

POSTINGS

articles for missions mobilizers



Postings Classic Issue | by Ellen Livingood

Is This the Team for Me?

Questions to help
determine fit on a
field team

Prospective missionaries often invest considerable time and effort in choosing the right mission agency. This is essential, but joining the right team may be even more important.

As a field worker, you will spend far more time interfacing with your team than with your agency's leaders in a distant headquarters. Team compatibility and ministry fit are huge factors in determining not only the success of your efforts but also your personal well-being.

Team values, culture, and function vary wildly even within the same mission organization. A thousand factors shape a team's personality, and determine how they approach ministry, resolve problems, and care for each other. Face-to-face interaction is necessary to begin to understand these complex dynamics.

You will want to debrief your observations, thoughts, and feelings with trusted advisors.

Here are some questions to consider when evaluating your fit with a particular team. Although you will want to collect lots of information, don't approach this process as a formal interview or an interrogation. Choose what you think are the most important issues to investigate. Ask God to help you grasp the crucial factors and the subtle clues that indicate whether you would fit with this team.

Remember, no team is perfect and no team fit is perfect. Expect your team relationship to grow and shape you, rubbing off the rough edges as you share the highs and lows of life and ministry.

1. HISTORY

What is the team's story? Where and with whom was the initial vision? Has the team always been the same general size? What do they feel is the optimum number of members and why? Does, or could, the team include nationals and/or people from other agencies or nationalities? Have there been members of the team who have left? Why? (It might be helpful to talk to them.) Has there been turnover of team leader?

2. GOALS

Are the team's goals clear? Have they been the same from the beginning or has the purpose shifted over time? How are goals determined? How important are they? How often are they revisited? How is progress evaluated?

3. DECISION MAKING

Are ministries determined by the group, or is everyone free to individually determine how they use their time and what they do? How are personal goals evaluated and by whom?

4. NATIONAL PARTNERS

What is the history of relationships between the team and field partners? What decisions are made by the national leaders vs. the team?

5. INTERNAL TEAM RELATIONSHIPS

Talk to team members individually. What is the leadership style of the team leader? What are his/her strengths? How honest are people in team meetings? Are there hidden

Consider Compatibility

As I coach people in the process of applying for missions, I try to help them identify the things that really matter to them and then formulate questions for the prospective team based on these concerns. Prospective workers need to know their own personal style (or temperament) and the style of the team. Will they mesh for a good fit? Tools like Strengths Finder 2.0 are a great help in this area. For example, an extroverted communicator will dry up on a team of introverted technicians. A "global thinker" can drive "specific thinkers" around the bend.

Potential missionaries want to know that their involvement will be meaningful. If they are convinced that they can contribute significantly to the team, they will have the degree of confidence needed to build a support team.

Bob Hay, SIM USA recruitment coordinator

agendas? Power struggles? Cliques? Is there a domineering individual everyone else is afraid to upset?

6. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

How are differences resolved? Ask team members to illustrate. Is there a team covenant? If so, what is included? What happens if the covenant is broken?

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7. MEETINGS

How often does the team meet and for what purposes? As you participate in a team meeting, analyze whether their time together seems to be characterized by transparent, authentic communication. Do you detect strained relationships? Do team members seem warm and friendly toward all?



8. TEAM LEADER

What are the team leader's two strongest spiritual gifts? Are they task oriented or people oriented? What percentage of time do they invest in leading and assisting team members vs. doing ministry themselves?

9. GIFT MIX

What gifts do the team lack that they feel are most needed? Do you bring these gifts to the mix? How would they see your gifts fitting into the team?

10. SUPERVISION

How often does the supervisor of the team/team leader interact with the team? What does that look like?

11. CULTURE/LIFESTYLE

What are the team's expectations of workers' integration into the local culture and community? What do they believe this should look like? Are there guidelines/expectations about where you would live and about your level of lifestyle as compared to nationals? Would you get a car or use public transportation? Who makes these types of decisions? How?

12. LANGUAGE

What are the expectations regarding language fluency? Where is language learned? Is this flexible, especially for families? Does a certain level of fluency have to be achieved before ministry begins, or are language acquisition and ministry integrated? How is fluency measured?

13. COLLEAGUES

Are there other teams from this agency or from other agencies in the same city? If so, is there interaction and collaboration?

14. ATTITUDES TOWARD AGENCY LEADERSHIP

What is the attitude of the team in general about the agency and its top leaders? Is the morale generally good? Are people excited about working under the leadership of the top administrators and complying with changes they initiate?

15. ROLES OF WOMEN

What are the team's positions on women? Are women individually part of the team and team decisions, or does a couple have one voice together? Are certain kinds of ministry considered off limits to women? Who decides? If the team has national partners, what is their position on women's function in the church, in leadership, etc.? Does the culture place limits on women? If so, how does the team deal with this?

16. FAMILY-RELATED EXPECTATIONS

How are ministry assignments determined for women who have children at home? If most on the team are older or single, do they welcome children as part of the ministry environment? What are the educational options on this field? Are there any field/team limitations or expectations regarding choices for children's education? How does the team support parents in the schooling of their kids?

17. FINANCES

How are field finances handled? Are some funds pooled? If so, what, and who decides how they are used? Does the team have input on support levels? When was the last time the support requirement for this team/field was reevaluated?

18. LIFE-LONG LEARNING

What does the team do to keep learning and growing?

19. SOCIAL CONNECTION

What are the social relationships among the team? Do members spend a lot of time together just having fun? Are singles included in family activities on occasion? Does this team include people from various life stages? If so, do they relate well?

20. PASTORAL CARE

Does someone on the team provide pastoral care? What does it look like? Is it clear when and to whom they refer people who have deeper issues to be resolved?

21. SENDING CHURCHES

How are team members' sending churches involved? Does the team highly value an active sending church? Would they prefer that churches "stay home"? Or is partnering with churches not even on their radar?

22. SECURITY

If this is a place where security is a concern, how and by whom are security guidelines developed? Are they being regularly reevaluated and consistently implemented?

Prayer Is Most Important

Joining a team is a big commitment not to be taken lightly. These people will become your family, church, and community. They will see the best and worst of you, just as you will see the best and worst of them.

Asking good questions and receiving good information will assist you in making this decision, but always remember this is a process that should be encompassed, infused, and drenched in prayer. Your eyes see just a little; God sees all. Ask Him for direction and He will answer you.

A worker on a team in the Middle East

Before You Go

Do your homework prior to your trip. The team leader can tell you how to prepare. Learn as much as you can about the culture and the work the team is doing. Good preparation shows that you are serious about contributing well to whatever team you eventually serve with. Learn and follow the security guidelines, and dress appropriately for the culture.

Be Transparent

As you ask team members to be honest with you, it is equally important that you open up to them about your strengths, weaknesses, expectations, dreams, fears, etc. If you are a couple or family, make sure that each person has opportunity to share their perspective. Don't just try to put your best foot forward. Your prospective team needs to see the real you.

At the end of your visit, debrief with the team or at least the team leader. Ask for honest feedback regarding their sense of your fit with their team. Where would they see good connections? Conflicts? What could you do to better prepare to contribute to their team?

After You Return

Processing all that you learn on your visit will be essential. Your trip may surface powerful emotions and a strong spiritual response. You may return very convinced or more unsure than ever regarding your match with this team. Regardless, you will want to debrief your observations, thoughts, and feelings with trusted advisors.

Talk to your church leaders and people who know you well. Sit down and share with them what you have learned. In light of what you have discovered, how would they evaluate your fit on this team? Pray together for clarity, and ask God to use them to confirm what you believe He is saying to you.

Talk to the appropriate leaders at the agency headquarters. Ask them if they think the impressions you have gleaned accurately describe this team. Tell them your impressions of your fit with this team and ask for their input on your evaluation. Again, pray together for God to use them to help you determine His will.

You may be wondering...

Q: A field visit is expensive. Can't these questions be asked via a Skype call or in a meeting with field missionaries when they are on home assignment?

A: A phone call will give you facts, but it won't provide much of the crucial interpretation. You need to see the team living life together to really understand the dynamics. This is not a place to cut corners just to save money. If you are a sending church, invest the funds for your prospective workers to make this visit.

Q: In the case of a couple or family, who should make the survey trip?

A: If at all possible, the whole family should go, especially if children are elementary age or older. It will be important to observe the chemistry between your kids and the team. Husbands and wives may have very different perspectives as they interact with their perspective teammates.



Q: At what point in the decision-making process should a field survey trip be scheduled?

A: Some agencies prefer that prospective missionaries first complete the application process and be appointed. Following their approval for service, the workers are then encouraged to make this type of field visit.

However, potential missionaries may want to know they will fit with a particular team before making their choice of an agency. So the sequence of events needs to be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Q: Is there a best time to visit?

A: Make sure you go at a time when most of the team is on site and have some margin in their schedules to spend time with you. If you can correlate your visit to also include a field-wide conference, you gain the benefit of meeting a larger number of your prospective coworkers.

Q: Should a church leader accompany the prospective worker on this survey trip?

A: There are pros and cons. The church must be convinced that their workers will have a healthy, productive ministry setting. To achieve this, the right field team is essential.

An on-site visit is the best way to confirm these elements are in place. However, the presence of a church leader will change the relational dynamics and, to some extent, the agenda. Sometimes it is best to make two separate visits.

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