



Member Care Update

Ethnê-MC Facilitation Team

To contact us: membercare@ethne.net

Ethnê-MC Update Issue 20: September 2010

Missionary Care: ROLE OF MISSION AGENCIES in HOME ASSIGNMENT and RE-ENTRY.

By: Peter Shankar

Furlough/Home Assignment

~Give opportunities to do extra training

Equipping and training are of utmost importance for missionary retention. Across the world, mission work is changing continuously and this inevitably changes how missionaries need to be trained and/or re-trained, especially while on home assignment. Specific training and re-training is needed for different categories of missionaries: re-training cross-cultural missionaries, local missionaries doing cross-cultural ministry and missionaries going overseas.

~Give opportunities for missionaries to help in selection

Missionaries on home assignment bring invaluable pre-field and on field experiences. With these experiences, they are an invaluable asset in helping with missionary selection, especially in recognizing basic selection process; e.g. calling for cross-cultural work, mature character, assessing the adequacy of cross-cultural exposure, mental strength, ability to cope with being single on the field, etc.

~Use psychological assessments

Missionaries who return home for furlough need to be assessed as part of a standard ethical practice. This will help increase their self awareness, personal reflection, and give them a wider and clearer perspective for their personal growth and development while they are on home assignment. In any case, if the missionary needs further assessment and counsel, the necessary actions must be taken to ensure the missionary gets all the help needed.

~ Involve missionaries in testing of calling

As mentioned earlier, missionaries are an invaluable asset in assessing the call for missions work. A personal sense of call is very important in a missionary's journey. Thus, I think, we should fully leverage the experience of missionaries in testing the calling during the selection process. Mission agencies should be most grateful to rely on their insights.

~ Protect personal & business agenda

Missionaries on furlough MUST be protected from personal & business agendas so they will find time for spiritual development/refreshing, and spiritual retreats. Missionaries on furlough must be careful not to keep themselves too busy (which is hard to do for missionaries on furlough), so they will find time for personal growth. One may not realize how much they are missing out in life when they don't give personal growth a major priority in their missionary journey. Personal relationship with God is of utmost importance, and agencies must ensure missionaries keep this a priority.

~ Conduct performance reviews

Appraisals help missionaries evaluate and increase their performance on the field. Time spent reviewing their time on the field will extend their effectiveness through affirmation and encouragement. Focus should be on their field time, not the present. During appraisals, difficult issues are brought up which gives the agency and the missionary the opportunity for two-way, transparent communication. This inevitably provides an opportunity to discuss training and development needs (gifts and skills) and decide on overall direction for the next term.

~ Do not overload missionaries with work

Boundaries should be set so missionaries on furlough don't overwork themselves. In essence, they MUST be protected from unnecessary meetings, work, etc. Time should be spent thinking, reading, reflecting, studying, leisure, and with loved ones and friends.

~Evaluate Ministry

Evaluate if missionaries are feeling fulfilled in their ministry. Take necessary action to help the missionary get all the necessary training, counseling, and help during his/her furlough.

~Take time to work on relationship with missionary

The agency must take time to build relationship with the missionary, especially during home assignment. It's during this time that the missionary may long for deep conversations with the agency. There will be heaps of questions – especially WHYS, and best practices on the field. Hopefully, for a missionary on furlough, the agency is probably the best 'person' they would feel most comfortable connecting with, simply because they know that at least someone understands what they are going through, and know where they can get help when they need it.

Re-Entry

~ Train missionaries for new job

A missionary may return home for many reasons. The agency, in discussion with the missionary, will need to plan a training stint to equip and train the missionary for a new role or ministry. An example of this could be a missionary returning home may possibly want to work in the home base in the area of Member-Care, or Cross-Cultural training – both of which would need specialized training for the new role. Some missionaries may even want to pursue post grad studies i.e. Masters and PhD to equip them better in the ministry.

~ Use psychological assessments

Psychologically, missionaries go through more stress than an average Joe on the street. Therefore, psychological assessments will be an important tool in helping the agency understand the missionary and evaluate the next course of action that would best suit the missionary. No one can undermine the effectiveness of using psychological tools; they give the

agency and the missionary a clear signal of how things need to be designed for greater effectiveness in life and future ministry. (See description in the Home Assignment section)

~ Involve missionaries in testing of calling

As mentioned earlier, missionaries would be an invaluable asset in assessing the calling for missions work. Every missionary would agree that a personal sense of call is very important in their own missionary journey, thus, I think, we should fully leverage on the experience of missionaries in the testing of calling especially in the selection process. Mission agencies should be most grateful to rely on their experience.

~ De-brief

Mission Agencies have an important role in ensuring adequate de-briefing is done with the missionary to help the missionary process and reflect on his time on the field. This will include reflecting on their missionary journey, engaging in deep listening, supporting and encouraging, etc. Facilitating a de-briefing retreat would help the missionary to become more transparent in sharing or journaling down his/her thoughts. The de-brief sessions will also give inroads or signals to what necessary steps the agency should take next to help the missionary assimilate back to the home ground e.g. engage external help if needed. A successful de-brief session will allow the missionaries to feel relaxed, unloaded, strong, and contribute towards being healthy emotionally, spiritually and physically and feeling refreshed.

~ Conduct performance reviews

Appraisals help missionaries evaluate and increase their performance for the future. Time spent during their re-entry reviewing their time spent on the field will extend their effectiveness through affirmation and encouragement. Focus should be on their time spent on the field, and not the present. During appraisals, difficult issues are brought up which gives the agency and the missionary the opportunity to be transparent with the discussion, thus there is a two-way process of communication. This inevitably provides an opportunity to discuss training and development needs (gifts and skills) and decide on overall direction for the future.

~ Keep in touch with former missionaries

Agencies should encourage re-entry missionaries to keep in touch with former missionaries for wholesome interaction, leisure, discussion, learning, counsel, etc. This will allow missionaries to connect with people with similar experience for maximum interaction during re-entry.

~ Keep in contact with missionary

The agency must keep in regular contact with the missionary to ensure that he/she is coping well with re-entry. Regular contact with the missionary will reflect our interest and love for them. Agency should also be sensitive to the feelings and needs of the missionary. Our interaction with them could reveal some genuine needs e.g. family matters, need for external help, friend raising matters, spiritual need, etc. Regular meet-up for time of prayer and fellowship would mean a lot to missionaries on re-entry.

~ Evaluate ministry

Evaluate if missionaries are feeling fulfilled in their ministry and take the necessary course of action in helping the missionary get all the necessary training, counseling, and preparation for the future.

References:

William Taylor; Global Missiology for the 21st Century

Avery T Willis; Jr and Henry T Blackaby, On Mission with God: Living God's Purpose for His Glory

Kelly O'Donnell; Missionary Care: Counting the Cost for World Evangelization

K.Rajendran; Which Way Forward? Indian Missions

Kelly O'Donnell; Doing Member-Care Well

William D. Taylor; Too Valuable To Loose

Rob Hay, Valerie Lim, Detlef Blocher, Jaap Ketelaar, Sarah Hay; Worth Keeping

Kelly O Donnell; Missionary Care

Gordon MacDonald; A Resilient Life: You Can Move Ahead No Matter What.