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May 01, 2013 by Roger Dixon

Framing a New Model of Training Cross-Cultural Church Planters



Introduction

Confusion of massive proportions is taking place across the missionary enterprise.

Great cultural change in the world has thwarted both young and old so that many are unable to engage successfully in cross-cultural church-planting. Political and religious opposition as well as emotional stress are partly responsible for this. But the greatest problem seems to be a lack of skill in cross-cultural church-planting. Some agencies report as high as 47% of their personnel leave the field in the first 5 years.¹ Others stay longer but do not really succeed in planting churches. This is a tragic waste of outstanding and committed people. We cannot expect them to do a job they have never been trained to do, and that is exactly the case which I want to address in this article. I want to suggest two things: 1) the type of training modern missionaries need in order to plant churches cross-culturally, and 2) the time and place where that training should initially take place.

Creating The Training Model

In 1999, a team created a cross-cultural church-planting model for Church of the Savior in Wayne, PA. Although the model was never implemented, it is useful as a template to discuss training issues. After surveying other programs in the U.S. we found that only one engaged in both cross-cultural adjustment and church-planting methods. Since then, additional programs have emerged in various parts of the country, but the need for cross-cultural church-planting training remains critical.

Proposal For A Cross-Cultural Church-Planting Training Model

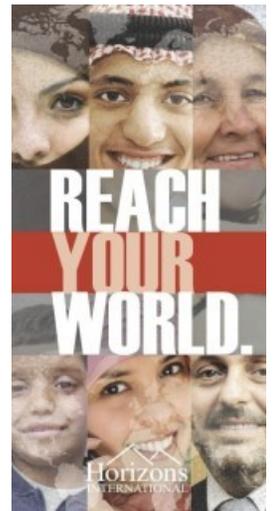
This proposal was field-based, intending to put missionary candidates into cross-cultural situations in their home country as interns to live and work for at least a year. Generally speaking this required them to live in urban areas where there was a significant immigrant population that still spoke their native language. The interns would rent living quarters and secure jobs in the area where they would raise part of their living expenses. It would probably be necessary for their church or agency to add to their income. The challenge of finding and fulfilling a job in a cross-cultural neighborhood would give them valuable experience for future assignments. Family and singles housing would enhance immersion in the ethnic community. They would then partner with a local church to implement a church plant among their focus group. If the candidates had children, they would experience the challenges of raising their children in an ethnic neighborhood.

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Article Tags

[church](#), [cross-cultural](#), [leadership](#), [planters](#), [training](#)

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By doing this, the interns would achieve a two-fold objective:

1. They would learn to relate to a new culture while being given tools to understand emotional, spiritual, and lifestyle challenges.
2. They would participate in the planting of a local congregation within a culturally different community while being coached in the observation and adaptation of biblical church-planting patterns in cross-cultural contexts.

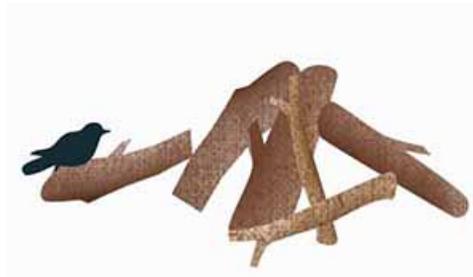
Prerequisites

The following prerequisites were established in order to assure that potential candidates were being trained for cross-cultural church-planting.

1. Each intern was expected to demonstrate spiritual and emotional maturity, a distinct call to unreached peoples ministry, and no personal problems or hindrances that would embarrass them in ministry.
2. Each intern was expected to have finished his/her formal training, Bible and religious studies, and/or degree work.
3. Each intern was expected to have completed the spiritual formation program at his or her home church.
4. Each intern understood that this internship was arduous and had released him/herself from other work or encumbrances to give full time to this program.

Experienced-Based, Coach-Intensive

Since this was formulated to be an experienced-based, coach-intensive program, we envisioned it to have several stages. In *Stage One*, the intern would follow a lesson-based course lasting from 8-12 weeks. The intern and family should attend. The interns would be in the classroom about one day a week studying the theory and process of cross-cultural church-planting, linguistics, and



psychological/emotional debriefing/evaluation procedures. *Stage Two* would overlap with *Stage One*, covering a year during which the intern would be assigned to work in a team model under the supervision of a church planter and a missionary coach. Here the tasks were envisioned to be both theoretical and applied in nature. Communication lines between the worker and the coach would be open at all times through e-mail or phone.

The intern would be assigned to cross-cultural church-planting preferably among an ethnic population that is the focus group of the candidate. All aspects of the intern's fieldwork would be under the

authority of the local area church that is his partner. A missionary coach would be assigned to the intern. This coach would be in regular contact with the intern and his partner church in order to give guidance on any area of cross-cultural or church-planting questions which arise.

The intern would also seek to develop a spiritual support group. This might be from the local area church, from his/her home church, or from a combination of churches. This support group would pray for and with the intern and family and would aid them in preparing spiritually and emotionally for departure to a foreign land. This group would pledge to pray for and maintain contact with the intern and family as co-workers in the harvest.

The Rationale for this Training Program

When workers have not had any experience in how a church is organized and operated, they cannot envision what they are trying to accomplish among the unreached people group. Churches have structure. This includes theology, worship, liturgy, organization, polity (government), and various infrastructure. When a worker helps create a church plant, it is necessary to have a concept in mind toward which to work. The goal is not to plant a clone church of another culture but rather birth an indigenous church. This would not be a fellowship where no one has responsibility to train evangelists, pastors, or lay leaders. A fellowship does not develop its own literature, music, or youth camps. The church-planting team must have an idea of the kind of congregation that will thrive in the UPG and have long-term success in all those aspects of ministry. This training program seeks those goals.

The major problem that most cross-cultural church planters face is a lack of church-planting experience. If one has not done church-planting in one's home country, it will be difficult to do it in a foreign country. The reason is pretty simple and should be obvious. Pioneer church-planting involves a complex series of competencies that are only truly understood when one has had some previous involvement. A false perception that people will suddenly understand the complexities of disciple-making, church theology and organization when they go to another country often leads to immature outcomes.

Benefits of Cross-Cultural Church-Planting Training

“Preparation is not something suddenly accomplished, but a process steadily maintained,” notes Oswald Chambers.² This program speaks to all the important weaknesses that lead to missionary attrition because it integrates the competencies needed to do cross-cultural church-planting. These include spiritual disciplines, family dynamics, team building, work experience, nurturing children, and learning to partner with national peers. In addition, this training program prepares a worker in language acquisition, cross-cultural communication and comparative religion. These are all competencies required for a successful cross-cultural church planter. Examples of the competencies can be found in the International Missionary Training Fellowship publication.³

A serious issue in today's world is preparation for trauma. Every cross-cultural church-planting model should have the experience of trauma or hostage training. Dr. Steve Sweatman of Mission Training International has commented that “more and more of those we debrief have experienced some

significant trauma related to bodily threat or damage. We have noticed that there are three distinct missionary eras:

The era when Western Expats and missionaries were considered TERRIFIC

The era when Western Expats and missionaries were TOLERATED

The era when Western Expats and missionaries are now TARGETED

For those we debrief, 50% are coming from countries in the TOLERATED era and the other half from countries where they are in the TARGETED era.”⁴

Train in the Homeland

Many of us have become convinced that training new workers in their homeland is the most effective way to alleviate these problems. However, this requires a significant shift in attitude by all parties. The candidates must be willing to add another year to their training while the churches must be willing to finance them during this time. It will cost far less in dollars because it will reduce the number of those who return without engaging their focus group. The financial loss by these resignations is much greater than a year’s training would cost. In “Understanding Missionary Support,” Daryl Anderson writes:

“The average cost to support a missionary family from North America is \$10,338 per month.⁵ A cross-cultural church-planting training program in the US would cost the church less than half that because the intern would also be making money at his/her secular job.

Obstacles of all kinds can be overcome with preparation for cross-cultural church-planting in a UPG. Such preparation takes time and cannot be accomplished simply by taking a few summer courses and short-term mission trips. Also, training at home is more efficient because it means that the worker is able to (1) integrate more quickly with his or her team on the field and be an effective member and (2) not be a physical and emotional drain on team members who must spend considerable effort training them. The team gains a prepared worker while not expending the skills of a seasoned veteran.

Endnotes

1. William D. Taylor (Ed.), *Too Valuable to Lose: Exploring the Causes and Cures of Missionary Attrition* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1997), p.13.
2. Oswald Chambers, *So Send I You*, (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1975), p.40.
3. Jonathan Lewis, (Ed.), “Training for Cross-Cultural Ministries,” *International Missionary Training Fellowship, WEF*, (September 1991). [also see: August 1993.]
4. Steve Sweatman, e-mail, Sept. 1, 2012.
5. Daryl Anderson, *EFCA Reach Global-8-2008*. Available on the Internet at: [Understanding Missionary Support](#)

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Comments



May 07, 2013 by Ken Smith

Roger. I agree it has been a confusing thing about missions in the past. Marginally experienced workers sent to the toughest places with minimal support networks to do the toughest job—cross-cultural church planting. [And yet God has even used this living sacrifice to accomplish His will.]

We can do better. No longer is it just a matter of training locally first. The best places to train locally are become the strategic places to reach. The Diaspora, as they are called, is made up of foreign-born residents (1 in 40 people in the USA) many of which come from countries and people groups that are costly to access, logistically difficult to access, or extremely difficult to provide worker care for those living among them.

I would go so far as to say every church that has the resources for a mission committee or missions pastor should also be using their resources to develop a local cross-cultural church planting strategy or partnering with others who are. This puts the responsibility of missions back in the hands of local church leaders.

Clearly not everyone is called to cross-cultural ministry, but when cross-cultural ministry is done side-by-side with the other local ministries of the church there is the opportunity to learn from one another and to evaluate what is fruitful together. As maturity and gifting is demonstrated there is an opportunity to send some to the difficult places.

Training locally can take away the mystery of what church planting missions is all about. As church members pray for and participate in different aspects of the training an ethos of serving others is reinforced that hopefully corrects some of the Christian consumerism mentality that continually creeps into even the best of churches.

As you have said there are a number of places across the country now that people can go to get trained like this. And there are a number of people like myself that are available to help churches implement it in their church.

It is not enough just to pray about it and it will not happen based on our own efforts. The place it all begins is in prayer for the Holy Spirit to begin working and then for His church to faithfully and obediently follow where He leads. May His will be done here on earth as it is in heaven...



May 07, 2013 by Roger Dixon

Ken, I believe we are on the same page in regards to this. I agree it is complicated and requires an additional dedication on the part of local churches to see that their candidates are properly trained. My feeling is that this motivating force must come from the local churches to pressure the mission agencies so that mutually they can work out a new model of training. Again I want to stress that mono-cultural church planting has some benefit but cross-cultural church planting is quite different because one has to learn anew all the cultural cues necessary to implement the church planting features.

Blessings,



May 07, 2013 by JohnMichael MacMillen

There is not just lack of preparation, but also field personnel who are threatened by new ideas and new concepts and also leaders who are appointed who are not gifted. It seems as though the article is still laying the blame on the people who return where the responsibility is in failed leadership.

Mission leadership has failed because we have adopted concepts from the world on what leadership is coming from MBA programs rather than address what real leadership is. It correctly focuses on training, but it wrongly thinks that a classroom is where training takes place rather than mentoring. Christ model was to mentor His disciples for over 3+ years and still it took throwing them in the deepened.

The world wants everyone to sit in a classroom, write papers and prove their ability to comply to the standards. Nearly everyone who reads this would feel threatened because we have all been told we have need follow the worlds standard. The Church nor its missional arm is in any way related to a business, and should bear closer resemblance to A Commune or Kibutz. We have bought the lie from satan that our job is to invite people into a “personal relationship” to Christ. I don’t remember Christ ever doing that, but He invited them to the community, the same is true with Paul.

The modern mission world has adopted a concept of reaching people through networks, but the goal is not the community but still the individual. Ultimately leadership needs to radically change, but then people don’t like change and the cost is very high. Then maybe we don’t really love Christ and His kingdom as we say we do.



May 10, 2013 by Marti Wade

A recent edition of Missions Catalyst “Practical Mobilization” also explores models for ministry training. With the help of readers, we’ve began compiling a list of intern/apprentice programs, some of which have much in common with what Roger Dixon describes. See <http://missionscatalyst.net/?p=3479>



May 11, 2013 by REINHARD MUTUA

AM ONE WHO WANT TO JOIN MISSION AN I NEED SCHOLARSHIP FOR BIBLE COLLEGE SO PLEASE I HUMBLE REQUEST SCHOLARSHIP THEN I MAY DO WELL FOR WORK OF THE CROSS. THANKS



February 04, 2014 by pastor john.

DEAR BRO ROGER,

I AM A MISSIONARY DOING PIONEERING WORK AMONG THE PEOPLE GROUPS IN INDIAN VILLAGES AND SLUMS FOR THE PAST 20 YRS.
I AM AN INDEPENDENT PASTOR AND NEED LIKE MINDED PEOPLE TO SUPPORT OUR WORK.DO PRAY AND IF THE LORD LEADS YOU TO CONNECT LORD’S PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE PASSION FOR THE LOST PLEASE DO CONTACT US THROUGH E-MAIL.
THANK YOU
PASTOR JOHN.

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