

Creo - empowering Christian entrepreneurs to become better leaders and build amazing ventures

Duncan McFadzean introduces his organisation. After leaving a responsible job in banking, he felt God was calling him to create a special social enterprise. But it didn't work, as he did not know his own weaknesses. Instead, he found success in training Christian entrepreneurs in acquiring the skills they lacked. The courses are digital, and so permit study anywhere. Duncan gives examples of small businesses which followed the course and found success.

In April 2008 I quit my job working for one of the largest banks in Scotland. I was responsible for around £3bn of the bank's capital, sat on boards of companies that employed hundreds and regularly worked on nine-figure transactions. Weeks later I found myself working out my notice, being flown around the UK by helicopter with three others, looking at assets the bank had funded and working with a CEO where the level of profitability of his company was over £100m.

I left because I believed I could serve God's mission better in a different context. I had been inspired by the story of the Prison Entrepreneurship Programme in Cleveland, Texas. I dreamt of creating a social business (a limited company with a social purpose) that created micro-businesses, generated profits and distributed these to bring about positive social change for those most in need in society. I finally felt I had found the way to integrate my experience (business, finance, entrepreneurship, investment) with who I was (creative, a giver, happy to operate outside the norms) and my passions (to use business as a force for good, to help those that had not had enough opportunity).

All of this was propelled by my faith and my heart to pursue my part in God's work.

It sounded wonderful; I was almost evangelistic (and proud) of my ambitions when I did my final leaving speech. I was off to save the world; joined by over 22 great people working across four ventures in the following three years.

But it didn't work.

When the time came to admit this in 2011, my friends were gracious enough to point to the positives, of which there were many, and to blame the financial crisis, which was not to blame. In reality, I lacked competency in many skills, I didn't know my own weaknesses and had equated inspiration with right timing and direction.

In hindsight, I have realised that my experience is common amongst entrepreneurs. I believe that Christian entrepreneurs face three main problems:

- They lack some of the competencies to run a business, including hiring, managing, sales, navigating legal cases and working with a challenging board or a difficult investor.
- They long for a trusted, wise voice to share their struggles with—whether personal or business-related.
- They lack a community of fellow Christian entrepreneurs who can sympathise with the loneliness or disappointments.

Rich Robinson and I launched Creo in response to these challenges. Creo exists to establish a community of Christian entrepreneurs who have the competency, character and Christlikeness to build amazing ventures that are redemptive. We are an accelerator, based in the UK and delivered digitally to increase accessibility, scalability and quality of content.

I need to explain our use of the word 'ventures'. We have a strong belief that Creo is not just about making Christian entrepreneurs better leaders - we also want to help them build great companies and charities and social enterprises. Venture is the word we found to encompass all three types of structure. It also fits with the venture capital world, where the focus is often on early stage, entrepreneurial, creative and disruptive models. We sometimes use "ventures" too to describe the people doing the programme, as there may be a team, and not just an individual entrepreneur involved.

We run two programmes - our nine-week Accelerator and a nine-month Lab, which include Theology, Formation, Execution and Impact from speakers such as Krish Kandiah, David Stroud, Alan Hirsch, the current

speaker coach to the CEO of a global software company, another person who led a major multi-national rollout for a high-street retail brand and many others who are Christians and experts in their field. We provide one-to-one coaching through the programmes and involvement in the Creo Collective where we are building peer relationships for encouragement, prayer, support and mutual benefit.

All of our content is delivered by Christians and regularly dives into the application of our faith to our vision, values, processes, systems, people and impact. We are inspired by Jeremiah 29:7 – “Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.” This was written to a specific people at a specific time – but the principle of seeking to advance the common good is one we hold strongly in our recruitment, programmes and coaching.

Our theological content covers:

- What is God up to in his mission in the world, what is he redeeming and

what is redemptive entrepreneurship? (David Stroud, Christchurch London)

- What does advancing the common good and seeking shalom mean, and how can Jeremiah 29 shape the vision of a venture? (Krish Kandiah, speaker, lecturer and author)
- What it looks like to embody the values of graciousness (reflecting the grace of God), beauty, peace & mercy in the culture of the ventures (Fred Drummond, Evangelical Alliance)
- What role is there for the Bible and prayer and how should entrepreneurs look for the Holy Spirit in their work? (Eddie Backler, Entrepreneur)
- The theology of work and the importance of mastery and excellence in all that we do, for the glory of God (Jordan Raynor, author of *Master of One* and *Called to Create*)

As a digitally delivered programme, entrepreneurs are able to access the materials in a way that works for them – on trains, in cars, at home or at work, and they can do that at a pace that fits

with the multiple other commitments in their life. Ventures on our Accelerator programme give 2-3 hours per week to the content and assignments and receive three one-to-one calls across the programme, as well as group webinars. Ventures on our Lab programme do 2-3 hours per month on the content and assignment and receive eighteen one-to-one calls across the programme, as well as group webinars.

We launched in early 2019 and have already worked with 17 ventures across the UK, Sweden and the USA. These are two examples.

I Can Compose is run by Rachel in Manchester. She has a background as a music teacher and her business delivers courses in classical music composition for high school age students and teachers. The Creo course has given her input on everything from strategy, personal focus, dashboards and digital marketing to hiring strategy. Rachel is an award-winning entrepreneur but found the flexibility and accessibility the digital approach enables very helpful.






Rise:Glasgow is run by Helen in Glasgow. She's delivering an employability programme for refugees and asylum seekers, to help them gain dignity, skills and ultimately employment. Catering is the tool for training and community building and *Rise:Glasgow* has run several pop-up restaurants and is now looking for permanent space, funding and people to join the team. Creo has brought additional input and coaching around how to build and scale what she has established.

We've been encouraged by the time our faculty have devoted to supporting us and we are regularly finding experienced Christian leaders keen to volunteer with us through providing content, working as coaches, or by joining our team.

Can you help us? We're looking for the next batch of amazing ventures to work with. They should be from £0 to £2m of annual revenue, from 0-20 employees and can be any legal format (we work with charities, social enterprise and businesses) and any structure. The entrepreneurs must be able to sign up to the Apostles' Creed. You can find more information and apply via our website creoventures.co.

Our longer-term plans include: an annual gathering of our community; the development of city cohorts and church partnerships; raising an investment fund to provide capital to the ventures; and building connections, relationship and collaborations across the alumni to increase their impact in the world.

Please pray for us as we seek to empower the next generation of Christian entrepreneurs to shine like lights for Christ as they build and develop amazing ventures that advance the kingdom.

We would encourage you to seek out the entrepreneurs in your church or community and take time to listen to their battles and their dreams, to encourage them and to help them advance the good they seek. Dave Blanchard, Founder of Praxis, a recently formed New York based Accelerator for Christians, says "Christian entrepreneurs can be bold cultural witnesses, and their ventures act as a demonstrated apologetic". Will you help that vision become a reality? 



Duncan McFadzean is Co-Founder of Creo. He has experience in corporate banking, private equity and corporate finance advisory work. He has helped secure investment across £2 billion of transactions, worked in two incubators, founded a social impact venture, was COO of a new training and consultancy venture for churches, and has led a city movement event around the world that engages with tens of thousands of people annually.