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# MISSIONARYNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS 

Stages of growth

Wes LINDQUIST

## Introduction

Whenever we talk about working together we are talking about relationships: In John 17 Jesus taught that the world would know we are His disciples by our relationships. Cambodian nationals, Do you have a good relationship with the missionaries with whom you are working? Missionaries, Do you have a good relationship with the nationals with whom you are working? The goal of this article is to stimulate better relationships between us.

## The Flow of Partnership

Relationship-As the following graphic illustrates, all partnerships are built on relationship. This is the foundation of all strong churches, NGO's, or any other type of organization. Without strong relationships our partnerships will be weak and short-lived.

Purpose-Once strong relationships have been built we need to have a purpose. A relationship without purpose is simply a group of friends. For a partnership we must have a mutually-agreed purpose-something we both want to accomplish.


Strategy-Once our relationship has an agreed-upon purpose, we then need to determine a strategy. How are we going to accomplish our purpose? This is where experience and training begin to show a great profit.

Resources-As Christians our next step in our relationship is to prayerfully determine the resources needed to complete our strategy and fulfill our purpose. In the world we often start the process by looking at our resources: "How much money do we have?" But as Christians we need to seek God's purpose and strategy first. Then by faith we pray the resources in.

Work-Finally, the partnership we have built upon strong relationships, mutually-defined purpose, wise strategy, and calculated resource management, can begin to work together.

The result of a partnership built on strong relationships is the ability to do great works for God. Whether in the church, an NGO, or any other Christian organization, the strength of the organization is found in the strength of their relationships.

## The Centrality of Relationships

The remainder of this article will focus on one element of the above model. The most important and yet most fragile component is our relationships. Brothers and sisters, we can have the best purpose, the finest strategies, and all the resources imaginable, but our partnerships and work will come to nothing if our relationships crumble. We must place a higher priority on our relationships than on our work. Jesus didn't die for any of our projects; he died for people. We must give more care and attention to people than to the work. That priority begins with those with whom we work, and not just the disadvantaged or hurting sinners our projects so often target.

## RELATIONSHIPS ARE OUR PRIORITY

- Jesus didn't die for your projects


Winter uses a four-stage model for working through missionary-national church relationships. ${ }^{1}$ The great value in his model is its recognition that all relationships must change and

[^0]develop. This is a sign of growth and health. Yet there will always be stress associated with change. The change required to move from one stage to another on this model causes us great stress. If we learn these stages of relationship, we can better understand one another and better partner together. It will also help us find a good path through the stressful changes of growth and development.

# Missionary - National Relationship Four Stages of Development 

## - Stage 1: Pioneer Stage

First contact with a people group.
Evangelism and relief work are some of the principal tools used.

- Stage 2: Paternal Stage

Expatriates train national leadership. The establishment of Bible Schools and assorted other training methods take shape. Relief is moving into development.

- Stage 3 Partnership Stage

National leaders work as equals with expatriates. Turning over control and projects to national leadership, with expatriates acting as mentors.

- Stage 4 Participation Stage Expatriates are no longer equal partners, but only participate by invitation. Specialized and highly trained missionaries are needed to support the national church in areas like Christian media production and advanced theological training.


As a missionary myself, I will begin by talking about the role of the missionary. It is an ever-evolving role, much like that of a teacher who teaches a student, and then trains that student to become a teacher, and then finally becomes an employee in his student's school.

Sometimes we use the analogy of a parent and child to describe this growing relationship. Missionaries must not forever maintain a dominant role over the local work, nor should they relinquish the local work too quickly. As with all living things, there is a natural process of growth and development. No parent wants to find himself or herself feeding and bathing a twenty-year-
old child. Missionary relationships should mirror this natural pattern.

Understanding this model allows us to see that our roles and relationships will naturally change over time. As we progress toward a mature national church we will move through each of these four stages. The important fact to remember is that each organization and denomination is on a different pace. There is no "right" method nor is there a "uniform speed" that all relationships will follow. As with our children, some grow up faster than others.

One word of caution-2 Cor 10:12 warns us of the "foolishness" of comparing ourselves among ourselves. One of the most dangerous activities in which we can engage is to compare the way different missionaries and nationals develop their relationships. As with all living things, growth takes place according to specific conditions of proper food, water, nurture, and care. The "soil" or personality of the people involved plays a large part in growth. I am weary of the sweeping generalizations like, "All missionaries are colonial and domineering," or "All nationals are Biblically uneducated and greedy for money and power." There is no basis to make such statements, and genuine relationships will never form in such a hostile environment.

## Pioneer Stage

The fact is there are times when a strong visionary pioneer is needed. Pioneers tend to have strong, domineering personalities. These people will let nothing stand in the way of bringing the light of the Gospel to souls trapped in darkness. These are strong people with strong opinions. Look at them one moment and you can see them sacrificing their freedoms and rights for others; look at them another moment and you see them crashing headfirst into conflict and poor decisions. These people are like the mighty water buffalo-if their strength is guided in the right direction they can do great benefit. But should their strength be misguided they cause great harm.

Currently, only $0.6 \%$ of Cambodia's population believes in Christ. To argue we don't need pioneer missionaries ignores this fact. To my knowledge, nearly every one of the twenty-one
provinces has at least one Christian home fellowship or church, and all four city principalities have a church. But how many of the 173 provincial districts or how many of the 36,000 villages have a Christian witness? The vast majority do not have any witness for Christ at all! This is a country that is desperately in need of pioneer missionaries. I would even dare to challenge the budding national church to focus its resources on pioneering new districts and villages for Christ too.

## Pioneer Stage

## Positives:

$\checkmark$ Strong independent personality
$\checkmark$ Will sacrifice greatly to see others hear the gospel
$\checkmark$ Self starters
$\checkmark$ Little conflict since there is no one else to argue with

## Negatives:

$\checkmark$ Strong independent personality

mission
$\checkmark$ Tend to have blind spots
$\checkmark$ Confrontational

In the present pioneering stage of missions work in Cambodia, many foreigners are confused by arguments such as, "The colonial days of pioneering are over. Now, we need to empower and equip nationals." Another argument runs, "Nationals can do it with better language and cultural sensitivity and certainly with far less cost." Yet those who argue this way fail to realize that such logic comes from nations with more than two hundred years of missions history. The current trend across the world is that "Developing World" or "Second World" nations are beginning to send missionaries.

Here in Cambodia we see fruit produced by Filipino, Korean, and Thai missionaries. These sending countries have
enjoyed more than 150,100 , and 80 years of national church development respectively. Let's compare these countries to Cambodia. Yes, Cambodia had its first Protestant missionaries nearly eighty years ago, but the national church never really grew and became well established. Then with the Khmer Rouge regime, the small national church was destroyed. Only four pastors survived and most of the Christians either fled to the camps in Thailand or died under the Khmer Rouge.

Realistically, the national church in Cambodia is a new pioneer work. The majority of us here are working with firstgeneration believers. Therefore, the idea of pioneering is more appropriate to Cambodia when compared to the rest of the world, since Cambodia has experienced such a terrible past. This is a pioneer field and not a mature field. We need to understand that to accurately set our strategies and plans.

## Parent Stage

As growth continues, we see new life springing up from the seed of the Word-babes in Christ requiring great care and attention. As with physical infants, these new believers require constant attention from their parents or teachers. This work of nurturing depends totally upon the mission for sustenance; the national church is in the learning stage. This stage requires the gift of teaching from the missionary. The young national church has a growing child's relationship to the mission. The missionaries must "parent" without being "paternalistic." This means they must guide, instruct, teach, model, and apply God's Word in culturally appropriate ways, but must not view the national church or its members as "children to be bossed around" or "employees to be ordered around." Many of the five-to-ten-year-old ministries in Cambodia are entering this stage. They are trying to disciple new believers in such basic issues as church attendance, personal devotions, prayer, and Bible reading. Though many new churches are developing materials to facilitate this growth, there remains a vast need for more basic discipleship resources.

In helping plant two churches I have experienced the conflict that arises in moving from Pioneer to Parent stage. It is the

## Parent Stage

## Positives:

$\checkmark$ Growth is rapid with solid teaching
$\checkmark$ Genuine change in lives beginning
$\checkmark$ Most opportune time to build lasting relationships (parent without being paternalistic)

## Negatives:

$\checkmark$ Early stages require the church to be totally dependant upon the mission
$\checkmark$ Conflicts arise as church grows

church mission
$\checkmark$ Without trusting relationships failure is imminent
age-old tension between the "evangelist" wanting more people to have opportunity to respond to the Gospel message and the "pastor" who wants to bolt the door shut, recognizing he cannot properly care for the people he already has. We must recognize that in these stages of growth sometimes we "grow out," and other times we let our roots "grow down." One is not more important than the other. They simply represent different stages of growth.

I believe some of the Cambodian pastors have experienced this transition too. Remember when your church was small and all the time you put into evangelism and going to new houses and villages with the Gospel? Then a day came when you had thirty to forty people coming regularly. They began sharing their problems and wanting you to come counsel them. You saw the need to better train them and teach them the Word of God, but your habit was to go out witnessing and not stay at the church and counsel people. A tension arose-that tension is the transition between these two stages. You need to recognize this and grow. Don't make the mistake of continuing to pioneer and not parent. You will bring them in the front door, but if you don't care for them they will leave
out the back door just as fast. Why do we have churches that continue to attract new members, yet whose attendance remains the same? Because they are not parenting the infants they bear.

## Partnership Stage

The next stage is a very difficult transition for both the missionary and the local church. It could be compared to having teenagers in your home. They are not really children, as they are big and physically developed; yet they are not quite adults, as they have so little practical experience. The teenage son wants to be a man. He is willing to "prove" how strong or tough he is. He is like a young rooster strutting around and crowing. The father wants to "let him go" and gain experience, but it is hard when the father knows the pain and long term effects one poor decision can make.

## Partnership Stage

## Positives:

$\checkmark$ Strength of national church emerging

- Creativity and cultural bridges being developed
$\checkmark$ Vast new areas of ministry opening as greater human resources are available


## Negatives:

$\checkmark$ Most difficult transition (for both parties!)
$\checkmark$ Cracks in the first two stages will show
$\checkmark$ Most causalities occur now

church mission

For the NGO this means turning over multi-million dollar programs, handing over the keys to vehicles and equipment, allowing the work to be governed by nationals, and allowing the nationals to make decisions that will affect the future of the NGO. This is not easy to do! Yet, some nationals believe they are ready
to do this within three to four years. "Let me show you how to do this right!" is the attitude of some. Oh, the pain involved in this transition . . . it is not an easy time.

Just as in our families, this transition is best prepared for when the relationship is young. We must build trust in one another and learn to appreciate one another's gifts and experiences. We must acknowledge early on that when the time for transition comes it will be painful. There is no easy way to do this; it takes the grace of God on both parts. Becoming equal with one another is something that opposes human nature. We both want to be in charge, but God is saying at this stage that one needs to let go and trust, while the other needs to respectfully take up the leadership role on a transitioning basis. The new leaders must start slow and gradually take full control. God will help us make this transition, but we certainly can make it less painful by being aware of what is happening.

## Participation Stage

Once the partnership stage has reached its climax, full control belongs to the nationals. The control of the denomination or NGO is now fully in their capable hands. The organization is being run with experience and wisdom. God is now blessing the nationals with growth and success.

At this stage the missionary needs to know when to move on to the next field. Not all missionaries are gifted for each stage of this developmental process. Strong Type A personalities often chafe under the vision, direction, and guidance of the national leaders. This is a recipe for continual conflict. Why do it? At this stage the local church or NGO needs to say, "We would like this one and that one to stay and work with us. But we need to see these others move on." At this stage the national church is in full control and they will only need the services of those highly specialized missionaries or technical experts. We will need missionaries with advanced theological training when we see true Bible colleges and seminaries in Cambodia, training at the master's level and higher. Do you believe that day will come? Yes, friends, it will. And we will need missionaries skilled in areas like television, radio, and
other mass media to help the national church develop the programs they want to produce. This does not mean there will not be Cambodian technicians. But these are examples of what it means to be in the Participant stage.

Local NGO's will need people helping in areas of specialized medicine, micro-finance, or other areas of expertise. The major decisions will at this stage be made by the Cambodian leaders, but we never want to isolate ourselves from the wisdom and experience of our Christian brothers and sisters.

## Participation Stage

## Positives:

- Ultimate goal achleved!
$\checkmark$ New People Groupi being targeted by national church
$\checkmark$ Mont misalonarles moving on to next unreached field


## Negatives:

- Some "old timera" hangling on
$\checkmark$ Politicking among natlonal leaderif for supreme control

church mission


## Conclusion

There you have it-the four P's of relationship development between missionaries and nationals. This model is given in the hope that by understanding the process we can improve our relationships with one another. And remember, don't be so foolish as to compare your church or organization with another. There is no value in this-it will only breed jealousy or anger.

I would challenge each of you to go back and talk with those you are working with and see where you think you are at on this developmental process. It might be enlightening to see that one
person thinks we are pioneering while another thinks we are in the participation stage!

Once you determine where you currently are, talk about the future. How do you want to get to the next stage? How long do you think it will take? What will be the signs that you are growing into that next stage?

Taking the time to answer all of these questions will help us build strong relationships between missionaries and nationals.

This material was presented at the 2001 General Assembly of the Evangelical Fellowship of Cambodia in Phnom Penh.


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[^1]:    ${ }^{(1)}$ Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds., Perspectives on the World Christian Movement (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981).

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