

Sending: Preparing the Framework and Safety Nets

By Lydia Reynolds and Jerry Reddix

Great! You've selected a person or family to become your very own Long-Term Cross-Cultural Worker (LTCCW). Don't stop with simply giving your LTCCW money and sending her on her way. Proper preparation prevents problems that would otherwise impede the project. When the sending structure is involved in helping with these details, your church and your LTCCW will experience the blessing of a properly functioning missional body.

Just as the church body has parts with different functions similar to the physical body, as Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 12, so does the missional body. If the LTCCW is the feet, then the sending structure is the rest of that body, and you'll need it fully functioning for the project to work as God intends.

The checklist on this website is intended for you to use to avoid the countless pitfalls you may encounter if you – as a LTCCW and a church - don't prepare properly for the overseas task. It cannot be urged strongly enough to wade through these details listed. Satan tries to trip us up when we threaten to shine the light in the darkest regions, and he surely uses our un-preparedness as pitfalls to prevent us from doing missional work. So be prepared!

All steps of preparation are important. None should be missed. However, perhaps the most crucial is clarifying the sending structure; spell out the commitment levels of those who help send the LTCCW through details such as financial giving and other forms of help. The sending structure acts as an umbrella of care over the LTCCW. The relationship the LTCCW has with the sending structure is the foundation upon which the subsequent building blocks of the project are laid; if you are not clear about the level of involvement the senders will commit to having with the LTCCW, with the project and with each other, then how can you properly prepare for project monitoring, accountability, emergency support or emotional support, for example?

Let's begin with an example. My friend Amanda lived in Asia for three years. She worked on a contract basis within her professional field for several different mission agencies. Several churches and friends gave her money. Yet Amanda served virtually without any sending structure. Why? A sending structure is so much more than groups or people who simply give money and pray on Sundays.

Amanda's partnership of senders provided only partially what Amanda needed. As well as money, she needed a focused prayer team, people who were emotionally caring, someone who could consult her work, and people who could provide on-location support, for example. See the checklist for a broader list of sending needs. A relationship should be developed among members of the sending groups so they could discuss the needs. In other words, if Amanda had a team from her church that had contact with members of the mission agencies, they could discuss what support was available to her. Then they could fill in the gaps of what was missing. Even the most

fervent of LTCCWs can be tripped up in spiritual battle, and each needs a fully functional support team who can recognize problems and help in overcoming them. Spiritual battle is a guarantee on the mission field, and evidences of it can be seen through circumstances, fallen relationships, inner struggles, etc. For there to be a successful work, a fully functioning support team is crucial.

Before you look at the details for which a fully functioning support team should take responsibility, first determine management authority and financial accountability issues. The partnership base – consisting of the churches, mission agencies, and other supporters - may, at the time of commitment, decide that since they are investing time, training, finances, etc in the LTCCW, they ought to have a certain level of authority. They may want to work in roles of monitoring aspects of the project: task progress, how new programs should be run, what the budget ought to be, what is worth spending money on, who has primary pastoral care for the LTCCW, who will establish a Crisis Management Team, etc. This is appropriate and can be a definite advantage, so build a strong and clear team.

Once you have the sending structure communicating well and willing to take on roles within the LTCCW's support team, it is time to tackle the details. Clarify the sending structure's role in monitoring, evaluating and encouraging the work of the LTCCW. You will want to work out who will be doing that and what their standards for measurability will be, among several other issues. Topics like work deadlines and indicators of project completion will come up here. When this has been established, a written contract stating the expectations of each party will be needed. Keeping a written record is always a good idea. See the checklist for more details of this process.

As in most situations, a strong financial accountability plan is important to keeping good relationships, especially when involving locals from the work location. My LTCCW friend in Africa was nearly arrested and deported because government authorities thought his group was embezzling money, which was handled by a local who did the accounting. It's a fine line between the sending structure demanding too much control and giving so much freedom to the LTCCW that she's dangerously on her own. Where you land on these issues is up to you. The point is that you need to think through all the potential pitfalls related to the lack of communication about these topics.

When the contracts and agreements are clearly laid out, you have shifted into drive ... but the wheels are not yet in motion. Given that your LTCCW will be living in a new culture with new rules, think about what can help her survive there the best. For instance, help determine whether the LTCCW needs more specific cross-cultural orientation. She might want to know if she's going to a culture where women don't speak to men and people drink blood for supper. Consider additional mission training and formal degree education. Perhaps studying the language, both verbal and nonverbal, may be helpful to do before the LTCCW leaves. If giving a thumbs-up is an offensive gesture to the new culture, you'll want to know it before you go and accidentally blow your respectability.

Consider all the preparation tasks for beginning life in a new location. Some are similar to those needed for any extended overseas vacation. Your LTCCW will want to know the proximity to phone and postal service. She will need to determine what she is taking with her and how it is going to get there. There will be legalities such as work visas and the legal status of the business in the new country. She will also have long-term financial needs like insurance and retirement. She will need assistance at the new location with things like rental agreements and other relocation issues. She must consider contingency plans if she encounters problems and needs to relocate quickly. Doing all this on her own can be overwhelming, so the sending structure should walk her through these steps.

Part of the relocation preparation is personal coping. Your LTCCW will need to prepare intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. The sending structure ought to help her find resources about the culture and previous ministry done there. Host a dinner with the cuisine of the location and practice customs and mannerisms, watch videos about the country, listen to its music and discuss its worldview. Form a strong prayer team and establish appropriate pastoral care. Remember Vineyard Missions PrayerNet Team will join you in your prayers as long as you keep them updated on your LTCCW. Check out more information on the website about that. Almost as important as food and water, supportive ongoing relationships will help sustain the LTCCW. In this age of email and satellite phones, maintaining close friendships while overseas is certainly possible. “Out of sight, out of mind” is a very real threat to the LTCCW and her relationship with you.

There is a saying my grandmother used to tell me: “The mind is strong but the body is weak.” You don’t want your LTCCW to feel that way. Preparing physically is important. Several months before she leaves, your LTCCW will need to look into health considerations, such as inoculations and prophylactics. A first aid course may be helpful to take as well as appropriate medical supplies. Help your LTCCW locate the nearest gym and hospital in her new location. A concern in any location is the threat of abuse, but when you’re in a cross-cultural location you have to concern yourself with new definitions of it. Understand the new culture’s definition of abuse and know how the LTCCW can be protected from all forms of it. Some cultures have different standards of child abuse, so know what the LTCCW is heading into and how she can protect those around her. Refer to the outline for further steps in protecting young ones. Finally, know who will determine when the LTCCW should come home if her health fails, for whatever reason, which leads to the last preparation step.

Creating a reentry plan is extremely important to the whole project’s success. Sometimes the LTCCW’s visits home will be planned, but other times they may be unplanned. In either case, clear expectations between the LTCCW and the sending structure need to be in place. Think about the details of returns: talk about when, why and how a LTCCW comes home. Address things like who will pay for what and under what circumstances you will pay. How about for her childhood friend’s third wedding? Don’t presume about the details.

Part of creating an effective reentry plan is thinking mercifully about your LTCCW's emotional state. You want your LTCCW's home visit to be revitalizing, not stressful. Vineyard LTCCWs have commented that ongoing emotional support after they return is critical to them ever wanting to go again. Prepare a cultural reorientation strategy that is appropriate for their age and situation in life. This may be simple actions like going grocery shopping with her and letting her tell you how different everything is and how much things have changed. This can be an extra important step for children and youth, who may be transitioning alone from school in a third-world culture to school in America. Have coffee with your LTCCW and just listen for as long as she wants to talk. That may not be enough though. Consider doing it more often if you sense she is still struggling with her experience. Be prepared to ask for details. Sympathize. Help her feel enthusiastically welcomed back.

Debriefing your LTCCW, even on short home visits, is crucial for your LTCCW and for your missional understanding. The Vineyard Missions website will give you more information on this. Also check out David Pollock and Ruth Van Reken's transition model called RAFT for more details. The LTCCW's returns can be strategic for your church's missions program but be sure to pay special attention to her emotional health.

There are sometimes unplanned returns, such as for genocide outbreaks. Establish a Crisis Management Network and prepare tenderly for her return. Reverse culture shock can be difficult and confusing for your LTCCW, especially in emergencies or evacuations. Whether visits are planned or unplanned, it is wise and compassionate to have a missionary retreat opportunity awaiting her. Look into a place where she can be alone with God with the comforts of her culture, like a flushing toilet and a hot tub.

God has blessed you to be a blessing to the nations. He has also blessed you to be a blessing to those you send to the nations. The more thoroughly and compassionately you act as a sender, the more effective your LTCCW will be on the field. As you support your LTCCW in the ways discussed in this article, you will experience the blessing of a properly functioning missional body; you will hear about lives changed by God's love being shown by the LTCCW. You will see how it was your support that helped the LTCCW stay focused on people instead of the concerns facing her, for which you helped her prepare. And that will be the blessing to you, the missional body – seeing people experience Christ's love.