

LONG TERMERS WITH A SHORT TERM MENTALITY

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Introduction: Youth With A Mission is primarily a short term organization.

Approximately 20,000 young people work with Youth With A Mission every year in short term outreaches, such as field trips, Summers of Service, GO Teams, FEET teams, outreaches at international events etc. 6,000 young people a year go through Youth With A Mission Training Schools. With an average growth rate of fulltime staff of about 20% per annum, it appears that most of the young people coming through our short term evangelism and training programs are not staying fulltime with Youth With A Mission. That should not be seen as a failure. God wants to use Youth With A Mission to expose tens of thousands of people to missionary opportunities. Some of these people will find out that it was human enthusiasm and not a long term call to missions that attracted them. Obviously that is a great blessing to those people since it would cost them a lot of money and time to join a conventional missionary organization only to find out later that they were not called to be missionaries as a career.

The positive side of short term missions is that it allows many people who are not sure if they are called to be missionaries to find out that God has indeed called them. Others return to the local church with a world vision. Still others leave Youth With A Mission and work with other types of missionary organizations. All of this is a great benefit to the Body of Christ.

For those who do stay with Youth With A Mission, it is important to recognize that working in an organization that primarily caters to short termers, it is very easy if you feel called to work long term to maintain a short termers' mentality. To work in a missionary organization with a long term call but a short term mentality undermines one's calling.

It is important for us to identify those areas where long termers in Youth With A Mission should make adjustments in their attitude and mentality. We must help our long term staff away from a short termers' mentality and begin to think in ways that will support and encourage their calling as a career missionary.

The following suggestions are put together to help us identify those areas where we need to be thinking "long term".

1. How we make decisions

Management experts agree that there are three basic time frames in which people make decisions:

- a. 6 months to 2 years = short term.
- b. 3 years to 5 years = long term
- c. 7 years and longer = career

Any decision that is short term is really “in between”. That is, it is the kind of decision that is made to help us make a transition between two other events or periods in our lives. Therefore, it should be recognized that to work with Youth With A Mission for two years or shorter is not “long term”, but really short term. It is temporary or transitional.

That is not bad, of course. It is one of the ministries of Youth With A Mission to give thousands of people an opportunity for a short term of service. It is important therefore, to not allow people who do not have a long term or career calling to make more than one or two 2 year commitments to work with Youth With A Mission. If God has not called them to be a missionary as a career, to continually make short term, temporary commitments will only undermine the need they have to find out what God has for them as a career or vocation.

Therefore, I think it would be wise for us to offer people these three time frames in which they can choose to be staff workers. That is, they can work with us as a short term two years or less (I suggest a maximum of two 2 year commitments), or they can be a long term; that is, they can be making 3 – 5 year commitments in any one given place. Or lastly, they can be a career missionary. I don't think people should feel coerced by leaders to make career commitments to a certain YWAM work, but it is helpful for them to understand that if God has called them to be a career missionary, they should be thinking that way.

2. Sufficient financial support

If a person is called to be a long term or career missionary in Youth With A Mission but they are still living from month to month and do not have regular pledged support, it is possible that this can undermine their calling and confidence. Some people thrive on a continued month by month challenge to trust God for their finances. Others need a more substantial financial base with which to fulfill their calling.

Living from month to month or from one financial crisis to another, can be very frustrating and debilitating. Many grow weary of continually thinking about finances and feel that it really distracts them from giving themselves wholeheartedly to the calling and task that God has given them.

Because of these factors, I believe it is important for us as a mission to take the initiative to create the structures and policies necessary to assist our staff in getting adequate financial support to work in Youth With A Mission.

This means that we will need to help people work out budgets before they are accepted on staff. Once they are accepted on staff, we need to ask them to return to their home country, or remain in their home country, and raise the necessary support. This also means giving them the guidelines as to how to communicate in order to raise that support.

Most of this will not work in the less developed countries in the 3rd world. But what will work? We must ask God for answers that our 3rd worlders can hang onto. God is going to release thousands of more 3rd worlders into YWAM. I believe we need to have answers for each culture and each situation that are arrived at in consultation with our 3rd world leaders.

3. Personal communication to one's prayer partners and supporters

If one is going to be a long term or career missionary in Youth With A Mission, it is extremely important that a systematic approach be taken to communicate with one's prayer partners and financial supporters. Communication is absolutely essential in sustaining a relationship. Some people are spiritual enough to remember to pray for us whether we write them or not. Most of our friends have not attained that level of spirituality!

Every YWAMmer who is a long term or career missionary should have a systematic approach to communicating through a prayer letter, or in person, to those who pray for him and give to him. This being the case, Youth With A Mission bases should take initiative in developing policies about how often YWAMmers should write letters, to whom they should be written, how finances should be mentioned and whether or not YWAM logos should be used.

The following recommendations are made by the International Operations Office in this regard:

- a. Long term and career oriented staff should send prayer letters to their financial supporters and prayer partners at least 4 to 6 times a year.
- b. When sending out prayer letters, the YWAM logo should be placed on the bottom of the newsletter to identify the person with Youth With A Mission. YWAM stationery should not be used but be reserved for official communication. If the YWAM logo is not used by the staff member in his prayer letter, it should be mentioned somewhere on the letter that he is a staff worker with Youth With A Mission.
- c. Seminars should be given to YWAM staff on how to write a newsletter. For help and guidelines on this area, please contact the International Operations Office in Amsterdam.

4. A systematic approach to home leaves, vacations and days off

If a person is going to be a career or long term missionary they need to visit their prayer partners and financial supporters on a regular basis. They should also return to give reports to their home church. This should be done on a fairly systematic basis.

Traditional missionary societies encourage people to take one year off for every four years in the field. However, many missionary organizations are changing that and encouraging their missionaries to take two or three months for every two years, in addition a vacation of 3 or 4 weeks.

A missionary organization such as YWAM should also communicate to its staff members exactly how long they should be taking every year for their vacations. Those who are workaholics should be encouraged strongly to take this time so that they will get regular rest, keep priorities with their families and have time to be refreshed spiritually in order to return to the frontlines with fresh perspective from the Lord. Guidelines should also be given for days and weekends off.

5. Well defined staff policies given prior to one's commitment

It is extremely important for Youth With A Mission as a missionary organization to communicate in writing its basic expectations of those who would be on staff with us, and what the staff can expect from us as a missionary society. This includes such things as a mother's time involvement, vacations and home leaves, language requirements, financial policies, participation in local churches, purchase of houses or cars, unemployment benefits, visa requirements, legal guarantees etc. This should all be spelled out in writing and should be sent to a person prior to their application as a staff worker.

This should not be an occasion for leaders to express their desire for staff to be loyal to the leader, but rather should be an opportunity to spell out policies in an objective manner.

6. Well thought through personal development goals for an individual's gifts and for his vocation in the Lord

It is extremely important for YWAM to take the initiative to encourage people to take study leaves, both inside and outside Youth With A Mission. If Youth With A Mission helps YWAM staff workers develop their gifts and abilities, this will not only benefit the individual, but in the long term it will also benefit the organization.

This will attract good people to the mission because they will see that the mission is not only committed to its own corporate goals, but also committed to the wellbeing and development of the individual members.

After a minimum number of years of service in the mission it should be made clear in policy statements that people can take one or two years study leave to further their own personal development, and still remain a missionary in good standing in the organization.

It would also be very wise for YWAM to develop in-service training seminars, retreats, conferences, etc for its staff. Many do not receive regular teaching after they finish their DTS, and it is important for the local base to provide as much training and in-service development as possible.

7. Well defined objectives and goals within a nation

It is extremely important for us to develop objectives for impacting a nation that allow people who have a long term or career calling to know that there is a place for them. We should resist the pressure to put these people in places where we have immediate short term needs (a cook, a driver, a receptionist etc.) and allow them to get busy fulfilling their calling as a planter of new fellowships amongst unreached people, learning the language, working in relief and development projects etc. Failure to do this will drive away those who have a career or long term calling to reach the unreached with the gospel.

8. Authority or pastoral structures that do not allow heavy handedness

It is extremely important that we foster an atmosphere of trust in which our staff can grow. It is not the job of leaders to overpower our staff through rules and regulations that demand that they submit every aspect of their personal lives to those in leadership. It is the job of leadership to empower people to do what God has called them to do. We are to be enablers of our staff, not hindrances to them. We do this by communicating our trust to them, treating them as adults, making them responsible for their own decisions and encouraging them to hear God for themselves.

There is a difference between corporate vision and personal vision. People are not accountable to leaders for their personal decisions, but they are accountable for those actions that would have a major impact or effect on corporate vision or policy. Leaders in Youth With A Mission should encourage our staff to be responsible for their own personal decisions, remembering that it is a privilege to counsel people and advise them about those personal decisions, but it is not a right.

9. Involvement by staff in the decision making processes on the base

It is extremely important to allow our staff to participate in major decisions so that they have a high level of ownership of that which is happening around them. We must foster decision making processes through discussion and prayer and encourage people to feel a strong sense of ownership over what is happening at the base or on the team. This tends to happen naturally on smaller bases or in small teams.

10. Feedback, constructive criticism and job evaluation from leaders or supervisors

It is extremely important that we develop job descriptions that give clear definition of what people's responsibilities are and who they report to, and job performance evaluations that take place on an objective and systematic basis so that people can have constructive feedback on how they are doing and how they should be improving. In some cultures this is done best through personal conversations rather than in written form. If leaders and supervisors do not do this, they will tend to become frustrated themselves when people do not live up to the expectations that we have for them, spiritualize those frustrations, and "rebuke" or "discipline" those who are not performing according to the supervisor's or leader's expectations. Many problems can be avoided by having a simple job interview from where there is an evaluation and discussion about how the person is doing in their particular area of work. Most people want to grow, but they need feedback on how they are doing and constructive suggestions on how to improve. If they don't receive this kind of feedback it can become extremely frustrating and debilitating to their work. This kind of interview should also allow a person to give feedback on how they are being supervised.

11. Having clear objectives for our short term outreach programs and our Discipleship Training Schools

A lack of definition as to the relationship of our short term training programs and outreaches in relationship to our long term objectives and goals can cause confusion. It is extremely important to recognize that the benefits of a short term evangelistic program are best realized in the context of having long term objectives. A hit and miss approach that does not take place within an overall strategy to have long term effects can be extremely undermining to those who are very seriously committed to affecting a nation for the Lord or reaching particular people groups.

This is also true of our Discipleship Training Schools and other training programs. The purpose of these training programs is to train potential missionaries and workers in the kingdom of God. If that is not clear, there is a danger of running these schools and programs either to finance our bases or to care for needy people that have been sent to us for inner healing and ministry to their needs.

12. Fostering relationship with local churches

It is extremely important that Youth With A Mission grows into its full anointing of unity and servanthood by developing a positive ecclesiology. This would practically mean that we become very supportive of local churches where we are working in our various bases and schools, and encourage our staff to develop a positive experience with a local church before they join us as a career or long term missionary. Without this our long term or career missionaries will not have

the prayer and financial backing that they need. In the long run this means that Youth With A Mission will be known in the Body of Christ as a mission that loves the local church and will create much goodwill towards us.

Conclusion: It is suggested that a time of reflection be set aside to think over these suggestions and principles at each base, both with the staff and on the leadership level. Policies and guidelines should be developed that would help implement these suggestions. May the Lord grant us wisdom to serve tens of thousands of teenagers and young people in short term opportunities for service and at the same time create the kind of mature cross-cultural ministries that will release many long term and career missionaries into the Lord's service with our mission.