

## Contemporary Mission Training: Backwards, Upside-down and Flat!

### **Finding a New Way for Missionary Development**

Missionaries are called and developed. If someone chooses to be a missionary but lacks a clear sense of God's direction and appointment, missionary development programs are a fruitless effort. Even with a sense of His call, development is not only desirable but essential. The missionary who ignores the need for development is a permanent beginner, unable to adequately meet the challenges of a missionary.

Jesus developed the Twelve by action, stories and explanation. Paul developed Timothy by working together and by letter, demonstrating effective development of a missionary. Development of effective missionaries is the highest priority today, if we are to fulfill Christ's command to go and "teach them to obey everything I have commanded." Simply multiplying the number of those who go is not multiplying effective missionaries.

### **Development is "Backward."**

At the beginning, the end result of missionary development is considered. What will a prepared and mature missionary be able to do? How will she/he do the work of an ambassador for the Kingdom of peace? The missionary will understand and be equipped for spiritual warfare, able to not only learn the culture but apply the richness of God's Word specifically to that culture.

Seeing the goal at the beginning gives meaning and focus to each step in the development process.

### **Development is "Upside-down."**

Experience is the beginning point, then principles to be followed in ministry are developed from that experience. Traditional school learning gives the principle first, then seeks to apply it. Turning that "upside-down" is the normal way of learning in life.

Field experience is often the real classroom. Experience is often brought into the classroom in condensed form in story videos, case studies, and interviews of experienced workers or people from the culture of concern. During this "live" learning, principles are understood and stated in summary – to be remembered as a guide in future service.

### **Development is "Flat."**

Through contemporary media – internet, skype, CDs and DVDs, digitalized libraries, and email, continents and oceans no longer are massive barriers to thinking together, praying together, talking together, exchanging pictures and stories. The world has been made flat, as if we all were in one place in serious conversation. In March this year, and again in April, from Portland, Oregon, I taught a class in Lima, Peru for two hours sitting in my Portland office! I was seen and heard in Peru and I saw and

heard the Peruvian class. That is a “flat classroom” – distance is not a major problem. We use whatever media is best for a particular country, and where possible, meet face-to-face to deepen fellowship and understanding.

The key to effective development in the flat classroom is the Mentor who understands more than content. He knows the region and cultures, and he can apply the Word of God to contemporary needs. Most of all, he shares himself and cares passionately for those he is mentoring.

Methods that are consistent with cultural learning styles should replace importation of traditional teaching methods for missionary development. Even content needs to be reconsidered, to adhere more closely to Biblical teaching and examples.

## **A Framework for Developing Missionaries**

(This is a framework, not a detailed outline of courses. Full content needs to be developed within this structure to meet specific needs of each region and culture.)

The assumption underlying the World Link Graduate Center curriculum is so simple that it is often overlooked – Mission is communication. Relationship with God is established and continued by communication, through God revealing Himself to man, in the incarnation, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Communication is expressed in the perfect relationship within the Trinity into which God draws us through Christ, “that they may be one as we are one, just as you are in me and I am in you.” Christ expressed this deepest desire for mankind three times in John 17. How, then, do we extend that invitation to a world alienated from God? Through effective use of communication, which is much, much more than who said what to whom, and how.

Building ministry within communication, rather than within contributing subject areas, opens a path in mission that will more clearly guide how we do mission, instead of simply identifying where mission should be at work. The essential Christian task is to share God’s Message - to communicate knowledge of Him and His ways. Therefore, the appropriate action framework for Christian workers is communication.

An underlying structure of Christian communication is presented in *Creating Understanding*, and summarized in eighteen revised propositions given below. The numbers at the end of each statement refer to the original numbering in *Creating Understanding*.

### **Knowing the Story**

Mastery of content is the necessary foundation for effective communication. 6

Clarification of goals increases the possibility of effective communication. 5

### **Knowing the Power of the Holy Spirit**

Communication is what is heard, not only what is said. 3

Meaning is perceived internally and individually. 4

Spiritual perception and response is the work of God’s Spirit.

## **Knowing God**

Communication is involvement. 1

Communication is a process. 2

## **Knowing Yourself**

The communicators' personalities and experiences modify the form of the message. 7

## **Knowing the Audience**

The communicators' image of the audience and understanding of the contexts are primary factors in shaping the form of the message. 8

A communicator almost always communicates with multiple audiences. 9

Perceived and actual feedback shapes the form of the message. 23

Communication increases commitment. 10

## **Knowing the Context**

The cultural patterns and beliefs of a society fundamentally influence the form of effective communication. 17, 18

Perception precedes comprehension, interpretation and effect of a message. All are directly related to experience and needs. 19

There are three simultaneous dimensions in communication process and effect - rational, emotional and spiritual. 20

## **Knowing the Tools**

All human communication occurs through the use of twelve signal systems.

Usage of the signal systems is a function of culture; thus they are used differently in different cultures. 11, 12

Mass media extend the range of a message but inevitably change the message. 13

The effectiveness of a medium is largely determined by factors other than the medium itself. 15

Effectiveness normally decreases with increasing size of the audience. 14

## **Knowing Change**

People respond to communications as members of social groups. 21

Messages are mediated. 16

A decision to change results from the combined effects of public (mass) media and interpersonal network. 22

These propositions are grouped into eight Learning Units for developing effective ministry (communication) in God's Name: Knowing the Story and Knowing the Power of the Holy Spirit (fundamentals), Knowing God (the purpose), Knowing Yourself (the messenger), Knowing the

Audience, Knowing the Tools, Knowing the Context, Knowing Change.

Within each of the eight Learning Units, there are several Sections. Each section introduces an aspect of the Learning Unit, similar to chapters in a book. The contributions of several different developer-writers are combined within each Learning Unit. The developers represent Africa, Asia, South America, and North America.