

DO YOUR HOMEWORK FIRST

By Rick Boxx

Watching a TV “reality” show called "Shark Tank," in which five accomplished investors consider funding a number of innovative ventures, a young entrepreneur made a major strategic error. He failed to properly prepare for his presentation to gain their interest and support.

This prospective businessman boldly asked the five investors, who are called "Sharks" because that is a term sometimes used to describe aggressive and very perceptive business leaders, to invest \$1 million in his innovative enterprise. This young man, however, had not done his homework. With a little research he would have realized that his request for funding was ridiculously high, especially since he had not yet made any sales and his product, although interesting in theory, was untested.

The aspiring entrepreneur also was clearly unprepared to answer basic questions from the “sharks,” which were typical of the show, not extremely complicated or tricky. In fact, these business people could have provided the resources to launch his business, but he failed to give them the information they asked of him. His lack of understanding of the entire process of developing and presenting a credible business plan caused him to leave the show empty-handed and disappointed.

The Bible offers good advice for how to properly approach such a situation. Proverbs 3:13-14 teaches, *"Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold."* A wiser aspiring businessperson would have consulted with someone he or she knew that had experience and insight into the how's and what's and why's of starting a new venture. The person then could have taken that information, formulated a business plan, and asked the “mentor” to review it before making such a critical public presentation.

Perhaps you are not starting a new business. This principle still applies whether you are seeking to persuade a potential customer to buy your products or services; trying to influence a client about a strategy you believe they should employ, or presenting a new concept or procedure to employees who are accustomed to doing things “the old way.” Before pitching your ideas to others, you should do your homework so that you understand what will be expected. Your results will be much better. Here are other biblical principles that relate to this process, regardless of who your audience might be:

Address first things first. Sometimes our enthusiasm for a project causes us to get ahead of ourselves, failing to complete preliminary work that is essential for lasting success. *"Finish your outdoor work and get your fields ready; after that build your house"* (Proverbs 24:27).

Anchor preparations in prayer. While doing the necessary “homework” and seeking wise counsel on how to proceed, it is also wise to pray, asking God to direct each step along the way. *"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed"* Proverbs 16:3).

Trust in God for the outcome. If we are properly prepared, then we rightfully can trust God for the decision that is ultimately made. *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases"* (Proverbs 21:1).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever failed to prepare sufficiently for an important presentation? If so, how did you feel – and what was the outcome?
2. How would you respond if someone were making a presentation of some kind to you, and it became obvious that he or she had arrived unprepared?
3. What do you think is the role of wisdom in preparing to make presentations, regardless of the setting or circumstances?
4. The proverb states, *“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases”* What do you think that means? Who is the “king”?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

Psalm 37:4-5; Proverbs 12:15, 15:22, 16:1, 9, 33, 19:20, 20:24, 27:1