

## An Interview with Ged Tyrrell

MD of Tyrrell Systems



Sally Orwin interviews Ged Tyrrell about the process of integrating faith and work as a Christian businessman and entrepreneur. Ged is MD of Tyrrell Systems based in Leigh in Lancashire. This is a high-tech engineering company providing services and technology for the control and management of building services systems including lighting control, heating and ventilation control and fire systems monitoring. He has also recently set up tankcoffee which roasts and grinds fine single-origin African coffee to order, delivering it direct to the customer's door. The best bit is you don't have to be at home to receive your order as the 400g boxes are designed to fit any standard size letterbox! Tankcoffee provides coffee to the Greenbelt Festival amongst other customers.

### An Introduction to Tyrrell Systems

Ged and Vicky Tyrrell set up engineering company Tyrrell Systems in 1998. From the company's website, we learn that the focus of the company from its inception was to deliver first-class integration of building services systems (access control, temperature control, fire monitoring etc), including project work, design, service, software/hardware development and support. The company now has a large number of noteworthy customers, prestigious sites and a growing, satisfied customer base. The sites and end users the company serves are a testament to Tyrrell's integration expertise and the company's commitment to lasting relationships.

Tyrrell were the first North Approved Systems Partner (NASP) in the UK, as well

as being Tridium AX Development Partner, a Tridium Systems Integrator, and now a Trend Integrator (TIS). Approved status with these key manufacturers assures customers that the company has the highest level of training and knowledge to deliver and support integration projects.

### I asked Ged to tell me a bit about his story as a Christian in business ...

'I always liked to make things better' he explained. He also reflected on a desire to keep things 'plain and simple'. Pricing, for example. Profit has always been set on the basis of transparency through asking whether the customer would be 'offended' if they knew what profit the company were making. This process has led to the setting of a 'straightforward fair profit' which is open to scrutiny within and outside the company.

Ged spoke in terms of a desire 'to take money out of the kingdom of darkness and bring it into the kingdom of light' as being his first and perhaps, looking back, simplistic objective in his view of business. He certainly perceived business as a way of expressing the Christian values he shares with his wife and co-founder, Vicky Tyrrell. It is these values which help them negotiate the challenge of what he called the 'global village'. Different countries and markets can afford to pay more or less depending on internal political and economic circumstances. He explained that this approach is more one of getting what you can for products and services rather than working with fixed costs, plus a sensible profit wherever those goods and services are

*Ged Tyrrell is a Lancashire-based businessman and entrepreneur. He is MD of Tyrrell Systems, a high-tech engineering firm which provides intelligent solutions for building management, including systems for lighting, ventilation and fire control. With his wife Vicky he has also recently set up tankcoffee which sources fine single-origin coffee from African growers direct to the customer. He also runs the CityGate conference held in the north west on an annual basis, seeking to teach and encourage the integration of Christian faith and discipleship in all aspects of life.*



▶▶ being provided. Ged feels strongly that if a local market can serve the local needs then it should do just that rather than having discrimination in pricing dependent on who you are selling to.

One of the principles which has driven them personally in business has been to avoid debt. Ged explained this as maintaining the well-being of the business without it becoming ‘a god in itself’. To this end, he and Vicky saved up to raise the capital to begin the business and run it for six months. That was back in 1998 and they have grown the business consistently over the past 12 years without the need to borrow.

As Ged went on in business and became more successful, he felt a corresponding lack of understanding about his vocation and calling from within the church. There, the idea persisted that business was a ‘bad’ thing, that it was about ‘making money’ and was therefore ‘fundamentally wrong’:

“I felt called to do this but I also felt it was viewed as not being as important as church work. This became more apparent after stopping youth work after 12 years of service in order to concentrate on the business, like it was a shame I had to spend more time on the business. This made me feel undervalued. I felt like a second-class Christian.”



*‘Wrestling’  
Gustave Doré  
Jacob Wrestling with the Angel.  
(Detail, engraving, 1855)  
Granger Collection, New York.*

The tension between what he felt to be a calling to be in business and a negative view of business from the church led to a period of ‘wrestling’. In 2005, Ged discovered the work of Landa Cope who at the time was working for YWAM (Youth With a Mission) as base director in Geneva, Switzerland (see my review of the CityGate conference in FiBQ 13:1 for more on the work of Landa Cope).

Landa’s work on what she calls the Old Testament template articulated for Ged the importance a calling to business has within the scope of God’s creative and redemptive

purposes. She has outlined eight domains of activity in which the Old Testament template helps us to gain a biblical view of vocation within the overall purpose of reaching the nations for Christ. These are government, economics, science and technology, church, family, education, communication and finally arts and entertainment. Ged learnt that in the model of the Old Testament business played a huge role in the community of God’s people. This gave him a direct biblical reference behind the calling he had to run a profitable business in the world and helped him to articulate what was going on: “... business is important to God and plays an equal role in God’s world alongside what might be perceived as ‘more Christian’ roles ... yes, I knew this was right but having the biblical framework re-affirmed my calling and lifted a huge burden of doubt and perhaps even guilt that what we were doing was not good enough or as important as church...”

The top line mission of the company now is “to provide goods and services that people want and need at a reasonable price delivered in a transparent and fair way, and to provide employment.”

In the long term, Ged is committed to business ‘playing its part’ in delivering the well-being of the community within which it finds itself and which it serves. He is passionate in encouraging individuals and groups to understand what this means for them within the overall model. If business were doing what it is meant to be doing, for example, there would not be the same need for the large number of charities which serve some sections of communities. He refers to picking only the low-hanging fruit and allowing the marginalised to come and pick for themselves, ensuring provision across the community whilst weaving in the principle of work. CSR can too often be seen as a give-away programme whereas God is specific and objective about nobody getting anything without playing their part and injecting some effort for what they receive.

“God started work in Genesis 1 ...” he argues, so the work ethic is reinforced right at the beginning of the creation story. Ged’s own ▶▶

▶▶ attitude towards the role of business changed dramatically after he understood more of its role in community and within a network of relationships. Here, to use the words of Dennis Peacock, the profit becomes the fruit and not the goal. The great thing about business is that it has to be sustainable to survive, which includes making a sensible profit. This model should therefore embrace accountability and the coaching and empowering of individuals for both corporate and individual benefit. When we look at how business functions as God intended in a community, it is a far cry from what we see in business today both in reality and in perception.

**“What gets you up in the morning? ...”**

“Wanting to make the world a better place!” which is very often the response of the entrepreneur. “I want the business to succeed for the people we work with and for the sake of engagement, security and democracy.” Although they don’t use the word ‘discipleship’ directly in company policies, Ged is clear that this is what lies behind the policies that reinforce the Christian values they strive to live out in the life of the company from day to day.

This is expressed in the sharing of ideas and the discussion of cause and effect in decision-making. It is also reflected in the very practical products and services which the company provides and delivers: “making things that make the world better” as Ged puts it. These include, for example, software and hardware to manage a building more efficiently and effectively.

More recently, Ged has set up a new strand of business buying coffee directly from farmers in Africa and engaging suppliers directly in the economic supply chain. To lift the African GDP by as little as 1% would help towards eradicating poverty in the continent and so that’s exactly the kind of contribution tankcoffee can help to make. In terms of helping with the growth of GDP whilst avoiding the traps of corruption, Ged says it is easier for corruption to take place through “sending a suitcase of money” than it is when sending “a load of shovels” to help the local

community begin work. He sees the coffee business as a “fantastic vehicle” to begin to lift people out of poverty in a sustainable way in which they play their own God-given role in developing the natural resources they have in the place in which they live. This is not about pity or charity. It’s about delivering great-tasting coffee to a market which demands the highest quality and working with farmers to “do it for themselves”.



*African coffee co-operative*  
photo: Menno (“the Dutchman”)

It is the long-term good news of the Kingdom of God which ultimately inspires Ged in his business work. It’s not “just waiting for Jesus to return” he argues. How can we understand better the role each of us has in making the world a better place now, wherever we are, whatever we do, every day. “We all need to be inspired to nudge things towards the way God intends for them to be, wherever we are and in whatever we are doing ...”.

**I asked Ged what transformation he is beginning to see as a result of his entrepreneurial activities ...**

“Seeing the results of people believing that the biblical models from the Old Testament work in nudging things towards the way God intends for them to be ...” he says. The staff he works with are beginning to speak out these values for themselves; even those that are not Christians. He is seeing an increasing boldness and tenacity to “just keep ploughing these values back into the team ... We have a really good team and we are beginning to see them look after one another.”

For himself, he says he is understanding better the role of coaching and empowering and that this is “the right way to do things ... It’s not about me or proving myself. It’s about my identity in Christ. God is passionately interested in what I’m doing but that doesn’t define me; my definition is in the fact that He created me in His image and my identity starts in knowing that that is enough. This has created a massive freedom because it’s about



▶▶ Him; I was holding the business back physically because things had to come through me ... Christ empowered only 12 to go out and look where things are now ...”

Tyrrell Systems has just ended its most profitable year ever in financial terms. The structure of the business is one of team. Ged is now working hard not to *assume* that people understand the values but to reinforce them. He speaks in particular of those who are entrusted to manage and lead others who “must believe the value system works and who *get it*: it happens through small incidents over time with the opportunity to make choices based on the overall vision and the direct working out of values”.

You can find out more about Ged's work at:  
[tyrellsystems.com](http://tyrellsystems.com)  
[tankcoffee.com](http://tankcoffee.com)  
[ottcitygate.org.uk](http://ottcitygate.org.uk)

**On business connecting with the church ...**

Ged refers back to the thesis of Landa Cope in assisting church and business to understand each other more directly and relevantly. It is the Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit which is the hub of the wheel and church is one of the domains alongside the other seven as categorised above. Although there is some crossover, each domain or people group has its own focus. He hopes for a time when the church will “understand and engage with business” rather than seeing business as a means only of making “filthy lucre ... God created the world which is spiritual and material ... the heavens *and* the earth ...”.

Therefore we make money to serve people; a church leader with too many activities and a misunderstanding of their own focus within their domain means the church activity itself is in danger of becoming an idol. Similarly the church might focus so much on its own self-perpetuating activity that it fails to empower the people who gather for fellowship to have a right understanding of their own calling within their own domain or sphere of life. No-one who has this sense of calling outside the church domain should feel “second-class” within God's overall creative and redemptive purposes, and the church should be doing everything it can to ensure this is neither inferred nor taught.

The church is important for holding accountable God's people who hold responsible positions. This is not only according to their calling within the church community, but also their calling in serving the local community. The church should have a right understanding based on the form this might take, depending on the focus of each local community group. A mother nurturing young children will have a different focus to the business person nurturing staff. Both roles are equal before God in terms of bringing about Kingdom transformation. As such, the church itself must have its own identity firmly rooted in Christ and a clear understanding of its own role within the community of believers and in reaching out to the surrounding community for the sake of Christ.

**“CityGate” ...**

The CityGate conference is one way of inviting people to engage with and begin to understand better the role they have in their own domain for extending the Kingdom of God. The great Christian businessmen of the past understood this: Barclay, Cadbury and Lever for example.

“They *got it*,” says Ged. They understood that the role of business is to engage in the community. They ran companies that were immensely profitable but understood the principle of serving the customer. They also understood the healthy tension that exists between individuals and a community, argues Ged. Whilst we have authority and free will over ourselves, the choices we make affect others. It is as important to look beyond our local community as it is to look beyond one generation of our families. The wealth generated, along with multi-generational thinking, was a means of nurturing sustainable communities, “... and we could do far worse than to aim for the same values again in this generation ...” he concludes as he plans for the CityGate Conference to take place in the North West this September - another step in nudging things towards the way God intends for them to be. ■

Sally Orwin is a consultant in change and development to a wide range of charities, individuals and small firms in Manchester and a co-editor of this journal.

