

About a decade ago, Steven D. Price published a bunch of jokes about attorneys with a salute to their real and perceived imperfections! Here's one that caught my ear and made me laugh...

"A physician, an engineer, and a lawyer were arguing about whose profession was the oldest. The surgeon said, 'Remember how God removed a rib from Adam to create Eve? Obviously, medicine is the oldest profession.' The engineer replied, 'But before that, God created the heavens and the earth from chaos, in less than a week. You have to admit that was a remarkable feat of engineering, and that makes engineering an older profession than medicine.' The lawyer smirked and asked, 'And who do you think created the chaos?'" ...The lawyer here placed himself alongside God before Eden! *I think I know that guy!*

Actually, you've probably heard for a long time that the world's oldest profession is prostitution, and the basis for that is often cited as Genesis 38 in the Bible in the account of Judah and Tamar.

But truth be told, a really good case for a profession that humans started honing from the start is that of sales persuasion or marketing, you know, the one-to-one skills of cajoling and convincing and influencing behavior—yeah, the skills that were deployed in marriages and businesses and social situations very early on. Yes, the first example in the Bible is the serpent persuading Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree. Catching the "sales bug," Eve then deployed her own one-to-one tactics and convinced Adam to join her. Voilà!... There we have the first effective marketing campaign. And, of course, buyers' remorse quickly set in, followed by Adam blaming the salesperson, Eve! And humankind has been doing just that ever since!

To the contrary of that signature beginning, the trillions of marketing transactions in the modern, free-markets era have made people *generally quite happy*. If not, they only have themselves to blame! The benefits of modern marketing are numerous: from pickles to toothpaste to bicycles to cars, in free-markets, prosperous economy people can access and acquire amazing value through countless sources. And a whole lot of that value is identified and propelled by one-to-one influence...strategy...persuasion!

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. One-to-one persuasion by humans really did start in the Garden of Eden, for better or worse. And throughout the ages following, family members have directly influenced family members...friends have influenced friends—for everything from vegetable seeds...to plows for the farm...to household needs...to professional services.

You *know* this: one-to-one advice from a trusted counselor—a parent, a friend, a medical doctor—has always been a go-to approach for the savvy decision-maker. And it's pretty easy to make the case that momentous decisions should have the inputs from those types of one-to-one conversations that astutely consider the pros and cons of the choices ahead. That's the tried-and-true use of one-to-one connections!

But nowadays, most of us are not in a remote village somewhere with no connection to modern accesses and practices—yes, "one-to-one" has been dramatically leveraged by software and hardware and digital connectivity for users via phones and laptops. So, consider this question: what is a full gamut of one-to-one connections...that's right, *one-to-one connections in the 21st century!* Let's try a few on for size...

So, let's start where we've already been: *one-to-one with a personally-known, trusted adviser*, perhaps a family member, maybe an intimate business associate, perhaps a pastor. These can be proven resources, but they are only as good as the decision-maker's discernment and application of the advice!

Next, we go to *domain experts*. This is where the modern era's opportunities really start kicking in. So, here's the point: did the average person have access to domain experts a century ago? Hardly...at least not in the business or consumer arenas. But nowadays, for example, a pharma company trots out a world-famous physician onto the TV screen to work to create credible one-to-one intimacy with audience members in order to effectively market a chosen drug. Yes, *one-to-one connection* is the strategy here.

Then how about one-to-one connections by business-to-business marketing representatives through advanced CRM approaches? That's CRM—Customer Relationship Management—where a company uses

technology to help create connection tactics with decision makers. Along similar but still notably different lines, we have LinkedIn, where both business and personal purposes can be served with a one-to-many platform also fostering more intimate one-to-one communications when participants desire that.

But even more tech-enhanced connection is available—let’s not forget the search engine Google designing its way into creating intimacy in decision-making. The searcher types keywords of interest and then the massive search engine responds with customized answers that “fit” or “connect to” the individual search query. In effect, that process works to create a fresh new reality of *customized* connection by the product or service seller who appears to somehow be “listening” to your search needs and desires, all the way down to the chat button just a couple of clicks away to a real human! Yeah, that’s navigating to 21st-century one-to-one connection. And nowadays we have entered into the brave new world of machine learning and AI, where an inanimate, man-made creation itself works to take on human characteristics in order to connect with the actual human being. Whoa, “one-to-one connection” indeed!

Hey, take a step back now. The 21st-century reality is that many cutting-edge enterprises are often deploying most—if not all—of these one-to-one connection strategies, apparently to the ultimate satisfaction of the engaged human target. This is key: successful one-to-one connections utilize multiple, integrated paths to fulfill the marketing mission of the enterprise!

And that depth of strategy is all the more true of the greatest enterprise of all—the Kingdom of God! Let’s be perfectly blunt here: *No other organization...has ever or will ever...match the one-to-one connections provided in, with, and on behalf of the Kingdom.* So, let’s take a look at the seasons of an individual and the related key one-to-one connections effected in the Kingdom of God.

The Preparatory Season — before an individual’s belief in Christ. First, God reveals Himself through nature to every person—each is without excuse (Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20). As to salvation, the Father draws humanity to Him (John 6:44)—and you know *that’s* not surprising since “God our Savior...desires all people to be saved” (1 Timothy 2:4 ESV). We see such clear drawings by the Father in the book of Acts, for example, through the Ethiopian eunuch reading Scripture (Acts 8) or through a vision to Cornelius (Acts 10). But ever-critical are Christians like Philip and Peter bringing the verbal witness to unbelievers as Jesus commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). After all, as Paul wrote, “how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” (Romans 10:14) Think of it—*all these are manifestations of one-to-one connections by our God to people—in the season before any particular one of them has committed to Him!*

The Individual’s Crucial Decision — the individual’s faith-response to Christ. The Holy Spirit will convict unbelievers “concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8), resulting in believing hearts. Then Ephesians 1:13 and 1 Corinthians 3:16 say the Spirit comes to dwell within those new believers from the first moment they hear the gospel and believe. *Wow, you talk about intimate connections with God!*

The Discipling Season — after an individual responds by personal faith in Christ. Right from the start, Jesus promised believers that “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). And the Holy Spirit (whom the Father sent) “*will teach us all things*” then and now, which Jesus promised in John 14:26. And horizontally focused followers of Jesus indeed go forth to make disciples around the world. (Matthew 28:19-20). And, yes, new believers receiving the Holy Spirit’s teaching and other believers’ discipling grow into mature believers who then disciple others. Hey, all of that comprises the astounding, consistent, and evergreening plan for one-to-one-connections—both from God-to-humans and believers-to-humans! Yes, all that perfectly crafted for the 1st century...*and the 21st century!*

The Kingdom *is* fueled by one-to-one connections, both God-to-humans and believers-to-humans. And listen: the supernatural activity and enablement by God makes man’s modern-day technology look like child’s play. Still, one thing is for certain: both in the Kingdom and elsewhere, we as decision-makers must be acutely aware and active in the processes that effect and leverage superlative one-to-one connections! Wow, for sure, astonishing one-to-one connections in the 21st century abound!

