

Training: Endurance Food For Serious Tentmakers

A major task of the Church today is to equip people for Monday morning. If local churches are not a training ground, then any other sort of training is operating under a handicap... Too many pastors think the people in the pews exist to keep the Church going, but in Scripture the pastor exists to keep the people going; for in the end it is the whole people of God who do the whole mission of God.

by Derek Christensen

This article is based on an address given to the Tentmakers International Exchange Congress in Melbourne in February 1997. Its purpose was to stimulate thinking on the broad subject of training for tentmakers rather than offer specific training programs. The conference delivery was based on a series of color overhead transparencies that contained catch phrases about aspects of the topic. Many of those catch phrases form the outline of this article.

Ten eager tentmakers, standing in a line.

One had done no training and then there were nine.

Nine committed tentmakers, waiting at the gate.

One had no church backing so then there were eight.

Eight aspiring tentmakers spread the news of Heaven.

One can't work with others and then there were seven.

Seven brilliant tentmakers are really in a fix,

"Cos one forgot security and then there were six.

Six keen business tentmakers, buzzing like a hive.

One got hooked on money and then there were five.

Five well-seasoned tentmakers knocking at the door.

One fell foul of government and then there were four.

Four real fired up tentmakers, going on a spree.

One forgot Ramadan and then there were three.

Three audacious tentmakers waiting in the queue.

One didn't know his Bible and then there were two.

Two real classy tentmakers ready for the fun.

One bad-mouthed the missos and then there was one.

One poor lonely tentmaker all on his own.

But that's OK because it was Christy Wilson¹ and he wrote a book about what the rest of us ought to do and now there are lots and lots of tentmakers once more.

The modern tentmaker movement knows a lot about attrition. It is like a resistance army hastily thrown together to stop the spread of an oppressive regime. High on enthusiasm, short on equipment, strong on ideals and weak on training, it pushes ancient rifles into the hands of green recruits and tells them, "Fight for the cause. Do what you can. There's no time for anything else."

Sometimes these guerrilla forces achieve great things, catch the oppressors by surprise and drive them out of a region. Too often though, our global telecasts carry pictures of broken bodies, some of mere children, cut down by superior weapons, training and discipline.

This article aims to raise the profile of training for tentmakers in the interests of greater effectiveness and lower attrition. In a recent issue of *Evangelical Mission Quarterly*, Jim Reapsome attached a chart of the strengths and weaknesses of tentmaking to an article on the same theme. On the "weakness" side he started with "*Lack training in mission, evangelism, Bible and theology.*"² While that may be far too broad a generalization, this article acknowledges

the fact that all too frequently it is true.

A recent conference on missionary attrition rated reasons for attrition in order of priority, distinguishing between traditional sending countries and new ones.³ Training appeared in one list as the third most important factor and did not make the top three for the other list. However, training for career missionaries is accepted as given, and for most missions non-negotiable. It may not always be adequate, but huge changes are taking place in the delivery systems.⁴ However, to suggest that career missionaries could do their job without proper training in a wide range of disciplines is almost unthinkable today.

My contention is that tentmakers, those who serve across cultures in a work or study setting and who cooperate deliberately in that place as appropriate with God's Kingdom intentions, need training that is just as well planned, just as balanced, and in many cases, just as extensive. This article explores the underlying principles that lead to that conclusion.

My convictions arise out of long involvement with the tentmaking movement in many capacities. For the past ten years I have been going to tentmaker conferences, waiting to hear a solid and extensive treatment of training for tentmakers. I have learned how to recruit and define, start businesses and aid projects, discover people groups and prepare job applications. But whole conferences pass without a single

word on training. We seem to be short on serious and systematic attempts to equip this marvelous marketplace workforce. If these words cause a flood of protests from groups doing proper training, then praise the Lord, because you have been very hard to find!

Allow me to lay a foundation for thinking about training by discussing the training attitude, current training developments, the climate of training and training as it relates to the local church.

The Training Attitude

Training is an attitude of mind before it is a programme. We either believe deeply that training is worthwhile or else we waste people's time. Here are five statements that expand on this matter.

Don't bother to train anyone today unless it is for the mission field.

The principal of the seminary where I teach tells us not to bother teaching any subject unless we can teach with a mission heart and a mission focus. That is not easy with something like Church History or Theology but it can be done. Training is not the boring stuff we get out of the way before we start the real thing. Training is what prepares the heart attitude. Mission is what training is all about, whether it be mission to Western culture or across cultures to the Two Thirds World.

Have too many Western training institutions got into a rut, pigeon-holed the component subjects and developed watertight delivery and assessment methods, without a mission intent to bind them together? There was a powerful statement last year from Jim Reapsome about mission and the local church that could just as well apply to training: "When people walk into a church ...they must smell world-wide outreach for Jesus Christ as if incense were burning. The smoke of missionary passion must permeate the whole place beginning with worship, pastoral prayer and down through all the edu-

cational programs and various ages and social groups. Everyone must boldly declare, Our Church exists for missions to the ends of the earth."⁵

That was about churches. It has to be true also about training institutions and programs. Training is an attitude and that attitude is mission.

Hands on, brains off won't last the distance.

Let me explain this odd phrase. Many people want training to leave the ivory tower of academic study and teach/learn instead by doing—apprenticeship models, practical, down to earth stuff. "Get people on the job alongside experienced people and it will all come out all right."

I have no problems with practical training—none at all. But training also equips people to think and understand and grow in their knowledge and insight. To have a future, tentmaking needs people who can think deeply about what they do and that is built in by the right sort of training.

The tentmaking movement is light on theologians and missiologists. There is considerable debate about the delivery systems of modern ministry training.⁶ Many models are being offered⁷ but none call for the complete absence of an underlying theology or sound biblical understanding.⁸

Training aims to produce the reflective Christian, not the reflective materialist.

That also is an odd phrase as well! Training is about producing an entire lifestyle. It has to start and finish with the worldview and value system of Jesus Christ, not with the latest management technique or conflict resolution course or self actualization technique. It is NOT about "I'm OK, you're OK." It is about Jesus Christ as Lord and my willingness to serve Him all my life in everything I do and say!

Hence, training aims to produce people who can relate the worldview of

Christ and the Bible to the setting round about them and make the right connections. Tentmakers are not spiritual technicians fitting together the latest fads; nor are they cross cultural tycoons who start the day with a prayer meeting and then suck the local market dry. Rather, they are Christians in heart, body, mind and soul—Christians who know how to think through Christian principles in a practical way. However, that does not happen overnight. It takes the right sort of training to build those gifts and attitudes into people. Even Jesus took three years to train His disciples.

Training today is about formation, information and application.

The training process is an integrated and integrative one. It is about the person, their skill and knowledge level and their performance capabilities. However, they develop these aspects not in isolation but interwoven as a total process and integrated whole. For this reason, there is no single trainer or training body. Later we shall see how many cooperate to form the person. The point is that the formal training process is related to other processes, not something we do when we "send people away to do a course." The "course" they do must be in harmony with the formative and practical aspects of the training. These things have all been said before in relation to ministerial and career mission training. However, the inertia factor in many of these training processes has been difficult to overcome. While training for tentmaking is still being formulated, it is easier to get it right. It is encouraging to note in a number of examples of training programs emerging from the non-Western sector that this integration is woven in from the start.⁹

Training for a significant career in tentmaking needs to start as early as possible.

Training is a long term process. Too often we feel the need is there, the job is there so as teachers we throw in a

couple of weekend courses, pack a correspondence course in their bag and wave their plane good-bye. Circumstances occasionally make anything more extended quite difficult.

It is far better if training is something that starts with our teenagers. It is something that involves many experiences and often many years. We need to change our attitude about training as something confined to a short a time as possible, something that occurs in a limited geographical space with a set syllabus and clearly defined information. We need to see it as incorporating life experiences as well as the specific subject content that needs to be there.

One of the encouraging thrusts of recent years has been the Strategic Careers Project.¹⁰ This aims to alert young Christians at the point of career choice to the careers that will make a difference in a variety of cultures. By this means we will have people who train strategically and weave into their training a Christian worldview.

In fact we need to take this back even further. What if churches trained Christian "career advisers" who get alongside young people in their churches from mid teenage on? This is the age when career choices begin to take shape as subject choices face them in their schooling. What difference would it make if these mentor figures fed into the equation the possibility of careers that make a difference, and followed it up with teaching that built a thoroughly Christian mindset into the marketplace thinking of these young people? If this were the case, then tentmaker thinking would come not as a revelation to these young people in another 10 or 20 years but would be there all the time as one of the options, alongside the awareness that their marketplace witness at home is highly significant. Let's take the surprise out of the possibilities by starting to train as early as possible!

Some Training Developments

What are some of the very broad trends in mission training and indeed, in education as a whole, that shape the way we design our emerging tentmaker training? Some of the best training is being done outside of the places Western missionaries expect. If we continue to think in Western ways of training, and we are the only ones fit for the Kingdom, we might as well issue our new missionaries with pith helmets and send them out by steamship.

It is hard from an isolated country like New Zealand to get a total picture of training worldwide. However, I have been impressed by the fact that as tentmaker movements emerge in a number of non-Western nations, the immediate concern is to provide some form of training. At the TIE Conference in Melbourne, training ventures from Korea, India, South Africa, Singapore, Philippines and Latin America were described, each with a high degree of intentionality and focus. Several countries are exploring innovative ways of fitting the training into the difficult timetable of tentmaker trainees.¹¹ A worldwide e-mail conference is now gathering information on such training as a means of integrating the often isolated experiments of small groups of enthusiasts.¹²

Unless our training moves as fast as our society, we will be training people for something that isn't there any more.

We cannot afford to fix something in place that is unable to meet people's changing needs. The prime symbol of this is the computer—the moment we buy the latest programme it is no longer the latest programme. Within six months our fancy Pentium is Spentium. The trick is learning to hang on to the unchanging Gospel but communicating its power in ways that recognize a changing world.

Biblical and theological truths are timeless. The ways in which we both learn and communicate them, however, are subject to enormous change. Whatever training we do must recognize how adults learn, recognize changes in the delivery systems for education and make friends, not enemies of technology. For example, the whole field of distance education is opening up new possibilities for tentmaking in particular. AT&T, the communications company, has a logo for its distance learning division: "*Moving information, not people.*" Tentmakers often are caught up in their full-time profession and many are unable to take a year or two out to train at a Bible College or Seminary. However, they can do some of their courses by distance learning, supplemented by intensives, workshop weekends, special events, retreats, etc.. One great course in Korea has developed a creative way of combining self-study with a programme that calls for on site work one Saturday a month and one week each six months. We need to build our training experiences around the times the people have available: weekends, Saturday mornings, Summer intensives, an evening study class—whatever suits and fits our students. We need to build training experiences that can be taken to people, that are portable and easy to use without losing depth.

Incidentally, before we automatically link distance learning with a stereotype of "correspondence course," in which we plow through endless "fill in the gap" exercises, ask yourself how many of the following you are familiar with: video letters, teleconferencing, e-mail discussion groups, learner specific assessment methods, web courses with hypertext links. I am not saying we need to be technology experts before we start distance learning, but I am saying distance learning offers room for expansion and often provides a lot

cheaper delivery method than on-site residential training programs.

Concerning adult learning methods, we need to reflect on the following statement:

- 50 and over learn by reading the manual.
- 35 and under learn by trying the controls.
- The rest are just confused.

Here is just one example of the changes. People as old as I ask our children to fix the computer or programme the video. We are scared to hit the keys in case we get it wrong. We struggle with the music and dress, the language and food fads of various sub-cultures. When I am told today I have a learning curve ahead of me, I usually find myself looking straight up!

Because the generations are so different, so are the ways we train them. Tent-maker training will have people of all generations, many professional backgrounds, diverse ethnic origins and various sub-cultures all thrown together.

We need to design our training to reflect that because in a field setting these are the people who will be there together.

If you can't measure it, many people today don't want it.

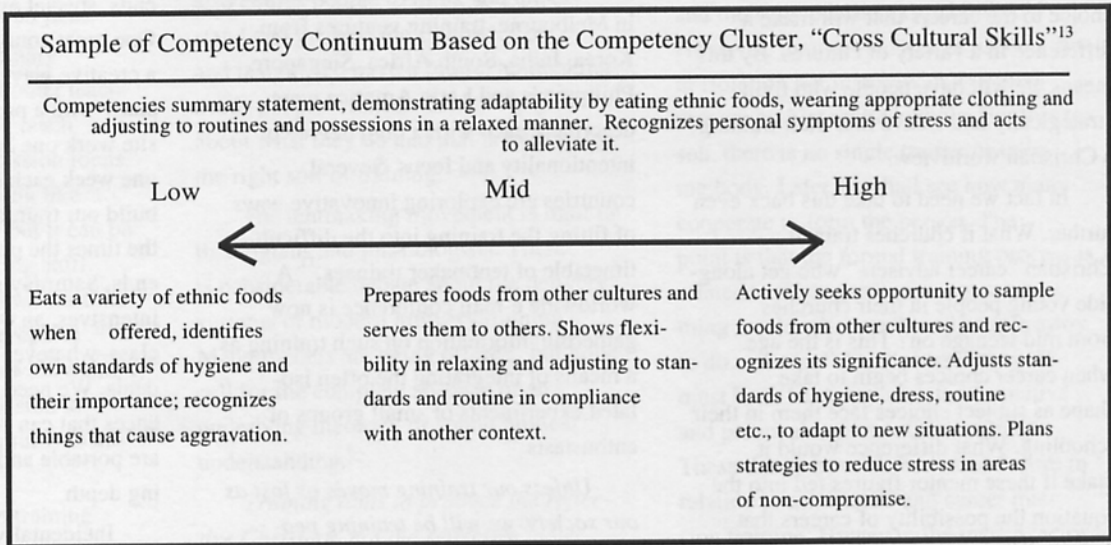
Younger generations want learning that results in outcomes. Most tentmaker programs in the past have aimed simply at orientation, a smattering of skills and principles sufficient to ensure survival. Now people want to have proof they have done the learning, a measurable outcome, not for the certificate on the wall but for their resumé, their future employer or for their own motivation. Many missions and governments reject the person who says, "I have lots of experience but never bothered to get any credit." When we design our training, we need to consider a format that can be measured. It is

amazing what such a requirement does to the quality of the course as well!

The means of measuring have changed too. Training aims now at competence, not competition. Traditional Western training methods grade people according to the results they obtain in tests and exams. They often joke that a lecturer needs a two storied house so they can put the exam papers on the stairs in order of merit. Today we understand more clearly the component skills of mission and have designed programs to move people along a competency continuum. A competency approach has a major effect on student attitudes and also on course design. Students who have not studied formally for some years are far more relaxed in this sort of environment. And a competency approach also allows training that builds

using current educational methods. In our enthusiasm to design training for them, we need to communicate in a format they understand.

Related to this is the fact that "receiving churches" are asking for more than merely academic biblical and theological skills. Extensive surveys have uncovered a deep longing for missionaries (and tentmakers) whose spiritual formation, team skills and proven ministry skills are all well developed. Relational gifts outweigh academic achievements. Personality and family must be stable and adaptable. All of this comes with a listening ear and a servant heart. This means a whole team of people contribute to the training programme. The heart of it all is this: if we are going to train tentmakers, we must form the whole person, not simply communicate a



practical and theoretical skills into an integrated whole and lets people on the receiving end know exactly what the tentmaker can and cannot be expected to do.

Here is a brief example of a competency continuum:

The point of all this discussion is simple. The majority of prospective tentmakers are well trained professionals, students, business people or skilled trades people. They have learned their skills in a contemporary environment

bundle of biblical facts or technical skills.

The Training Climate

Training involves community but not always an institution.

Mission today needs people able to cope with community that has been tested in relationship. Traditionally this has been a residential task. However living in harmony is not an automatic product of living together. I recall the residential college that built six apartments for married students and pro-

vided only five clotheslines. So how is community to be achieved apart from residential training?

There are many ways. These include short term residential components, courses that build in team competency through simulation techniques¹⁵, short term field exposure, training in teams and many others. A wide variety of community approaches is described in the book *Internationalizing Missionary Training*. And strangely, many people forget about the resources of the local church. If we are unable to build relationships into our church life, how can we expect a distant training institution to do what we could not do at home? My own students once suggested a camp with no rules, no rosters, nobody designated to do anything, from cooking down. By the end of the weekend they would either have discovered community or discovered their need of community! That sounds not too far removed from some mission settings.

Training involves many people. The training team is multi-disciplined and is also spread over time and location. How about the following list?

teachers	mentors
local church	field experiences
secular trainers	work experiences
peers	spiritual directors

Training is a team effort with many people and many disciplines. In the future, the chief trainer may be the person who coordinates the team, who draws together the components. Prospective tentmakers may well train in teams, each contributing to the formation of the others. Remember we may well have people in formation for five, ten, twenty years if we start early enough.

Underlying what I am saying here is a recognition we are not very good at, especially in the West, at forming people in the image of Christ. Part of the problem is that we separate out all the components, and another part is the rush we let ourselves get into, just to "get them out there."

May we not forget that the training of a tentmaker involves their work or study area. We need to allow the trainee to be as skilled as possible in their work field. It is a weaving together, binding the marketplace skills with the mind of Christ.

It pays to cooperate and costs to compete.

This should be obvious, yet how we compete, even in missions! It would be a giant step forward if the tentmaking movement, before it gets too advanced, too organized, and too set in its ways, would bring key people together to map out the range of topics needed, the range of things being done to provide an international network of training resources on which all of us would draw. I can imagine something on a scale we have not dreamed of that will equip the great mass of Christians we call "lay people" for missions in the tentmaking mode. The technology is ready if we are.

If tentmaker training is to produce greater cooperation between career missionaries and tentmakers, then an increasing amount of the training should be together.

Again this sounds obvious, yet it rarely happens. There remains the attitude so often that "career missionaries" are just a little higher up the scale and therefore their training needs are more serious and so are separate from "lay training." There is some theology in this attitude that needs addressing! As a practical test, how about listing the subjects that are taught in career missions courses in the training institution you know best, and then go through and ask which of them is *not* needed by a serious tentmaker. You might reach some interesting conclusions!

The Church and Training

It starts and finishes with the local church. Everyone else is just an agent.

Having spent most of my work-

ing life as a pastor, my heart remains in that mode. Yet I also ache for many local churches as I see them missing opportunities to be the right sort of training ground for the Kingdom.¹⁶

Unless training involves the church on this end, it cannot expect to contribute to the church on the other end.

One of the criticisms leveled at some tentmakers is that they are highly independent and sometimes independent of the local church. No wonder some missionaries get edgy when one of these ecclesiastical loose cannons wanders into their patch with no history of commitment to the local church. That is why partnership in the home territory is so important, for God wants to equip the whole Body. At the center of this article is a deep conviction drawn from passages such as 1 Corinthians 12 that God wants to do His work with all His people, not just a select few. Ephesians 4:11-16 is saying much the same as we see the task of equipping, which starts with a few, spread to the many. Tentmaking is not just a technique, it also has a theology and that theology says the whole Body is there for mission and the marketplace is a valid venue for mission!

A major task of the Church today is to equip people for Monday morning. If local churches are not a training ground, then any other sort of training is operating under a handicap.

Where do people get trained for the marketplace? Hopefully they are trained in their local church, the church where they worship between working weeks. If the local church does not do that, then others have got to undo a lot of bad habits. The truth is, before most churches are really equipped to turn out significant numbers of tentmakers, they need to re-examine their theology of the Church, as well as the ministry and the workplace.

The tentmaking movement is throwing up some vitally important theo-

logical questions for churches. The movement needs theological and biblical champions as much as it needs strong practitioners. Fortunately, while there are as yet few books on tentmaking as such, there is a flood of fine material on Christians in the marketplace. When the people in the pews each Sunday know what to do for the Kingdom on Monday, then mission will be in good hands both at home and across cultures. As a start, how about looking at the *Word and Life Study Bible*, the fruit of many years work by Pete Hammond of *Marketplace*, designed to explore the ways in which ordinary people live effectively from Monday to Friday.

Too many pastors think the people in the pews exist to keep the Church going, but in Scripture the pastor exists to keep the people going; for in the end it is the whole people of God who do the whole mission of God.

It was only towards the end of 28 years as a pastor did I realize how little difference I made on Mondays. I taught and exhorted and visited and loved and counseled and married and buried and all the other things a pastor does. But I had no specific plan to make a difference on Monday. Then I tried visiting some people at their workplace in their lunch hour, found out about the job scene of the people, used workplace illustrations and prayers in services, held workplace services in which people came in their work clothes, talked about career choices and workplace ethic—but I needed to do more. Churches can gobble up all available time and all available people. We need to realize the Sunday service is just a railway station where the troops stop briefly on the way to the battle front to get refreshments and supplies and we need to design it to get people ready for life at the front, not life at the station.

My favorite statement about all of this can be summed up as follows:

If you want to set the church on fire, you will find more fuel in the pews

than the pulpit.

Tentmakers and career missionaries are different in many ways. Neither is "superior" to the other, neither is "needed more" in today's world. God needs both approaches and perhaps many more besides. However, when we do send tentmakers into the battle zones, let's send them trained, ready, and equipped. They do not deserve second best in either equipment or training. They hurt just as easily as career missionaries, need spiritual resources just as much, have just as valuable a message to communicate. Also it is just as distressing when they come back home beaten and depressed. May we provide today's missionary tentmakers the best and most appropriate training available!

End Notes

1. Christy Wilson is a senior statesman of the modern tentmaking movement. He wrote a foundational text on tentmaking and has also encouraged and mentored many tentmakers over the past quarter century. His book is Wilson, J. Christy Jr 1979 *Today's Tentmakers*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House

3. Report on *Consultation on Missionary Attrition* convened by World Evangelical Fellowship Missions Commission, London, 1995

4. e.g. Taylor, William D. ed. 1991 *Internationalizing Missionary Training*. Grand Rapids: Baker

5. Reapsome, Jim. *World Pulse*. April 21, 1995

6. e.g. Anderson, Ray S. 1993 *Ministry on the Fireline*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press. pp197ff

7. e.g. Dearborn, T. "Preparing New Leaders for the Church of the Future," *Transformation*. December and Elliston, E. "Church Based Training" *Strategies for Today's Leader*. Vol 32 No 1 1995. pp8-10

8. e.g. Wells, D. 1993 *No Place for Truth*. Grand Rapids: Wm Eerdmans.

9. Taylor, William D. ed. 1991 *Internationalising Missionary Training*. Grand Rapids Baker Book House. pp 43-189

10. *Strategic Careers Project*, 1624 21st Street, Colorado Springs, CO

80904 USA.

11. Chandran B. and D., Thomson R. and Rajkumar S. 1995 *Breaking New Ground*. New Delhi: The Tentmaker Centre.

12. For information on this group, contact Tentmakers International Exchange, P.O. Box 45880-0880, Seattle, WA 98145, USA.

13. Massey, Brian. *Training* (Published by Missions Commission of WEF), September 1994. p 6

14. Ferris, R ed. 1995 *Establishing Ministry Training*. Pasadena: William Carey Library. See especially appendices B, C and D

15. A group with extensive experience in this area is *Mission Training International*. See Lewis, J. ed. 1993 *Working Your Way to the Nations*. Pasadena: Wm Carey Library. Ch 4

16. *ibid.*

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