

COMMUNICATON WITH MINISTRY PARTNERS: TIPS FOR LONGEVITY

One of your most important challenges from Day One until you retire from ministry, will be that of keeping your ministry partners involved with you – keeping your ministry work “top of mind” with your partners. You’ll notice I didn’t call them “donors.” Nobody wants to be just a “donor.” People who support you want to see themselves as a meaningful member of your ministry team – partners in ministry. They don’t want to be your bank – they want to be your partner!

~~DONORS~~ **MINISTRY PARTNERS** Lesson One involves your attitude toward those who support you. Never call anybody a “donor.” They are high-value partners, so call them “**ministry partners**.” The rest of this training will deal with what that means. It begins with your attitude. From now on, if a person says, “I’m a donor,” you need to counter with, “You’re *much more* than that! You’re a prayer partner, marketing associate, financial supporter, and a personal friend. We are in this together and are making an impact for Christ which neither of us could do apart from one another. God has yoked us together for this high and holy calling. You’re a *high value* **ministry partner**!”

NEWSLETTER Lesson Two involves staying in touch with your **ministry partners** every month. Yes, every month. You need to keep your name on their minds in in their hearts. Don’t let people forget you. This is critical to your longevity. All too often, after a few years people living in the States begin to emotionally “move on.” The fallout is often financial. You can prevent this with a quality, regular newsletter. Here are fifteen tips for your newsletter:

1. **ELECTRONIC** Use a high-quality electronic email source (e.g., Constant Contact, Mail Chimp). They will help you make a template that you can use each month for branding purposes. People will begin to recognize your newsletter. Always personalize your salutation, as in “Dear Chad and Sally,” but NOT “Dear Friends.”
2. **CREATIVE NAME** Create an identity for your newsletter. Don’t just call it, “Phil’s Monthly Newsletter.” Create something that communicates a sense of adventure. *Stories From The Front. Updates From The Edge. God’s Recent Touches.* You get the picture. Use a distinctive, well done template for your communications, so that your partners will recognize you instantly.
3. **SHORT** – Keep your newsletters s-h-o-r-t. Few people will actually read more than 20 or 30 lines in a newsletter. You may wish to share a detailed story from time to time. If so, rather than telling the whole long story in one newsletter, break it down into two or three newsletters, ending each with, “I’ll tell you more next month.”
4. **STORIES** Facts are important – who, what, when, where, why. But don’t just give facts – weave them into a story that involves your **ministry partners** with the lives of the people with whom you work on the field. The subject matter of these stories may be

about: your calling, daily life on the field, family life, prayer concerns, cultural anomalies, spiritual warfare, God's intervention in some situation, anything from your life on the field – but SHORT STORIES every time. I like to call these, “Heart String Stories.”

5. PICTURES It's the old, “one picture is worth a thousand words” thing. If you can, use your cell phone to take actual pictures or short videos. The modern cell phone is a technological marvel, and its pictures are easy to download into newsletters. If you can't take a pix, then find some picture or video on the Internet that is similar to what your story is about.
6. YOU TUBE Whenever possible, try to attach a link within your newsletter, that features some YouTube story that's similar in some way. That will embellish your newsletter, and give a “feel” for what you're expressing in words. You don't need to attach the entire YouTube piece – just the link.
7. THANK YOU Be sure to thank your ministry partners in every newsletter, for their **partnership** with you. You might cite Paul and Silas, or Paul and Barnabas, or Christ and Peter – biblical examples provide a good context for describing your **partnership** with each of your **ministry partners**.
8. COMBINED IMPACT Regularly remind them that neither they nor you could have this impact for Christ, without the **partnership** you share with them.
9. PERSONAL NOTES On each newsletter, try to figure out how to give a personal touch with each **ministry partner**. If you are able, write a one-sentence hand-written note to each person. This will demonstrate that you're not just sending a newsletter to everyone, but you're interested in *them* as **ministry partners**. Something as short as, “How's that new puppy doing?” or, “How's your wife doing after her recent flu?” or, “Love you both,” or, “Can you believe we've known each other now for four years?” Whatever it is, keep it short but targeted at *that* **ministry partner**.

Two rules of thumb:

- a) Don't make each newsletter into an appeal for money – rather communicate two times in general for every one time you ask for financial help.
 - b) Consider calling or texting sometimes, to ask for advice from your partner. Nothing says *you are important* like asking for their valued opinion.
10. USING A LIAISON If communication from the field is dangerous or difficult, set up a liaison relationship with one of your Stateside Home Team, send your monthly newsletter to that one person, and have them distribute it electronically to all of your stakeholders.

If you're in a "creative entry" region and you need to be careful about what anyone says to you in letters or electronic correspondence, then use your Sateside Liaison's mailing address for all correspondence (snail mail and electronic) and have that person "edit" whatever comes to you on the field, re-drafting the correspondence using coded language

| Instead of saying: | Use the term: |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, etc. | cousins |
| Christ, Jesus, God | dad |
| Baptize | puddle hopping |
| Believers, or Christians | brothers, sisters |
| Missionary, missionaries | m, ms |
| China | the big chicken |
| Iran | Ahmed's dacha |

Etc.

You can have fun with this, creating crazy code words that only you and your Home Team liaison will understand. When speaking of visiting a village for evangelistic or teaching purposes say, "making a coconut run" or something else that makes sense only to your "Home Team" liaison person.

11. FOCUS ON GOD Don't ever forget *why* your **ministry partners** are with you: They know and trust you, they respect your ministry, and most of them feel used by God in supporting what He has called you to do. People in ministry often use the word "I" far too often. The real story is not about the missionary; it's about God – His plan – His provision – His intervention – His calling – His heart for the lost.

Be very careful to make God the central player in all you say. You are a doulos, a servant, called by a Master to do His bidding. Make sure He gets all the praise. Your **ministry partners** will be far more likely to remain with you for decades if they *understand their part in God's plan*, than if they merely see themselves as your bank.

12. PRAY FOR THEM Finally, pray for your **ministry partners**. Let them know you pray for them. Very important: ask them what you may pray for. This is a two-way street – they're your **ministry partners**, **and you are theirs**. Don't just "take" from them – give back by offering your prayer support and your interest in their lives. The more they know that you care about them, the greater the likelihood they'll stick with you through good times and bad.

This may sound like a lot to do. In the end, if you take your **ministry partners** THIS seriously, you will find enormous blessing in the act of their supporting your ministry. Rather than feeling embarrassed about always having to "ask for money," you'll begin to see how God is using your calling not only on the field, but in the lives of people in the States – friends and supporters of yours – people for whom you care and count it a privilege to be ***united in Kingdom Building***.