

SELECTION: DETERMINING LONG-TERM CROSS-CULTURAL INVOLVEMENT

By Lydia Reynolds and Jerry Reddix

As the great missionary Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans, how can the unreached hear if no one tells them, and how can someone tell them if no one is sent? Indeed, acting as a sender is an imperative role to play in God's Kingdom drama.

The question many churches are left with is "How do we select someone to send?"

Luckily, the sometimes-intimidating prospect of selecting a Long-Term Cross-Cultural Worker (LTCCW) already has a solution. Just as God unexpectedly burst on our scene when our spiritual eyes were first opened to him, He is right now (and has always been) bursting on the scene for someone else, opening their eyes to their missional calling. He is the recruiter. The church is the training base.

My friend Chris returned from a summer mission trip before his senior year of high school. He felt that God may be calling him into missions. During that school year, Chris approached our small church about being sent as a missionary. Since our church had no sending structure in place, leadership directed him towards YWAM and other mission groups. Overwhelmed with brochures and sensing little direct guidance, Chris signed up with the military.

Often, churches struggle with what to do with the recruits God brings them. Questions arise such as "How do we know this person has a true call to ministry and cross-cultural work?" and "How do we know when they're ready?" or even "They'd be perfect! With which mission agency should we recommend they go?"

Indeed, determining how to select someone to send depends on the readiness of the church as well as the individual. Both need to have thought through a checklist of questions. Important questions to consider deal with the LTCCW's personal and family needs, their readiness, their task and their support team (your church).

Click here to view the checklist: http://vineyardmissions.org/images/Long-Term_Cross-Cultural_Worker_LTCCW_Check_List_for_Church_Partnership_Agency_and_LTCCW.pdf

Solid mentoring is crucial for the potential LTCCW. Someone of the same gender and who also had deep missional understanding – someone who Chris trusted, felt safe with, who could walk through this process with him and challenge him with these questions – would have been a perfect mentor for Chris. Dr. Tad Blackburn identified some key mentoring steps in his article "A Biblical Model of Reflecting on a Call". He suggests questions to ask about the past and present events in the life of the potential LTCCW, and even the atmosphere to seek God's presence during this searching process. Reflecting on and verifying the call are fundamental steps, and it ought to be taken with a mentor from your church so that there's a relational foundation to bookmark this stage in the LTCCW's life. This mentor will probably be a very important advocate for the LTCCW as well as the church's support team once the LTCCW is on the field.

If I could go back in time, I would invite Chris to coffee. Over a mellowing java, I would start by asking him how God has spoken to him about this call. Did he feel led to a specific people or area? I would also ask him if he was serious with his girlfriend and did she feel called to missions? Many young people interested in missions deny the missional call because someone they are dating does not want to go.

To understand this better click here <http://www.missionfrontiers.com/1999/0102/jf995.htm> to read this Missions Frontiers article called “Walk Me to the Field” Click here:

If he were married, what did his wife and kids think about going? Spouses often have separate tasks, separate visions, and require certain steps for tax and legal purposes. What about practical issues, like schooling for the children and cultural laws the family would need to adapt to?

Once we established that Chris and his family felt assured of a true call, I might ask Chris if he had a specific task in mind. Did he want to dig wells, open an orphanage, plant a church, translate the Bible? Or did he want to be used wherever he was needed? Having a vision statement that his family and his church can agree upon is primary for success. A proposed method with clear expectations ought to be defined. If Chris has frightfully little experience digging wells, than sending him to a country far away in a land with a different language and different soil for that task could be disastrous. Chris might want to seek technical training, talk to other agencies that work in the same area, assemble a team, and perhaps take a vision trip.

The next issue I would approach with Chris deals with his cross-cultural competencies. We want to make sure our LTCCW won't hit red lights before he begins work. Of course details such as ability to acquire a visa and passport, or other such travel documents, are mandatory. Legal convictions, child custody, bankruptcy procedures and debt can also derail the process.

Having emotional, mental or spiritual un-preparedness can also slow or stop the task. If Chris had ministry experience but was not effective with it, this would be an indication of task limitations he might have, or at least areas for him to improve on before he goes. If he has not spent time out of his hometown, sending him to the desert of Somalia could be lethal. We must ask how much cross-cultural experience and language learning will be necessary, and when should he start acquiring these skills? A tool your church can use to assist your potential LTCCW is to introduce them to the IRA. The International Readiness Assessment provides a template for training and identifies areas to work on, such as cultural adjustment issues. (To obtain the IRA©, you need the URL site and the pass code. Contact dodde@edcrg.com with the subject line “IRA Password Needed.”)

Part of cultural competency is relationship ability. It's pretty key to know that the LTCCW plays well with others. Emotional and physical health are just as important. However, the required health is relevant to the task demands. A man who lost an arm in a gang fight may be perfect for street ministry in Brazil. His history may be relevant in a good and bad way, but the point is that we need to consider it with everyone.

Finally, I would want to share a pot of java with church leadership. The church would need to

honestly examine how committed it was to Chris and his task. If there is not a long-range plan to send and care for the LTCCW, than to send him is to throw him to a pack of wolves. A dedicated prayer team and support team are vital to the LTCCW's health. Not only are financial commitments necessary from the church, but written agreements about leadership roles and levels of oversight are too. My friends who were LTCCWs to Latin America ran across trouble when their water project could not be sustained by the locals. The church had thought their equipment donation was enough. The LTCCWs had thought the locals would take over the maintenance, but that the church would help financially sustain the project. The locals had thought because it was an American project, the Americans should take care of it all. The situation becomes very difficult when LTCCWs must return home to straighten out details in the middle of a project.

For any cross-cultural work to be successful, a firm foundation of trust must be in place between those who go and the sending structure. Otherwise your LTCCW will be like a fireman sent into a burning structure ... without protective gear, without equipment and without radios. No fire truck waiting outside, no fire hose, no ambulance. Don't leave your LTCCW stranded. As the sending structure, we are called not only to prepare our LTCCW, but also to protect them from what they may not see themselves. Go though the checklist (see page 1) with them ... thoroughly and honestly.

Click here to view the checklist: http://vineyardmissions.org/images/Long-Term_Cross-Cultural_Worker_LTCCW_Check_List_for_Church_Partnership_Agency_and_LTCCW.pdf

There are many more questions that will arise the closer you get to sending your LTCCW to the field. The church's function as a sending body is to help God's mission recruit recognize the pieces of the puzzle that either do or do not point in the missional direction and to provide extreme support for the direction God leads them. Part of doing that is offering the questions that will help them identify how God may be speaking to them.

Someone once said, "God doesn't call the prepared, he prepares the called." If your church has someone who doesn't seem prepared, than God is issuing an exciting word to you. He calls you to prepare the called. Grasp the challenge!