

The Key Tools and the Missions Committee
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The ‘guru’ of missions, Dr. Ralph Winter states that “...the process of taking the gospel from one culture to another is the most complex enterprise known to man” (Mission Frontiers, Nov-Dec 2010, p. 17). Does it not follow then, that it deserves our best thought, our best training, and our best strategies?

Dr. Winter also indicated that amateurism can hinder the process. This does not mean that only professionals can engage in this task. It does mean that we should give it our best effort. So I applaud those who organized the conference, and chose the topics we most needed to look at. And I have been assigned this one on Key Tools. And I approach that from the perspective of a church’s Missions Committee.

Let me give you these three tools and then defend my choice of tools. The first one is *Awareness*. The second is *Initiative* and the third is *Relationship*. Why did I choose these as opposed to, for example, use of the MMPI, or using a mentoring or coaching process?

I chose these three because I believe, from a church’s perspective, the Mission Committee has a very important function. Missionary Care is a stewardship matter—using the platform and resources we have to responsibly, adequately meet the needs of those we send to represent our church throughout the world. And as part of the church’s care Missionary Care begins with this committee, this group of people..

Why awareness? And awareness of what? I think of several things the committee needs to be aware of:

World state; world trends. What is going on in the world? What direction are things going in various parts of the world? What’s the context to which we are sending our people? What challenges will they face?

Differences and uniquenesses in mission agencies. There are _____ and they are very different from one another. They have personalities. They have a reputation. What are the markers of a healthy mission agency? What is their specialty? What kind of member care do they believe in and practice?

What is the leadership style of this agency? How hospitable are they to specialists? To mavericks? How communicative are they? How open are they to working with the church as a partner? What does a given agency look for in their new members? What are their expectations? Their screening mechanisms? Do their field members work in teams? Are their field people multicultural, or are they mostly Americans? What sort of infrastructure do they have to care for their people?

Generational matters. Maybe everyone on your committee is 40 to 60 years old, so how well do you know and understand your young people? The youth of today? How open is an agency to building and giving training to working in multigenerational teams? What are the special challenges that young people today present as they consider missions? What do they expect? How can we equip them for hardship, suffering, culture shock, for working with folks from other cultures? For living under surveillance and suspicion?

Another area of need for awareness has to do with short term teams. According to A. Scott Moreau (“A Current Snapshot of North American Protestant Missions”, IBMR, January, 2011) short term missions has dropped dramatically. “U.S. agencies reported a 17.8 percent decrease from 2005.” What does this mean? What are the benefits to the field, to the church of sending short-term teams? Do they really make a lasting difference on receptor fields? How do they compare with sending career workers, as far as benefit to the church is concerned?

What about initiative? What does that have to do with the mission committee?

I think it is a key tool simply because many things will be left up to you. It will be up to you to find out what the context of the world is where you want to send people. It will be left to this committee to decide what kind of preparation new recruits need from the church. It is up to you to organize a system of support that takes into account the kind of work a person or couple plan to do, whether they grew up in the church or not, how well their spiritual gifts and proposed ministry fit into the strategies of the church as a whole, etc.

The mission committee also must take initiative in establishing a relationship with the new recruit and his family. He or they can hardly tell the Mission Committee, “Hey, we want to know you guys; we want to get

acquainted with you; can you give us time to do this?" Yet this may well be one of the most important relationships a missionary will have to his sending church.

The Mission Committee must take initiative in setting policies governing these matters. They will be the face of missions to the whole church. They will plan and organize a missions conference, if such is to take place. They will formulate a budget and ask the church for funds to meet their budget. They will keep their records and defend their expenses to the church treasurer. They must monitor the productiveness of the sent workers. They must maintain communication with the field people, and be fully informed about their work, lifestyle, production, morale, etc.

And then there is relationship. What does *that* mean? And relationship with whom?

First of all, members of this committee will have a relationship with church leaders; they must be people of integrity, vision, and godliness. They will have a passion for missions. At least some of them—as many as possible—will have some missions experience, which will give them credibility with both church leaders, agencies, and their own global workers.

And then they will have internal relationships, and build these with their long-time experienced missionaries as well as with new people who approach them about their interest in missions. Lacking such a relationship, are these workers likely to talk with the missions committee members when things aren't going well for them on their field? Or when they have internal family problems? Or when they are desperately discouraged and thinking of quitting their ministry and perhaps leaving the faith?

Finally, members of the missions committee must have strong relationships with local resource people. Suppose they are interviewing someone and find mental problems in that person's history? Or a history of homosexuality? Or a troubled adopted child? Where will they go to consult with a professional who knows something about missions, and knows how to work as a consultant? Suppose one recruit presents a medical risk, their resource file should include medical professionals on whom they can call, or to whom they can send someone for an evaluation. Suppose a family wanting to go to the mission field has a deaf child, or a handicapped child. Talking with

professionals in education and/or those who know about disabilities would be helpful.

Of course members of the missions committee may have some of these skills among them. One would hope so. They should be able to understand culture shock, and reverse culture shock; they should be able to do debriefings. They should be able to confront gently but clearly when problems arise and are ongoing.

Are these three key tools important only to the Missions Committee? Of course not! Think what it would do to a church if everyone were aware of these matters, if everyone was willing to take initiative, if everyone was eager to build relationships! The missions task would be well under way if that were the case.

My suggestion is that if you are a professional in any of the areas mentioned above, or other areas that occur to you, please offer your services to the Missions Committee, and to the missionaries themselves. While the missions task is quite specialized, the needs represented by individual and family missionaries are broad and general. Many times my husband and I and our family could have used, for example, some financial advice, or guidance in some of these areas. We didn't know where to go to get it.