

---

# TED ENGSTROM

Short bio speech for launch of the Engstrom Institute at the Christian Management Association conference in Sydney, June 2008

When Ted Engstrom joined World Vision, they were holding all night prayer vigils. They were praying for money to come in the next morning to fund the payroll. The organisation was in crisis. Its high profile founder, Bob Pierce, had a big compassionate heart, and a small business brain.

When Ted Engstrom retired from World Vision two decades later, World Vision still needed to pray, but not for the payroll.

In 1976 I was working at a Brisbane radio station when I saw a positions vacant ad in "B&T Weekly" for an organisation called "World Vision." In 1976, World Vision was not the household name it was yet to become. I knew nothing about it. I flew to Melbourne and met the people. And I was blown away.

Here was a Christian organisation that took its business seriously. As a business. There was a culture within the organisation that said, if it's good enough to use good business principles to produce washing machines, then it's certainly good enough to use good business principles to feed the hungry. If effective organisational principles are used to produce hamburgers, surely we should use effective organisational principles to save people from poverty.

Already in 1976, this was Ted Engstrom's imprint on World Vision. In the USA for sure. But also in Australia and everywhere World Vision existed around the world.

I ended up working for World Vision for 24 years in various roles. Even after he retired, Ted Engstrom was a consistent presence. Like all great mentors, Ted could sum up a wealth of knowledge in a pithy phrase. I carry them with me still today, and every day.

"Work with the willing, Philip," Ted would say, "the rest will get on board, or go away."

I remember having a long conversation with Ted about vision and culture. "If people think right, they'll do right" That's how Ted summed it up for me.

And on planning, Ted was the guru. "If you don't know where you're going, any road will do." He might have borrowed that from someone else, but that didn't make it less right.

Private time with Ted Engstrom was really a privilege, but he never made it feel like one. He liked the young Turks, and he gave us his time and his wisdom. When you were with Ted, it seemed like there was nothing more important to him than you.

Whenever I was promoted, or relocated, within World Vision, I always got a personal note from Ted. At first, I thought this was just the work of some personal assistant, until I asked her one day how she did it. "No, no, it's not me," she said, "it's Dr Ted. He likes to keep an eye on you."

And, you won't read about this in any brief bio, but Ted Engstrom was fun. He had a great sense of humour. Speeches from Ted about the history of World Vision were always hilarious. But Ted knew, that

speeches about organisational history shaped organisational culture. You left such a speech with your sides aching from laughter, and your heart full of pride to be associated with World Vision.

According to the world's values, Ted Engstrom may not be considered World Vision's greatest leader. Less charismatic, less flamboyant, less in the public eye, than some others.

Although, if we are to believe "Good to Great", Level 5 leaders have exactly the qualities of humility, humour and clock-in-the-thunderstorm steadiness that characterised Ted Engstrom.

I commend the organisations that have come together to create the Engstrom Institute, and I commend Christian Management Australia for aligning itself with the Institute. Dr Ted would be pleased, but he wouldn't have wanted anyone to make a fuss about him. Thank you.