

Learning to put Faith into Business

■ by Ranjeet Gupta

Ranjeet Gupta shares the challenges of starting and growing a business, www.kingskurry.ch; and shifting from work as an *entrepreneurial evangelical* to being an *evangelistic entrepreneur*.



I finished my first degree in Theology at Oxford in 2001, and then moved home to my parents in Switzerland. I prayed for a miracle to pay off student loans. A Swiss Bank somehow thought I was employable, so, gingerly and reluctantly, I started a secular job. I did get busy in youth work and leading worship, but was still frustrated by not being able to help the unemployed people in our congregation

Meanwhile, I read the Bible in German every morning on the train. In this quiet time, for an entire week, I heard Jesus say to me “Start an Indian Restaurant.” I was perplexed, as my personal plan was to study further, only working for two years to save up for my next degree. Slow to obey, I laid a fleece in response: “If this is really your will, Lord, please give me the people, the place and the pounds.”

The next Sunday, I met an Indian Chef at our predominantly white, upper-middle-class church. A few weeks later, I was jogging around Zurich and saw a desolate restaurant, with broken windows and trees growing out of the roof. After that, my mother received a small inheritance, which was enough to start the company. I am grateful to the circle of 50 shareholders who supported the vision to raise the necessary funds. So, one could say that the coincidences mounted, and we completed the legal foundation of King’s Kurry AG in July 2002. It took us three months to get work permits for the person who became our first Chef and to sign the

rental contract, and a further two months to renovate the first restaurant. After that, the real work started.

Restaurants may look like a glamorous business. But by the end of the first accounting year, we had a loss of CHF 300,000 on revenues of CHF 600,000, compared to a budget of CHF 1m. The shareholders were ready to close the company, and write off their losses. Nevertheless, we received very generous reviews from restaurant critics, and as a result there was an increase in regular clients. Moreover, my father had an interesting contact, who owned one of Switzerland’s largest food factories. He had read the reviews, and invited us to design a range of ready meals and drinks for the largest Swiss supermarket chain, MIGROS. It took a further two years of (unpaid) testing and development to launch the products. Once we launched, the products won the prize for European Supermarket Innovation of the Year 2005, and seven years later, our meals are still best-sellers, and helped us not only to spread Indian cuisine culture in Swiss households but also reach our first profit.



Following this encouragement, we concentrated on expanding the restaurants. In 2006, we moved from fine-dining to a faster, casual format of lunchtime “express” units, and then moved inside shopping centres and





Badrutt's Palace Hotel, Saint Moritz - Switzerland

▶▶ food courts. By 2012, we had expanded to several locations in three cities, and were invited to one of the top five star hotels in St. Moritz, Badrutt's Palace, where we featured alongside NOBU, a Japanese restaurant, and our meals sold for over \$200 per head (without wine!).

The company was birthed in prayer, and we made an effort to work with Christian employees and investors wherever possible; in fact, over half our staff were formerly unemployed, refugees, or partially disabled. We began and ended all Board and Management meetings in prayer. From the beginning of the company, we received encouraging verses from Directors, such as Proverbs 21:5, "The hard working plan brings success, but what is done for a fast profit brings ruin." Later, we were reminded of Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit", which seemed appropriate. We did not feel mighty or powerful, contending with Swiss bureaucracy in a foreign language, along with trying to stop strangers and staff stealing, suppliers cheating, or guests walking off without paying.

I often wished that I had stuck to banking, with a decent salary instead of none, and where I was appreciated, and ranked at the top of my peers, working on billion dollar transactions. And yet, I gained valuable skills with King's Kurry, not least writing business plans, raising capital for small businesses, and motivating a team to work by themselves for the customers, as well as learning to sell to corporate behemoths the hard way.

By 2008, it became clear that we were capable of writing and executing a business plan, but we needed a spiritual plan for King's Kurry. One of my prayer partners asked the tough question: "To what extent is King's Kurry growing the Kingdom of God?" I confessed that we were too busy, or a little embarrassed, or even ashamed of the Gospel. Did we really believe that Jesus was the power of salvation, even for the foreign Muslims or Buddhists or Hindus who worked for us? So we intentionally built our written values, based upon biblical truth, into our company culture. For example, part of our training tells all staff that "At King's Kurry we realise that all people are royalty, as males and females created in God's image (Genesis 1:27)". We started to be bolder in preaching the Good News of Jesus in a small way at every company-wide meeting – even using a Toblerone, the famous Swiss chocolate, as an illustrative gift for all staff at Christmas by explaining the Christian values of the founding Tobler family. The triangular "Matterhorn" shape gave us the inspiration to explain sin, redemption and sanctification (Romans 3:23 & 24, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

We were featured on Christian, and then secular, television and press. This, in turn, opened more doors to present our testimony via business fellowships across the country. But mundane business still took the majority of my time.

Acts 6:2 makes clear that "it is not good for us to neglect the word of God and wait on tables." And so, after 10 years, I cannot say I regret a moment. We as a company learned to increasingly prioritise God's word and prayer in a corporate setting. Getting married next month has allowed me to reassess my priorities, and I do not think 100 hour work weeks are compatible with the goal of Deuteronomy 24:5. Thus I handed over the CEO position at King's Kurry, so that after the wedding, I can concentrate on deeper priorities and study further. What more pleasant place to continue in what I have learned, to be thoroughly equipped for every good work, within or outside companies, than at Ridley Hall in Cambridge? ■

Ranjeet married Davita in August, is a British-Indian-Swiss citizen, with a degree in Theology from Oxford and 10 years experience as an entrepreneur and COO of a major bank.

