
GROWTH POINTS

With Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D.

Learning from a 244-Year-Old

For 244 years, sets of Encyclopaedia Britannica graced the shelves of thousands of homes. It was the go-to source for elementary, middle school, and high school students writing papers for classes. Adults searched its pages for factual information on what seemed like unlimited topics. The set was well respected as a source of factual information written and updated by seasoned editors. But, in 2012 Britannica's management stopped producing the 32-volume, 129-pound encyclopedia.

The announcement that the hardbound copies were being discontinued, caught people by surprise — many were shocked. The response was immediate as people called for management to bring back the iconic sets, criticized management for yielding to the Internet, and generally expressed dismay.

Some misunderstood the reasons behind the decision, but the fact was the decision to discontinue publication of the hardbound copies took place after much research, testing, and thinking. The following are some insights that guided the Britannica management, which may be of value for leaders of churches.

Management was attentive to changes

Throughout the first 200 years of publication, editorial changes were made through laborious means. By the 1970s, management decided to streamline the process by loading the contents onto a large mainframe computer. While doing this made for easier editing of content, management became aware that the entire process of publication was about to change. Instead of ignoring this change, they began to identify various threats and opportunities for doing business in the future.

Management chose to see changes as opportunities, rather than problems.

The advent of digital media was first viewed as a problem, since digital publication would pose a threat to selling encyclopedias door-to-door. Overtime, however, management began to see these as forces to help the company focus on its core business and redesign its strategy.

Looking for a coach? Our team is available. Email Dr. Gary L. McIntosh at cgnet@earthlink.net or call 951-506-3086 for full details.

Management redefined its business.

After listening to its K-12 customer base, management discovered that customers desired multimedia and interactivity combined into affordable learning materials that could be used in the classroom and the home. With this understanding, Britannica moved past its business of providing reference content in hardbound books, to being a provider of educational materials. Now they are no longer an encyclopedia only company.

Management held tightly to its core mission and values.

The historical mission of Britannica is to bring fact-based knowledge to the general public. One of the underlying values is quality. In part this requires a large investment in editorial resources and people. Rather than replace its long-tenured editorial staff, Britannica committed itself to an aggressive overall of the editorial process that reflected its values. Teams of scholars representing numerous disciplines from around the world review, refresh, and revise content. Now, rather than taking years or weeks to revise content, updates are made every 20 minutes! Staying true to its intrinsic values has enabled Britannica to continue to differentiate itself from other similar companies due to the high quality of its materials.

Management experimented with new approaches.

Management's attempt to adapt to the changing digital markets led to several mistakes. They priced a digital version of the entire encyclopedia at \$1,200, which proved to be too high since customers could get other versions for free. Britannica eventually dropped the price to \$1,000, then to \$150, and finally to less than \$100. In addition an attempt to provide a free, ad-supported version bombed. Yet, they didn't give up and keep experimenting and adapting until they hit upon a new approach that worked.

Leaders made bold moves.

The center to the success of selling the older hardbound sets of encyclopedias was Britannica's door-to-door sells force. Their army of sells people blanketed the world, but that approach became obsolete in the age of the Internet. It was a bold move, but Britannica's management dismantled the sales force and moved forward with a new direct marketing one.

Leaders celebrated changes.

The day Britannica announced that it was discontinuing the production of the hard bound sets, employees held a party. Silver balloons—244 of them—reminded the staff of its long history, as the company entered a new era with determination.

What insights can you learn from Britannica's turnaround? What can you apply to your own ministry?

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Building the Body *12 Characteristics* *of a Fit Church*

Just as physically, healthy people might not actually be fit enough to run a 5K, so churches can appear healthy—with no obvious issues, maintaining a healthy size—but not exhibit fitness.

A fit church is one that is not satisfied with merely coasting along with no problems. A fit church is actively making disciples, maturing in faith, developing strong leaders, reaching out to the community, and more.

Building the Body unveils the twelve characteristics of fit churches and shows pastors and church leaders how to move their church through five levels of fitness, from beginner all the way to elite.

Here's what others are saying

“Building the Body powerfully draws on the biblical imagery of the church while taking the concept of church health to a whole new level. Becoming fit is presented in a way that motivates rather than produces guilt, and the combination of principles and practices applies to churches at all levels of development.” — Wayne Schmidt, general superintendent, the Wesleyan Church

“Practical steps to the next level—that’s what this book offers. Wherever your church lies along a continuum of twelve factors (e.g., outreach, stewardship, worship, disciple making), McIntosh and Stevenson give concrete strategies for advancing to the next level . . . and then the next level . . . and then the next level.”

—Donald R. Sunukjian, chair, department of Christian ministry and leadership, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

“A practical, informative, doable resource for leaders and churches who want not only to get better but also to get as strong or fit as possible for the good of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.”

—Jim Dunn, vice president of church relations, Wesleyan Investment Foundation

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“All fit churches are healthy, but not all healthy churches are fit.”

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