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A circular graphic containing a stylized map of Africa. The map is divided into regions, each filled with a different pattern and color: green with a leaf pattern, red with a dotted pattern, yellow with a dotted pattern, green with a leaf pattern, and brown with a dotted pattern. To the right of the map is a smaller version of the "AFRICA *SPEAKS" logo. Below the map and logo, the text "THE SECOND ROUNDTABLE CONSULTATION 2024" is written in red, and "5th -9th March Nairobi, Kenya" is written in red and grey.

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DEVELOPING FAITHFUL PUBLISHING PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

This paper looks at how Christian missions in the 19th Century changed African book publishing, focusing on the Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) organization. ACTS is known for distributing theological literature in Africa. We explore how ACTS started, how it hires staff, and deals with challenges like dishonesty. Its growth shows the value of teamwork, strong leadership, and ethical management. Despite obstacles, ACTS remains a key player in shaping African Christian literature by balancing tradition with innovation.

Keywords: African book publishing, Christian missions, Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS), theological literature, visionary leadership, ethical stewardship, collaboration, technological integration.

INTRODUCTION

The expansion of Christian missions in the 19th Century revolutionized African book publishing. These missions not only spread Christian teachings but also ushered in modern publishing by establishing printing presses across the continent. This marked a pivotal transition in the distribution of literature. In the mid-19th century, Nigeria got its first mission printing press. More presses were set up in the 20th century, making it much easier for people to access knowledge

and personal development resources. The Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) organization stands as a product of this evolutionary path. This paper will delve into the inception of ACTS. The first section describes how ACTS has navigated the challenge of unfaithful employees, overcoming these challenges with insights gleaned from successful publishing houses. The second section will describe ACTS' staff recruitment and retention procedures, and other strategies that have helped ACTS raise faithful publishing professionals.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ACTS

In 1991, a number of missionaries and theological educators living in Nigeria attended a regional conference of ACTEA (Accrediting Council for Theological Education of Africa). As a part of that meeting, the need for textbooks in African Bible colleges, seminaries and universities arose. Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS) was the eventual product of that meeting. Though the ministry began informally about that time, the organization was constituted in 1993, and was officially registered as a non-profit organization in 1999 with the Corporate Affairs Commission of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The ACTS Board of Trustees and Board of Directors is made up of missionaries, senior Nigerian academics and Christian leaders. ACTS is interdenominational and evangelical.

ACTS is now a leading provider of theological literature in Nigeria, Kenya and other parts of English-speaking Africa. ACTS imports a wide range of books and also publishes theological textbooks and reference books, mainly in English, and some in Hausa, to equip Christian leaders for the challenges facing Africa today. Responding to the challenge of book famine areas of Africa, ACTS could be described as an African-based international Christian literature aid agency which seeks to provide textbooks and other training resources for churches and schools in Africa. In May 2023, ACTS celebrated her 30th Anniversary with 20 branches all over Nigeria, in addition to branches in Kenya and Cameroon. There is an ongoing plan to open another Branch in Liberia.

A. NAVIGATING CHALLENGES OF DISHONESTY: A GLIMPSE INTO ACTS' EXPERIENCE

Within any organization, the complex issue of theft and dishonesty can rear its head, and ACTS has not been immune to these challenges. Let me share two noteworthy instances that exemplify these issues.

One situation revolves around a seminary branch that evaded computerized sales recording. This allowed staff to divert funds into their personal accounts. As scrutiny came to the forefront during accounting and sales reviews, those implicated tried to erase data from the hard disk. However, the intervention of a resourceful computer engineer led to data recovery, unveiling a significant gap in the expected revenue. This questionable activity resulted in a staggering loss of 6.5 million naira (\$16,331.65 foreign exchange rate as at 2021 – translating it at the rate of 398 to a dollar).

The second case centres on the marketing department. An employee within this unit undertook a deceptive approach by directly soliciting payments from clients for books, circumventing proper payment channels. This led to a substantial loss, exceeding 5 million naira (\$13,425.00 foreign exchange rate as at 2020 – translating it at the rate of 372.42 to a dollar).

In both instances, ACTS responded to these transgressions with the utmost prudence and maturity. Investigative committees were promptly established. They investigated each case carefully and provide management with comprehensive reports. The suspected individu-

als were placed on suspension during the investigations. The conclusions of these investigations guided subsequent actions. It's important to note that ACTS' Conditions of Service encompass an array of remedies for diverse offenses.

PRACTICES THAT ENCOURAGE UNFAITHFULNESS

Throughout my journey with ACTS, we have tried overcoming certain practices that inadvertently foster poor stewardship. Let us share some of our realisations:

1. **Sentiment and Bias:** Favouring individuals based on tribal, religious, or familial connections can hinder progress. Choosing team members who lack genuine enthusiasm and relevant backgrounds for the tasks at hand simply because of the aforementioned connections, has always proven to be a stumbling block.
2. **Unmerited Promotion:** There have been instances where leaders were appointed or promoted without their demonstration of a genuine commitment or a track record of competence. This sort of decision-making can hinder the quality of our publications. Additionally, hiring underqualified staff to save on costs, only to compromise on the quality of our work, has been a lesson learned.
3. **Lack of Accountability:** When employees are not held accountable to a higher authority, they tend to have a poor sense of stewardship. In mitigating this, we have recognized the value of seeking recommendations from respected figures who can vouch for an individual's character before they join our team.
4. **Justice and Fairness:** In our pursuit of trustworthiness, we have realized the significance of fairness within our organization. Dismissing employees without valid reasons, solely to assert authority, undermines the sense of justice we aim to uphold.
5. **Insufficient Training and Retraining:** Through experience, we've understood the importance of mentorship and continuous learning. Neglecting the growth of staff, both professionally and spiritually, can result in stagnation within our operations.
6. **Lack of Motivation and Recognition:** Neglecting to involve staff in important organisational changes can have a negative impact. Viewing employees merely as tools for achieving goals, rather than recognising their unique contributions, can lead to a lack of motivation and disengagement.



7. **Poor Understanding of the Vision and Mission:** When employees don't fully comprehend our organization's mission, it leads to confusion and misalignment. Communicating and reinforcing our vision has proven crucial to maintaining a shared sense of purpose.

In light of the above case scenarios that exemplify dishonesty in the work place, coupled with the above listed wrong practices that encourage unfaithfulness, the management of ACTS actively sought out steps to take in creating a culture of honesty and faithfulness in the work place. One of the first steps was learning from other successful institutions.

GLEANINGS FROM EXEMPLARY CHRISTIAN INSTITUTIONS

In establishing publishing houses and bookshops, staff accountability and integrity is crucial for success. In the past, Jos for example, had numerous bookshops, including those affiliated with various Christian denominations. However, these entities have struggled with persistent issues like theft and dishonesty. ACTS engaged in discussions with such organisations, using questionnaires to reveal insights. Some of the organisations interviewed include Oasis Distributions, Albishir Bookshop, FCS, ECWA Productions Ltd, Modern Bookshop, and NIFES Bookshop. The data gathered revealed that these publishing houses have dealt effectively with dishonesty and theft, leading to necessary staff terminations. Despite some of these challenges, some publishing houses have flourished. Four organizations stand out, from whom we can glean valuable insights:

1. Living Faith Church: Their resilient publishing arm has thrived by focusing on indigenous works authored by leaders, creating a relatable bond with their audience. Thus, one of the lessons ACTS has learnt is to publish indigenous books that local audiences can relate to.
2. RCCG: This denomination has recorded huge success and impactful service across the world that have inspired improved administration methods at ACTS.
3. Oasis Distributions Limited (**Nigeria**) and **Oasis International:** Their exemplary customer relationship management and commitment to evolving technology highlight the importance of nurturing relationships and embracing technological advancements. ACTS has learnt so much from them

about devising effective means for customer relationships among other lessons.

4. **Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries:** This denomination's success in embracing indigenous authors and modern technologies demonstrates the balance between tradition and adaptation. Thus, even though we strive to ensure that we are up to date with technology and modern evolving themes in theology, the need to meet the needs of those who are used to traditional ways of acquiring books is a big lesson learnt for us.

FOSTERING AN ENVIRONMENT FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FAITHFUL WORKERS

ACTS has put in place various policies to enhance the growth of reliable and faithful employees. These policies focus on four main areas: a good recruitment process, stable HR structures, care for staff and benefits, continuous training; and staff recognition according to years of service. This section explores these policies to highlight their importance in fostering trustworthy and dedicated workers.

1. Staff recruitment policies:

ACTS employs a meticulous recruitment process, encompassing two approaches:

- a. **Secondment of Staff:** To address the evolving staffing requirements, ACTS reaches out to churches and missions, encouraging them to second or recommend suitable staff or clergy. A notable example of this approach is the appointment of the current Managing Director, who was seconded by Ekklesiya Yan'wa a Nijeria (EYN).
- b. **Conventional Hiring Processes:** ACTS employs a hiring method that adheres to conventional industry standards as described in the following steps:
 - i. **Personnel Recruitment Announcements:** Churches receive letters and advertisement notices to raise awareness among members.
 - ii. **Shortlisting:** Candidates undergo rigorous screening in order for the recruitment team to create a shortlist.
 - iii. **Interviews:** Shortlisted candidates partake in a structured interview, including a written test, practical computer test, and an oral interview.
 - iv. **Background Verification:** Successful candidates undergo comprehensive background

checks covering church affiliation, residential history, and employment history.

- v. **Finalization:** The ultimate interview confirms the final selection, leading to the formation of the definitive candidate list.
- vi. **Offer Package:** Selected candidates receive a formal letter of employment, salary assessment, employment contract, and detailed job description.
- vii. **Staff Orientation and Consequent Induction:** New ACTS staff undergo a comprehensive week-long orientation with the Director of Human Resources. Aiming for effective integration, this reviews the history, mission, values, policies, and Conditions of Service. Afterward, they meet Management, undergo induction, and start a one-year probation. Software training is offered to them, to enhance their technical skills for sales, records, and accounts. If performance is poor during the first year of probation, an extended probation year might be granted. Successful probation leads to confirmation.

2. Stable HR structures:

Clear and stable HR structures in ACTS have provided a framework for fostering trust, accountability, and fairness within the organization. Consistent policies and procedures have ensured that employees understand what is expected of them and feel supported in their roles, thereby promoting stability and loyalty.

3. Benefits and care of staff:

Upon completing a one-year probation without confirmation, staff gain entitlements, including gratuity and pension after service. They can obtain loans for land, housing, and apartment furnishing, with medical expenses subsidized by 70% for staff, spouse, and children. Additionally, education allowance is provided for up to 4 children under 18. After their first 2-3 years, ACTS supports employees in their pursuit of further studies. The organization also offers assistance during weddings, loss of parents, and other family events. Yearly benefits encompass Christmas bonuses, promotions, and incremental salary increases. After 5 years, a 15% leave allowance is granted, with leave duration varying based on years of service.

4. Training and re-training of staff:

ACTS is devoted to enhancing staff growth and development. This commitment is upheld through ongoing personal life reviews and mentoring initiatives. These practices are fortified by

continuous training, seminars, and regional engagements. To elevate performance, ACTS provides select staff with full scholarships to attend universities and seminaries for relevant courses.

5. Staff recognition according to years of service:

ACTS has a system of recognising and acknowledging staff according to their years of service as shown in the table below:

CATEGORY	YEARS OF SERVICE	NUMBERS OF STAFF
A LIST	26-30	2
B LIST	16-25	9
C LIST	6-15	25
D LIST	1-5	19
E LIST	Student on Training	10-20 & above yearly

ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES.

1. Every staff member who joins an organisation has questions that need answers. Your policies should address these questions. Some of the commonest questions are:
 - # What benefits will I get if I join this organisation?
 - # Will I have the opportunity to grow and develop in this organisation?
2. As an employer, you should understand that no one wants to stay stagnant. Unfortunately, some employers want their staff to work for them forever, but at the cost of their family life and future. They hire a single person, but they do not care about their marriage plans, further studies, career aspirations, or personal goals. They expect them to stay loyal for 65 or 70 years, without anything to show for it. There is often no written contract, no benefits like pension plans, gratuities, housing or car loans, no education support, family or social assistance, vacations, or church activities. Some employers do not distinguish between ministry and family life. They turn their staff into domestic workers or slaves. An organisation cannot attract faithful workers this way.
3. Staff look for organisations with leaders who have a human face, and not a lion face that makes them afraid to greet their boss



- or his wife or even his children.
4. Staff want organisations that care about their family's welfare and wellbeing.
 5. They just want to feel valued and dignified as they come to work every day. They appreciate words of praise and gratitude, like 'well done', 'God has blessed us with you', or 'cheers'. They like to receive encouragement, support and validation from their leaders.
 6. Leaders should welcome new talents and give them the chance to express their positive ideas.
 7. What stake do the staff have in the organisation as they sacrifice daily for it or for the employer?
 8. They need organisations that are not biased or tribalistic in dealing with or positioning people.
 9. Employees desire an organisation that places and promotes people based on their merit and not on their connections within the hierarchy or management.
 10. Christian employees desire an organisation that has Christ at the centre of its leadership. One where when the staff make mistakes, they are treated like members; corrected or disciplined with love.
 11. An organisation where rewards are given when deserved and punishments are given when necessary will be respected.
 12. It's important that those who leave the organisation are treated well. Whatever you do sends a message to those who remain. Maltreating one has negative consequences, treating one well has positive rewards.

REASONS FOR THE HIGH RATE OF STAFF RETENTION

Since its inception, ACTS has had a high rate of staff retention as depicted in the table above. The reasons for this are discussed in what follows:

1. Connection to the Church and passion for the gospel: ACTS' enduring partnerships with churches and seminaries across various denominations underscore its commitment to the gospel beyond mere profit-making. This mission-driven focus fosters a sense of purpose among staff, contributing to longer tenures within the organization.

2. ACTS shows high regard for, and connection with staff's family needs.
3. ACTS provides well-articulated conditions of service, special privileges and opportunities.
4. Staff are strategically placed in departments where they can achieve optimal performance. This approach has proven more effective than implementing forceful transfers and changes in duties against their preferences.
5. The founding fathers and Management offer deep empathy to staff in times of need.
6. The Staff Cooperative supports their daily needs.
7. ACTS is a mission-oriented organisation, where most staff feel called to serve.
8. ACTS is currently blessed with an MD and Senior Staff who listen to the plight of all other staff and attend to their needs.
9. There is prompt provision of working tools to aid the work of staff.
10. For the past 30 years, to-date, salaries have been paid promptly as and when due (25th of every month).

CONCLUSION

The journey of African book publishing, evolving from Arabic scripts to Christian missions, has paved the way for the success of organizations like Africa Christian Textbooks (ACTS). From its beginnings to becoming a leading provider of theological literature in Africa, ACTS' journey reflects the importance of visionary leadership, thoughtful staff recruitment, retention strategies, and technological adaptation. The organization, born out of a need for theological resources, underscores the transformative power of collaboration. With its roots in missionary ideals, ACTS embodies a harmonious mix of tradition and innovation.

ACTS' staff recruitment emphasizes value-aligned personnel. The structured selection process, orientation, and induction nurture a dedicated workforce. Strong church connections, fair policies, conditions of service, and empathetic leadership contribute to a high staff retention rate.

Proactively addressing dishonesty underscores ACTS' commitment to ethical standards, transparency, and accountability.

Inspired by successful Christian institutions, ACTS values indigenous works, lasting relationships, and technology's role in staying relevant. Lessons from successes and challenges guide future growth and contributions to African Christian literature.

The evolution of ACTS' from humble origins to a respected resource provider reflects the power of commitment, collaboration, and ethical leadership. In a changing landscape, ACTS remains an inspiring force, affirming the written word's potency for enlightenment, education, and spiritual growth across Africa and beyond.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

The biggest and most important thing that we chief executives, managers and stewards of our ministries need to answer is whether we allow Jesus to be a part of our work, and test our leadership or stewardship on a daily basis; or do we just leave Him behind and out of our lives and remember Him only when we are in trouble or inside the church? This is a big concern because living lives without Jesus will continue to sabotage our work. A true life story from Nigeria corroborates this:

A driver of a general secretary of a certain church (name withheld), when queried for quitting his job replied, "While the Bible has the real story of Jesus, we cannot encounter the Jesus who demanded that we will follow in his footsteps, if we don't live like He did. Currently, if not for the bible, I cannot believe from the life of my boss that Jesus ever existed.

"I have seen no sign of Jesus in my boss's life and relationship. I see more of the signs of the devil in him. As a steward, I desire to see and experience Jesus in practical terms. I therefore quit this job to look for the practical Jesus, and not the theoretical one."

It will be worthwhile to read this book, "Taking Jesus to Your Work: Living out Your Faith on the Job, by Vera R. Jackson, published by Chosen Books, 2008.

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