



Member Care Update

Ethnê-MC Facilitation Team

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This month, we bring you a chapter from Dr. Brent Lindquist's book on Member Health that was written from Central Asia by, Peter Eliason, (a pseudonym) a leader and member care provider. His thoughts are deep and important and we bring them to you in their entirety. We welcome your responses and insights. Please write to me, Linda Swanson at LindaSwanson@LinkCare.org.

Management and Member Health

For the last three years, I have been specifically working on the quality of member health from a business discipline that ironically may be considered by some people as the root of many member health problems; and that is the business discipline of *organization management and operations*.

We know that there are a limitless number of causal factors – both chronic and acute – that erode or attack member health. And if we are honest, we have to admit that there are some challenges have their origin in management. It may be bad management, mismanagement, naïve management, inexperienced management, non-management; but no matter what prefix you give it, it is still about management! But before I go on, let me establish a premise for my proposition...

What I would like to propose is that, after salvation, the second most important human experience in life is our own ongoing transformation...

Romans 12:2

²And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. ~ NASB95

2 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁸But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. ~ NASB95

And that transformation affects spirit, body and soul, and comes with great commotion, clamor and struggle...

Romans 8:22-23

²²For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until

now. ²³And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. ~ NASB95

James 1:2-4

²Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. ~ NASB95

Do you accept this proposition, that our human experience after salvation is fundamentally about being transformed from one image into another? Do you think it is possible or even desirable to contain when and where this transformation happens? Perhaps limit it to Sunday school, weekend conferences, or personal quiet times. Or should it reason that since we are redeemed people in a real world that this experience is going to be a 24 hour-a-day experience as part of God's intentional design? Have said that, why wouldn't it follow suit that where we work, and the very work we do, be a part of that tumultuous process?

Therefore as a manager of people, I have a Biblical and ethical responsibility to reflect and complement what God is doing in the lives of the people I supervise. And this is in addition to the program goals I am responsible to achieve for the benefit of clients, donors, host nations, etc! Is that what you signed up for when you agreed to be in management? It sounds awful doesn't it?

But I am dead serious. The balance sheet for organizational management has two subtotals: 50% consists of program deliverables and other 50% is the development and maturation of people. Can you picture God asking us managers about it when we see Him face-to-face? He might even refer to it as our contribution to discipleship.

But wait, don't grow faint, there is "new math" latent in this proposition. While I believe it is half of my responsibility as a manager to grow people, this is *not to say* that *this* responsibility needs to take half my time, half my energy or half of my budget. But it *is to say* that each morning when I wake up, I need to recognize that the kingdom building that God calls me to that day might just as well be on the inside of someone's heart (my own?) as it is in the achievement of the program goals that overflow from the pages of my Day Timer.

To commit to manage this way is really to commit to subdue "the worries of the world and the deceitfulness of riches". Metaphorically, we sternly tell operational objectives to "sit down and take a proper seat at the table" along with all the other competing demands. We lovingly tell operational objectives that "they are welcome member of the family and are free to consume most of our resources" but they will no longer be the center of our attention. We bravely state that "who" we are as an organization – one that is committed to the development and transformation of its people – will now have equal footing with "what" we do as a program.

As I see it, this is *the only way* to get member health into the DNA of an organization; otherwise it will forever be an add-on.

Something completely unique about management, in all its forms, is that it is THE organizational discipline with immediacy to the entire team. This immediacy is compelling, both in terms of potency of

influence and responsibility to cooperate with God's purposes. Program and project managers are typically the stewards of individuals at the exact point where they 'go past center' and start to malfunction. And because of our immediacy, there is no other position arena with the opportunity to precipitate, exaggerate, or mitigate the conditions and factors where people move across the line from 'wellness' to the state of 'needing member care' as management.

Precipitate, exaggerate, and mitigate are great words. These three words really describe litmus test or the accountability that management has in the realm of member health.

The first two words really address the issue from the negative side. No doubt the choices and organizational commitments we make as managers can *precipitate* or *exaggerate* the factors that cause premature attrition from the field. We have all kinds of short-sighted and commanding ways of covering this up: "What do you expect for a situation like in Warland...!", "The grant opportunity looked too good to pa\$\$ up..." etc, etc. In vain, we hope recruiting finds us a troop of Supermen and Wonder Women to come do the impossible for our programs.

Please note: there is a sober and important element to discern with this thought of precipitating or exaggerating team challenges. We know that the life of every true believer will include many forceful and significant milestones where we "die to self" (and perhaps even die as a martyr). But I am unsure how much of it is my privilege as management to create or sustain these very personal and defining challenges. In regards to my staff, how can I tell the difference between a trial that comes at the hand of a loving God and trouble which comes as a result of my ego, foolishness or inexperience?

On the positive side, *mitigation* would always be a preferred choice. And the more we get effective member health principles into the "DNA" of our organizational fabric, the less concerns of precipitation and exaggeration should fill our day.

If you want member health to be in the "DNA" of an organization – and not just an institutional add-on stuck in the back office operating behind the "curtain of confidentiality" – we must act intentionally to get member health into the fabric of organizational culture.

It's heartbreaking that so often member care is treated like a cost center with the implied question, "How little do we have to buy?" Member care often becomes a function that an organization uses to simply "fix problems" and attenuate personnel risk. Please know that I understand that transformation is messy business. And if you feel that no manager in his or her right mind would want the added responsibility of facilitating individual transformation, I would understand that. But then I would have to say that you've settled for "business as usual" and not the kingdom business that is at hand.

In my opinion, most missions' management needs this transformation of understanding and it may be a question of leadership more than management. But if you've followed me this far and say "No problem, we're on the same page" then I would like to visit about the difference between *espoused values* – you know, the ones that are on the motivational posters in the halls at the office – and *actual values* – you know, the ones revealed by where we actually put our priorities and resources. But this is a subject for another day...

So to wrap up...it is very challenging work to discern the difference between guiding people through meaningful sacrifice and into transformation, and management failure that potentially kills the spiritual

vitality of people under our charge. But as a humanitarian organization, we must be sensitive and committed to the human experience of our own personnel and not see it as a something that detracts from the work that needs to be done in a desperate and hurting world.

REALITY CHECK QUESTIONS:

I have a group of questions that God keeps floating around in my head to help me bring member health into the very heart of what I do in management and operations. I share them here with you for your consideration. I first answer them for myself, and then I seek to discern how each of my workers would answer them...

1. How do you define missional living, and am I in daily contact with it?
2. What does it mean to be a kingdom builder?
3. What does it mean to have an intentional, spiritual witness? (I suggest it is saltier than lifestyle witness, but milder than a culturally belligerent witness.)
4. Lastly, the “money question”, how am I able to express the answers to the three preceding questions in the work I do for this organization?

If the answers to these questions run strongly more positive than negative, then I live with the assurance that what I do, and how I do it, is a good thing for member health and not in opposition to it.

We'd like to hear your response to this article and the questions above? How do these leadership issues find resolution in your context? Please email your thoughts, ideas for articles, resources to share to LindaSwanson@LinkCare.org.