

Engage the Professionals in Your Church

10 Keys to Sparking Their Missions Involvement

By Ellen Livingood

God wants every believer in your church to be involved in some way in reaching the nations! And that includes professionals, those who pursue a demanding vocation in their homeland. Professionals are no more important to the Kingdom than other believers, but because of their schedules and focused mindset, they may be harder to recruit for the cause. Yet people who fill demanding vocational roles here at home have gifts that are at the same time sorely needed around the globe. Many of them long for ways to move from success to significance.



In this article, we focus on involvement in short-term opportunities and non-resident missionary efforts. Sending people to pursue marketplace opportunities has been addressed in other *Postings* (see page 4 for links) and will be again in future issues.

The following suggestions for church leaders come from professionals who, themselves, have become engaged in missions through their local congregation.

1. Ask them

Highly qualified people often do not volunteer or respond to a general invitation.

That doesn't mean they can't be recruited, but they are more likely to consider contributing their time if they are approached individually, and presented with a clearly articulated invitation.

2. Keep on asking them

Don't be a pest, but don't take the first "no" as the final answer. Ask again in six months. Respectfully build your case over multiple invitations. Describe how their involvement will be strategic. Professionals can usually overcome barriers to their participation once they have become convinced of the value of the project.

An Outside Perspective



"When I agreed to join my first short-term trip, I just knew it was something God wanted me to do," **Dan Denton** explains. "The team from our church in Baltimore, MD, went to Central Asia to teach micro-business. I am not a teacher, yet God carried me through and used me. While there, my eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit to the fact that He cares about people everywhere. By the time I came home, the fire was lit."

Over the next few years, Dan's involvement increased, despite the demands of his business. "Our abilities, money, and time all belong to God," Dan explains. "When God says, 'I want you to invest some of your time in missions,' He also promises to take care of the details back in your business. I can testify that the Lord covers us and provides for us if we will trust Him."

Today Dan is the non-resident coordinator for a ministry team in Southeast Asia. For the past several months, that has involved serving on a discernment team of 11 people making a major decision about *(continued on page 2...)*

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how to move forward. The team holds a weekly conference call where each person speaks into the process and they collectively seek God's guidance. The commitment demands time but Dan knows God is calling him to it, and his wife is fully supportive.

Dan's role involves three primary things. First, he sees himself as an encourager. Some of the team members are in very remote places and need someone to serve them by listening well.



Second, Dan can speak into some of the team's initiatives. When he is on site, there are three or four days of intense team meetings. "I am an outside set of eyes and ears; I ask questions," he explains. "I learned in business that someone from the outside can bring a fresh perspective, and that's what I seek to do. The Lord seems to have given me the ability to read people well. For example, I may sense when someone in the group is not expressing what they are thinking, and I try to draw them out. So some of my contribution is spiritual discernment and some comes from my business experience."

Third, Dan serves as a connector. He works to link in people and fellowships in the US that can contribute in some way to the ministry in Asia. There is great satisfaction in seeing people united to reach this unreached people group.

The field leader for this ministry team is enthusiastic about Dan's contribution: "Because he has been committed to the work over a period of years, makes regular visits, and keeps in close communication, he has become a true team member. We've been blessed by Dan at multiple levels—he is wise, humble, committed to praying, and a shepherd for our workers. His unique skills are a great benefit. I would say that he accomplishes 50 percent of the amount of work handled by a full-time field workers!

"We resident workers need to break out of our own boxes," the field leader continues, "and not assume all short-termers will require a lot of facilitation. Dan is evidence that they can become a huge asset. What we have invested to get Dan into his current position is dwarfed by the contribution he is making! We want more folks like him."

3 ■ Have the right person do the asking

If you are recruiting professionals for a ministry trip or to serve on a specialized coordinating team, have a peer approach them. For example, a doctor is the best person to recruit other doctors for a team, and a teacher can best describe a training program so that other educators understand the importance of the program.

4 ■ Recruit to an appropriate time frame

For a first trip, most working professionals will commit for no more than one week of vacation with the bookend weekends. Don't ask them for a longer stint initially, even if half the time is spent traveling. Get them there to catch a vision, and the next time they may be willing to commit a longer period of time. Consider their work schedules: For example, tax accountants couldn't join a trip between January 1 and April 15; some professionals may need a year's advance notice.

5 ■ Match expertise and interests

Wherever possible, recruit professionals to serve in their sweet spot. This may be their professional expertise, or it may be some other area of particular interest to them. These people are success-oriented and believe they are more effective if they can utilize their skills. God often uses short-term trips to demonstrate that it is not about our human ability, but the initial tug to join a ministry

team often relates to the person's area of experience.

6 ■ Customize training

Professionals may view a series of preparatory meetings as unnecessary requirements. Yet such people often are unaware how much they don't know about crossing cultures and relating well to on-the-ground ministry. Make sure all training meetings are well planned and focused. If someone cannot attend, provide the content via written material or a recording they can listen to in the car or while jogging.

7 ■ Give them freedom to lead

Don't micro-manage people with leadership capacity. Resource them well and let them lead.

8 ■ Run interference

Busy professionals usually don't have time or are ill equipped to handle lots of details, complete extended reports, or attend lots of planning meetings. Assign a details person to work alongside them to handle these important tasks or look for other ways to reduce logistics time.

9 ■ Challenge professionals to embrace bigger jobs

Leaders thrive on challenge. Once they catch the vision, they will sacrifice other commitments to invest in what they

see has eternal impact. Talk to them about how they can expand their involvement. This may be the time God wants them to move overseas, launch a new business within your adopted people group, cut back their work hours in order to travel to the field more often, make a major financial investment, or resign from other responsibilities in order to lead your church's FOCUS team. Don't ask too little of them. Challenge big faith commitments.

10 ■ Encourage field workers to pursue your professionals

Missionaries may be hesitant to ask professionals for deeper involvement. Explain that you believe they should be asking your leader-level people to invest more of their time and other resources. Brainstorm together how your highly gifted people could get more involved.

A Bigger Purpose



"Our missions pastor, Kirk Lithander, had to be persistent to overcome my reluctance to join a missions trip," **Bob Smith**, a pulmonologist in Dayton, OH, explains. "I couldn't see what real difference I could make by offering just one week of medical services in Ecuador. But finally I said yes.

Bob's wife **Holly** was also initially hesitant to join the team. "I'm not a medical person. What could I do?" she rationalized. Assured that she was needed, she also agreed to go.

The trip radically altered their perspective. "God woke me up to the fact that it wasn't about the medicine," Bob shares. "It was about using medicine as a way to build relationships that the local church could leverage for the gospel. Suddenly I saw a much bigger picture."



Since that first trip, God has used the Smiths to build teams that annually serve alongside their Ecuadorian partner church to hold clinics in poor areas. But their special focus is building friendship bridges to Ecuadorian doctors in the local hospital. Through an exchange program, some of these doctors annually come to Dayton where they are showered with hospitality by Christians who share their faith through their everyday lives. As word spreads of this exchange program, interest is expanding across Ecuador. More doors are opening for witness to middle- and upper-class people who have traditionally been hard to reach.

The Smiths are involved year-round in team building, hospitality, and nurturing key relationships.

They have seen people come to Christ and powerful witness shared with people in the US and Ecuador. "Because I'm a doc," Bob explains, "I can help other docs understand the value of their involvement and what happens in the larger context of our purpose. It's amazing to see what God is doing. Who knows how far this may go!"



More than the Numbers



When **Mary Castria's** husband passed away, she was left to raise two children as a single parent. God providentially opened doors, and she built a successful career as an accountant and financial controller in the not-for-profit sector. As Mary listened to missions challenges at her church in Princeton, NJ, she was interested but didn't see how she could contribute. After all, she was an accountant, not a missionary, and her work responsibilities were demanding. But her missions interest stayed alive through a world-missions course sponsored by her church, and she put her 'toe in the water' by participating in a short-term trip.

The situation changed when Mary retired at the end of 2012. She was ready to pursue missions but decided to complete a degree in counseling at a local seminary first. Between semesters, she spent the summer in eastern Congo implementing a student billing program for a Christian university followed by three weeks in Cameroon doing an audit review for Wycliffe.

God enabled her to surmount language barriers and work with an unfamiliar computer program. She marveled at the way her accounting skills and experience were needed—and used by God—to serve people in Congo and Cameroon. Most fulfilling was the opportunity to minister to a fatherless young man, a single mother, and a family touched by cancer—all three dealing with issues she had experienced in her own life. God brought these people across her path while she served using her accounting expertise.

Now with graduate studies completed and some missions experience under her belt, Mary is looking forward to her next phase of missions service. She is ready to use her accounting skills and engage her passion to share words of godly counsel.

"There is so much untapped missions talent sitting right on our church pews!" Mary declares emphatically. She is a model of how it can be unleashed.



More Postings Resources

This *Postings* focuses on how to recruit professionals to short-term ministry or some type of missionary-like role. There are huge opportunities here, but there is another growing global missions force. It is comprised of professionals who take overseas jobs or launch businesses in a global setting for very intentional ministry purposes. Check out past issues of *Postings* focused on this fast-growing cadre of

cross-cultural workers: [Business as Missions: How Do Church and Agency Connect?](#) and [Business as Mission: Engage Marketplace Potential for Global Impact](#).

For more ideas on how to recruit and use professionals in your church, check out [High-Capacity Leaders: Coaching Influencers for Global and Local Mission](#) and [Second-Career Workers: Mobilizing the Boomer Generation](#).

Action Steps for Both Church and Agency

1. Brainstorm ways to use professionals in short-term assignments. Challenge your missionaries to list ways they could use professionals for one week to one year. Catalyst's [June 2008 Postings](#) provides a starter list, but you can add lots of other professional categories. (Send your additions to info@catalystservices.org and we will add them to our list too!)

2. Challenge new retirees to take a "gap year" in missions. The missions gap-year concept has applied to students serving overseas for a year between high school and college. But why not ask those concluding their vocational work to invest a year in missions service before launching into retirement? Who knows, they might decide that God is calling them to a whole new career!

Additional Action Steps for Churches

1. Resize some adult missions trips. Instead of thinking in terms of sending a team of six, eight, or more people, consider sending just one or two people to accomplish a specific task for your field partners. Smaller-size teams are easier for your partners to host, and use effectively. Your church can recruit qualified professional(s) to accomplish a specific goal.

2. Analyze motivations. Sit down with some of the sharp professionals in your church and find out what would pique

their interest to serve in missions. Also discuss the hurdles. How can you shape opportunities that “work” for these types of people in your church?

3. Survey the congregation. Find out what types of professional skills and expertise God has given members of your church. Send this list to your field workers and ask if they could use any of these people on a short-term assignment (which just might turn into a long-term one).

Additional Action Steps for Agencies

1. Tell stories. Publish the accounts of professionals who have contributed their expertise for shorter or longer periods of time. These stories will challenge others to volunteer.

2. Use professionals short term in your headquarters. Challenge your home staff to brainstorm ways that professionals could contribute to what they are doing. As noted in the Denton article above, an outside pair of eyes and ears

can be very valuable. Help staff to recognize the fear and sense of intimidation that may make them hesitate to utilize highly competent, consultant-type people. Set an example by inviting several of these people to volunteer some time (from a couple of days to a couple of months) in your office. Afterward, report to the staff how you benefitted and dealt with any challenges.

CHECK OUT OUR BLOG on [Valuing All Kinds of Cross-Cultural Ministry](#). Share your ideas about how those in traditional missionary roles can better integrate the gifts of workplace professionals.

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