



Opportunities Among Threats

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SWOT. It's an analytical tool. You've probably never heard of it, but it is a simple tool I find very helpful. What does it do? How do you use it? (Not too much detail, I promise.) You look for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The idea, then, is to find ways to strategically turn your weaknesses into strengths, and threats into opportunities.

Consider the economy. It's a *threat* to the well-being and future of many churches, non-profit organizations, companies and individuals. All this talk about falling stock prices, a lower DOW, bankruptcy, recession and depression have folks worried about their future, and legitimately so. The pastor of one of our largest churches confided to me recently, "I've never seen my people so worried about the economy" and he is pastor to people who know what is going on. That worry can translate to reduced giving, unmet budgets, less money for missions, church planting, personnel and programming. In a SWOT analysis, the economy at this time is a *threat*.

The challenge, then, is to discover *opportunities* within every threat. For example, when people are worried about their futures - whether economic or existential - they start focusing on more basic issues. They are less concerned about getting a new car and more concerned about finding meaning in life. What a wonderful opportunity for the church to share the gospel. What a great opportunity for spiritual conversations and evangelistic witness.

It's rarely a good thing when people lose their jobs, but what a great time for the church to step in and help, to set up networking and support programs for the jobless and provide real, tangible assistance for families in need.

When people have less money (or perceive they do), they may also be more open to learning about more effective money management. What a great opportunity for the church to teach about biblical stewardship and money management. Perhaps training opportunities like that will even attract the lost in the community to the church. If we are creative, we can turn threats into opportunities for significant ministry.

When Hurricane Ike hit Houston, people were hurting. Some folks were merely inconvenienced for a while; others lost most of their earthly possessions. All across the city, people reached out to their neighbors and helped one another out. Even those who'd lost much were willing to share what they had left with their neighbors. In that same spirit, we can use this as an opportunity to reach out and help others.

God doesn't waste anything (which is why manure helps make such tasty tomatoes). Let's don't waste this opportunity to help our neighbors, to share the gospel, to make a significant difference in the lives of others all around us.