

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1756 Always Do Your Best and Wait on God

If you've lived in Guam for a long time you might know that I once published a business magazine named Directions. It last 15 years and, other than daily newspapers, it was the most successful publication in our island's history. And it almost never happened. I'm Jerry Roberts and I'll tell the story next on The Extra Point.

It was 1995 and my company was preparing to produce the second Guam Business Show. We had a long list of exhibitors coming back from the first one the year before, plus others that wanted to get in. We would be sold out.

Vendors had requested that we create an event booklet, something they could advertise in, and attendees could take with them. I knew it would be extra work, but we'd make a profit and satisfy our customers. Thus, I agreed.

I enlisted the support of many leaders in the community to write articles. I interviewed Gov. Carl Gutierrez, then in his first term, as well as the head of DFS, Bob Coe.

During the making of Directions, the "event booklet", I was repeatedly asked if I intended to go into competition with the Guam Business News, which had been around for 13 years. We had added the Guam Housing Expo and were successful with shows, intending to add more, so full-time publishing was not on my radar screen.

Still, the more I thought about it, the idea had some advantages. Within a couple of weeks of the show, I announced that Directions was jumping into the magazine game.

A very simple company business model, show production, was about to give way to a long list of problems.

There was no editorial staff, so that became me. Managing ad sales and getting ads made was another issue. When all that was done, who was going to actually lay out what was now a 50-page magazine.

The magazine/event booklet had to be at the hotel by 3:00 p.m. on Friday to be handed out when the show opened. The printer told us they had to get our materials by a certain day and time, or that wouldn't happen.

I might have received a little help on the layout, but at the end I stayed awake for 72 hours to finish. I somehow made it to the printer, but just a few minutes late.

Unfortunately, we had lost our place in line and there would be no delivery on Friday. We might get it on Sunday, the last day of the show. I informed advertisers and vendors that we would have a plan B.

We had an excellent business database that included leaders in both the private and public sectors, and we had registration forms from the event attendees. From those sources, we built a mailing list of over 3,000 recipients, and those folks got a copy of Directions, inside of an envelope with their name on it.

I said in the introduction that Directions almost never happened. Let me explain.

I had altogether too large of a role in producing the magazine, and I knew that was not the way to be successful. We were preparing to create another show, so I knew I had to build a team or swallow a bitter pill because of my enthusiastic announcement.

I decided to see if there would be any reaction to Directions. If nobody said anything, maybe that would be a clear message that we should not move forward.

It took a couple of days, but then the calls and emails began to come in. As much as I felt I could have done better with the layout, the writing had been good and responses were all positive.

To my surprise, this "event booklet" had revealed the desire for a different kind of business magazine. (Con't.)

Several advertisers wanted to commit to annual contracts, always a good sign, and we were in the publishing business.

We had no trouble attracting top contributors to write for us. One fellow, an old friend by the name of Bill Gibson, was with us from the start. Carl Peterson was another. We had many more, but those two were in the family for most of our run.

What had begun as a concession to vendors at a show, and what had been an exhausting distraction from producing our event, served to change the course of our business.

Eventually, Guam Training was added, and the shows were reduced, and finally terminated.

Directions grew into the most successful publication in Guam's history, outside of the Pacific Daily News and the Guam Daily Post. It ran for 15 years.

What's the message? I tell the story not to glorify what we did, but to inspire someone who is toiling away on an idea or project, not knowing if it's going to work, or even if they should continue.

If that's you, then only you can figure that out. I would simply say that you should do the very best work you can, be open to the opinions of others, but keep your eyes on the ball. Get your work into the hands of the people who need to see it, and then let the market tell you what it wants to do.

If not for Directions, I'm not sure there would be Guam Training. Without that, I can't imagine there would be an Extra Point.

Do I believe that God has a hand in a person's career, and that He made something special out of what was originally going to be nothing more than a side project? Yes, I do.

I hope you believe it, too.

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3FM, the Ray Gibson Show, and First Hawaiian Bank, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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