charity is the more attractive generosity. We see immediate results for the better and we enjoy – here and now – the gratification that comes from doing good. Justice is less attractive because it usually calls for personal and communal change, and we are creatures of habit.

We often respond to needs and global issues through non-profit charity models. But the danger is that some may have more of a PR function sprinkled with feel good factors, rather than dealing with systemic issues and root causes.

Wilberforce and the Clapham group were not popular; they worked against an institution – slavery - that was broadly accepted. Today, taking a position against human trafficking is among the easiest things you can do. The world will applaud you! But how can your stand free slaves and restore human dignity?

Root cause to human trafficking

We need to identify root causes to human trafficking. One answer is **unemployment**. Places with high unemployment and under-employment become high-risk areas, where traffickers trick and trap vulnerable people looking for jobs. Thus we cannot talk about adequate prevention of human trafficking unless we include the need for jobs with dignity.²

We must also answer the question: out of trafficking and into what? Jobs with dignity provide a hope for sustainable freedom to survivors. Effective prevention *and* restoration require jobs. Who can create jobs with dignity? Business people.

Big, organized and transnational

Human trafficking is a huge and hugely profitable crime, connecting criminal organisations around the world. It is big, organised and transnational. On the other side, most of those combatting trafficking are in the non-profit sector; and the charities responding are often small, local and poorly connected. We need to develop strategies and initiatives focused on business solutions to human trafficking, and they must have the capacity to be (or become) big, organised and transnational.

Business solutions: BAM & Freedom Businesses

In 2012, the Business as Mission Global Think Tank assigned a working group to explore business solutions to human trafficking. The group identified businesses that aim at providing solutions to human trafficking, particularly by providing jobs for prevention and restoration.³

Called **freedom businesses**, these businesses exist to fight human trafficking. There are several types of business that fit into this category: businesses that create jobs for survivors of exploitation would be the most familiar. Other workplaces hire vulnerable people in order to prevent exploitation, or aggregate products from these first two and bring them to new markets. Because employment is an important aspect of human dignity, freedom businesses offer opportunities to people whose main qualification is the need for a job.⁴

The Think Tank group produced a groundbreaking report: *A Business Takeover: Combating the Business of the Sex Trade with Business as Mission*.⁵ Excerpts from the report reinforce the crucial role of business:

Freedom businesses are uniquely positioned to strike at the economically driven foundations of the sex trade. By combining the necessary components of economic productivity and holistic ministry, the staggering numbers of people caught in the trade can be reduced through the powerful response of freedom business.

Traditionally, businesses have been relegated to participating in anti-trafficking work as the funding source for the work of nonprofits. However, business as mission (BAM) entrusts businesses with much more than simply funding nonprofit work; the business itself becomes the vehicle of change. As such, both nonprofit and for-profit strategies are integral to success in anti-trafficking work.

Business and nonprofit work can come together in anti-trafficking work to focus on job creation, increasing the employability of individuals who have been victimized by human trafficking, and in their subsequent aftercare.”

Freedom Business Alliance

This report catalyzed the launch of the Freedom Business Alliance (FBA)⁶, a global trade association that believes business can be a powerful tool in the holistic restoration of individuals and the transformation of their communities. FBA is registered as a trade association in the United States, and exists to help freedom businesses succeed by providing business training and mentoring, industry research, networking opportunities, information, resources and marketplace connections.

In January 2016, the Freedom Business Alliance was invited to engage business leaders from companies like Coca Cola, Life Shape, Oracle, Anthem, Randstad, Deloitte, Salesforce, Delta Airlines, and Infosys who wanted to use their business experience and corporate infrastructure to combat human trafficking. FBA presented the corporations with on-ramps for engagement, including:

- allowing employees to do pro-bono consultation with freedom businesses;
- employing vulnerable people in every place they do business;
- training freedom businesses in business skills; and
- becoming financial supporters of the Freedom Business Alliance

FBA will hold its official launch in the first quarter of 2017, when it will gather freedom business leaders from around the world for the first time in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Review concept of return on investment, ROI

As we acknowledge the importance of both financial capital and investors, we also need to review the concept of ROI. The most prevalent paradigm is a Wall Street concept.

Simply put, Wall Street is relatively one-dimensional: it is about money. Investors put money into a business, with the hope and expectation that they will get more money back - in the shortest time possible. It is a two-way street: money goes from investor to business, and then back from business to investor. This is not bad or evil, but we need to think bigger, beyond the traditional ROI.

Wall Street vs. BAM Street⁷

We need to move from Wall Street to BAM Street. Business as Mission is about seeking a positive impact on **multiple bottom-lines** for **multiple stakeholders** through business.

BAM Street recognizes the importance of investors, business owners and operators, but also values other stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, family, church, community, creation, and ultimately, God. BAM Street is multi-dimensional. Besides financial capital, we are intentional about putting other kinds of capital into a business: intellectual capital (for example, through mentoring) and spiritual input (for instance, prayer).

BAM Street is more of a roundabout than a simple two-way street. Roundabouts have multiple entry and exit points. I may put money into a BAM or freedom business, but the financial return (part or whole) may go to some other entity in the BAM eco-system. Part of the profit can go the community, to profit-sharing schemes or into investment in other BAM companies. BAM Street engages people and groups with diverse resources to use business as a blessing - on many levels and for many stakeholders.

BAM Street and solutions to human trafficking

The global BAM movement needs more financial capital, and so do freedom businesses. But more money is not enough if we just think and operate on a Wall Street concept. Should we settle for Wall Street, or should we move towards BAM Street? With the latter model we can see more and different kinds of capital invested in businesses, with more returns to more stakeholders.

Freedom and restoration of human dignity can be returns of BAM Street investments, and the Freedom Business Alliance may serve, in part, as a "BAM Street stock exchange".

Movements of societal transformation⁸

Fighting human trafficking through business solutions is necessary but it is not a quick fix. We are seeking a good and lasting change, a holistic transformation on a macro scale.

Throughout history there has been movements of societal transformation. We can mention the Protestant reformation, Wilberforce and the abolitionists, the suffragettes, and the civil rights movement in the US.

Looking at these movements, one can observe some common themes. The groups often started as a small minority with a shared vision and common values. They connected with one another, built a critical mass, and had a commendable tenacity.

The freedom business movement has the potential to become a movement of societal transformation. The vision is clear and the values are shared.

Although small, they have taken significant steps via the Freedom Business Alliance to build critical mass. You are of course invited to join the freedom movement!

Doing BAM and growing freedom businesses to bring freedom and achieve societal transformation is not instant coffee: take a few bits of BAM thinking and a desire for freedom, stir into a business and voilà: transformation. No, societal transformation takes time. We want to set a stage and serve our generation in such a way that it will be a blessing for many generations to come.

BAM, Freedom Business, and the Olive Tree

We can learn from the olive tree. Many of us think in terms of two kinds of olives: green and black. But there are a thousand or more varieties! In the BAM movement we are not just two categories: business people on the one hand, and church and mission people on the other. Instead, we are part of a greater eco-system of investors, bookkeepers, prayer partners, entrepreneurs, academics, human trafficking experts, theologians, marketing and sales people, and many others.

After planting, it takes about twenty-five years before an olive tree bears edible fruit. But once it starts bearing fruit, it can produce olives for two thousand years - or more! Olive trees are intergenerational blessings.

The modern BAM movement and the freedom business movement are still young; we are in some ways still within the first 25 years of the life of an olive tree. We do see some fruit, but are eagerly awaiting more.

In this stage of growth, the BAM olive tree needs care and feeding; the strategic and intentional investment of time and resources. We want to build a movement that can bring the good and lasting “fruit” of transformation, and we know that this will take time. In the meantime, we hold tenaciously to the vision of freedom as we build BAM communities and develop the Freedom Business Alliance.

We embrace the promise that God will bless us so we can be a blessing – in and through business – in our generation and for many generations to come.

¹ Find out more about the vision of the St. Andrew Catholic Church in Clemson, South Carolina: <http://www.saclemson.org/a-parish-vision>

² Mats wrote a longer article in 2015 which elaborates on human trafficking, a root cause and business solutions: <http://matstunehag.com/2015/05/17/human-trafficking-and-freedom-through-enterprise/>

³ Jennifer describes the development of the Freedom Business Alliance in an interview, see <http://businessasmission.com/fba-interview/>

⁴ Jennifer gives an introduction to freedom businesses in this video vignette <https://vimeo.com/152460926>

⁵ The BAM Global Think Tank report on BAM and Human Trafficking: <http://bamglobal.org/report-trafficking/>

⁶ Make sure to watch the FBA introductory video at <http://www.freedombusinessalliance.com>

⁷ Mats wrote an article on the issue: <http://matstunehag.com/2015/06/24/wall-street-vs-bam-street/>. There is also a short two minutes video: The Wall Street model is too limited; we need a more broad and impactful BAM Street concept: <https://vimeo.com/152713984>

⁸ See also Mats' article on BAM, the olive tree and movements of societal transformation from 2013: <http://matstunehag.com/2013/05/08/bam-the-olive-tree/>