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Commentary from Design For Ministry™

Milwaukee – Philadelphia – Tampa

Total Economy Thinking

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The March 2004 Fast Company details the environmental vision of Kinko's. It is good for Kinko's to go green since one Kinko's consumes as much energy as 23 homes.

Developing an environmental vision reflects total economy thinking. Total economy thinking means an organization counts all the broader costs and benefits of an organization, not just income and expense. Moving to a total economy understanding requires two steps:

1.) ***Understand expenses as costs and investments.*** Surprisingly, many who control the finances of a ministry organization do not grasp this. In their mistaken understanding, all expenses reduce an organization's welfare. This is not true. Many expenses provide a return that increases an organization's capacity.

2.) ***Understand that an expense is more than a mere transaction.***

Take the debate about paper plates at church potlucks. Should a church buy paper or reusable dinnerware? Paper plates are biodegradable and come from a renewable resource. But they

tend to end up in landfills in plastic bags where they cannot be recycled. They cost less, at least initially, but most churches don't plant the same number of trees they consume.

Dinnerware looks more environmentally friendly, but washing means water must be heated and consumed, and suds flow into the water table. Most churches have no technology for water reclamation.

There is no perfect decision.

Intelligent, informed and clearly communicated decisions are those that weigh cost vs. return, benefits vs. detriments, and a flexibility to change decision-making formulas as new information is gained.

If Kinko's is willing to revise its formulas in a quest for sustainable profits, why not those organizations that have a vision for doing sustainable good?

– mark l. vincent