

Hey, we're talking about the unique Berry Gordy! But do you even know who Berry Gordy is? Well, Gordy is one of last century's most successful American businesspeople. And he is certainly one of the most successful African-American businesspeople *ever*. And chances are high that, for years, you've happily enjoyed the services that Gordy's company produced. So, you might say, just *what* are you talkin' about?

*Well, it was Gordy's music, amazing music, yes, music that cut across generational lines and social barriers!* Hey, have you "...Heard It Through the Grapevine" with Marvin Gaye? How about listening to "Please Mr. Postman" by the Marvelettes? Have you followed Stevie Wonder's advice sayin' "Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing?" And think of Michael Jackson—are you singin' "Got to Be There" along with the King of Pop? Are you willing to "Stop! In the Name of Love" with Diana Ross and the Supremes? How about the classic "Sail On" with Lionel Richie? Now, isn't that sampling of classics timeless? It's pretty likely that you're in agreement with Smokey Robinson and the Miracles by sayin' what they sang: "I Second That Emotion!"

Hey, we haven't even mentioned top songs by The Temptations, The Four Tops, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, The Spinners, The Commodores, and the Jackson 5. And all of that entertainment was rooted in the efforts of Berry Gordy from the very beginning, resulting in the one, longstanding record label whose name still resonates deeply across generations: *Motown!* That name still sounds magical, right? *Motown!*

The reported statistics are startling: #1 hits? *180 worldwide!* That's mind-boggling—think about what it takes to get just one #1 hit, let alone 180! Famously, in 1968, Motown had 5 hits on the top 10 list at once! And, over the years, *lots more* songs charted. No wonder Motown named its first studio Hitsville USA!

Here's the thing. Berry Gordy was extremely successful in the music business. He built Motown into an incredible music machine with the help of many friends and colleagues, as well as several of his siblings. And he wrote his version of Motown's story in his book *To Be Loved: The Music, The Magic, The Memories of Motown*. And three important features set Gordy's autobiography apart as special for us to learn from.

First, Berry Gordy's narrative is unvarnished and tells the hard truths—about *himself*. You see, Gordy messed up a number of times, and some of those mistakes had very significant impact. And Gordy doesn't just say he made mistakes—he *owns* his mistakes and missed opportunities, and he specifically points out how he messed up. Hey, very few people of high accomplishment own up to their mistakes in real life, and even fewer write them down for the whole world to see and ridicule. This dimension of Gordy's self-told story creates a part of what an autobiography should be—credible, honest, helpful, and engaging!

The second thing about Gordy's tale is the flip side of the coin of owning his mistakes. You see, many people are name-droppers—that's a key way they try to gain credibility, trying to indicate how important they are by who they know, who they've met, who they've worked with. And Gordy earned every right to be a name-dropper—he was a core dimension of the launching of the careers of some of most famous entertainers in history. You heard some of the artists' names—and virtually every one was pretty unknown before connecting to Motown. And Gordy tells their stories well. But that's not what I'm talking about here—Gordy goes well beyond that! He smoothly calls out many *less-well-known people* in his narrative—and not just their names, but the role each had as part to the Motown success-machine. And Gordy calls out *lots more* people in his acknowledgements and co-creators list in the book. That's powerful, and it's mindful of how real organizational success works. It honors the total process, and it reflects true humility.

Here's the third key point about his autobiography. Gordy's story is extremely worthy, informative, and entertaining. So many autobiographies are vanity publications—done just for the "me-centric" vanity of it all by lesser achievers. But Berry Gordy was personally very successful, *undeniably a breakthrough winner!* With an \$800 loan, he started a business whose corporate and music catalog value a few decades later was in the *hundreds of millions of dollars*. He made a couple of great movies. And he super-charged the careers of dozens of music artists and groups. And, yes, Motown's relentless efforts resulted in millions of individuals being lifted up many billions of times in magical, four-minute bursts of captivating songs!

But now let's get to the heart of why we're talking about Berry Gordy: he planned, executed, and succeeded in very effective, relevant ways. *And Gordy's template parallels how some savvy Christians have grown the church by hundreds of millions of believers worldwide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond*—in fact, going the opposite direction of many established churches with declining numbers. Listen closely. Here are six of Gordy's approaches, each paired with similar approaches used by the specific, rather small sub-segment of savvy Christians in missional churches with astounding success fulfilling Kingdom goals.

1. Gordy's Motown communicated globally in very effective short bursts and messages to countless millions about the universal experiences of love and heartbreak. Those messages are called *songs* (recall those 180 #1 hits!), and they've been absorbed as impactful messages billions of times.

Similarly, savvy Christians communicate globally and missionally with many songs for countless listeners about universal experiences like heartbreak and redeeming love—from *Amazing Grace* to *I Can Only Imagine* to *You Say*. And the church uses key Bible passages like John 3:16, Psalm 23 and Romans 3:23 to minister deeply to believers and unbelievers alike. Powerful. Bursty. Effective.

2. Gordy's Motown utilized non-threatening, slightly-distanced-but-still-intimate media like radio and vinyl records very well, with the end result of people clamoring to see those artists up close.

Similarly, savvy globally-focused churches use slightly-distanced-but-still-intimate media: video + audio on the internet, websites, TV, radio—with Jesus-saturated believers connecting up close.

3. Gordy's Motown helped break down racial barriers in 1960s America, when racial division was escalating very publicly—doing this by truly attracting people to the extreme competence and fruitful hard work of Black artists that consumers might *otherwise* disagree with or reject socially.

Similarly, savvy globally-focused Christians point to the sacrificial servant Jesus in His universal appeal to every tribe and tongue. He's the only sinless Person, transcending *all* social barriers, the only One where all meet on the same level—in our spiritual poverty at the foot of the Cross!

4. Gordy's Motown trained its artists to navigate culturally so as to be widely embraced by others.

Similarly, savvy globally-focused churches effectively train believers for competent, cross-cultural outreach, whether by traditional missionaries hailing from every country imaginable raising up indigenous leaders or by workplace believers impacting their dissimilar colleagues and neighbors.

5. Gordy's Motown did this repeatedly for years, deliberately creating a remarkable “assembly line” reality for collaboration, replication and productivity among brilliant, competitive, creative artists.

Similarly, savvy globally-focused churches take the assembly line reality of discipling new believers seriously—by obeying Jesus's stated Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” And the result the last century or so has been hundreds of millions of new believers!

6. When star artists who Gordy significantly helped lift to greatness took a path away to social-criticism messages, Gordy's Motown sought to continue with more universal messages, like love.

Similarly, like the Apostle Paul, savvy globally-focused Christians stay unswervingly centered on the message of Christ and Him crucified. For centuries, while seemingly lofty political activism like prioritizing social criticism, forcing social change, and installing economic socialism grab the attention, the savvy global church knows the only truly worthy pursuit is the Risen Christ, for us and for others—because we all fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23) When “Christ and Him crucified” is preached and responded to, real and enduring change and betterment result.

These six approaches are extraordinary! Giant kudos to Berry Gordy and Motown. And giant kudos to savvy, globally-focused, missional Christians the last hundred years. But what about each of us, today and tomorrow and our days remaining after that? Have we absorbed the astounding progress already made for the Gospel of the Kingdom...and readied ourselves for taking similar action—for such a time as this?

