

The Trampoline*

For Missionaries - Full Presentation

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Mental health has a lot in common with a trampoline. To understand how this is true, the following paradigm will lead you through an in-depth look at your relational support system. Instructions for each section are found in red font, at the beginning of each section.

Part One

Section A — Composition

Components: Tubular steel legs and frame; 250+ springs; rubberized mat.

In this paradigm:

The trampoline frame represents one's life relational structure

The springs = relationships

The mat has to do with one's level of "bounce" and correlates with one's mental health



This paradigm is aimed at providing personal insight regarding many core issues of field success including emotional stability, relational competence, longevity on the field, and resilience. It's easy to miss out on the depth of this paradigm by either over- or under-stating one's roster of

relationships in this paradigm. The essential question of accuracy in your responses has to do with what will happen thousands of miles and tens of thousands of dollars later, when you're on the field and wrestling through the demands of language acquisition, cultural adaptation, as well as isolation and relationship building with indigenous people. Careful thinking and accurate responses are your friends in Section B.

Section B — Names and Numbers

This section is foundational to your understanding all that follows, so take your time and think about names in each section. The important thing about each name is that you feel warmly and significantly connected to, and supported by, each person whose name you write. For example, on Side One **only** write names of your mother, father, siblings, spouse or children **if** you feel warmly connected to them, supported, encouraged, loved, affirmed, etc. The same applies to **each of the four sides** of the trampoline. Be selective in names you list. The more accurate you are in this task, the more you will learn and the more helpful it will be for you.

Your Name: _____

(Please Print)

Four Sides of the Trampoline:

Side One: **Primary Family**-- Mother/father, siblings, spouse, children

Names: _____

Side Two: **Secondary Family**~ Uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents, in-laws, etc.

Names: _____

Side Three: **Intimate Friends**~ Your lifetime collection of *precious friends* whom you know deeply, who know you deeply, and to whom you are warmly bonded

Names: _____

Side Four: **Other Friends** ~ Neighbors, work associates, church friends, club friends, etc. Names: _____

Section C — Criteria

CAUTION: Section C can only be helpful if you have been honest and accurate in Section B. Now that you have your list of names on each side of the four sides of your Trampoline (Section B), let's take a **deeper dive** and make sure that each name meets four very important criteria found in Section C below. If you include names of people who do not get these four criteria, you'll skew your own data and will miss much of what this tool has to offer.

Section C will now help you **qualify** your Section B list. This step is critical in helping you understand the **meaning** of your support system. As you read through the following traits in Section C, feel free to add or delete names on any of the four sides from Section B.

Section C represents the **type of relationship** that helps build strong and healthy Trampolines. So read through the four traits below, and then go back to Section B and make sure that **each** name you have kept on your Trampoline, has **all** of the following characteristics.

Four essential traits of each relational "spring":

Although there are exceptions, one's closest and most meaningful lifetime relational "springs" are usually found on Sides One and Three. Yet to be counted as true "springs" on one's Trampoline, the following four relational traits should be present in each relationship that you listed, on all four sides of your Trampoline:

1. **Meaningful contact** ~ whenever contact occurs it is meaningful (not incidental) to both parties ~ contact may be regular or not, but each time you're together it's meaningful to both parties
2. **Mutual investment** ~ both parties are clearly invested in one another, even if there's a cost

3. **Equality** and **symmetry** ~ there is **balance** in the relationship ~ neither party is rescuing nor being rescued ~ neither is unevenly more-or-less powerful, or significant, in the relationship
4. Relationship is consistently **positive & encouraging** ~ you feel consistently supported and uplifted within this friendship

Section D — Evaluating Your Personal Relational Balance

The Trampoline paradigm now begins to build insight into your particular life situation. Read through the points in the following section (Section D). As you read, make margin notes regarding your own Trampoline ~ notes about particular people ~ notes about your relationship with them ~ notes about those you have listed in your Family-of Origin ~ notes about particular friends that stand out. Be candid and forthright as you make your margin notes.

Missionaries (and pastors) historically tend to be somewhat isolated, for several reasons:

1. They tend to live in cultures that are different than their culture of origin.
2. At least for the first two or three years they tend to struggle with language, which can be an impediment to forming relationships.
3. They tend to serve in places geographically far from their homeland.
4. They tend to be seen as “outsiders” by the culture in which they live, which tends to create and enhance isolation.
5. They usually leave lifetime friends back in their culture of origin, and over time these friendships tend to erode.
6. Their educational status is often significantly higher than those they serve, which can actually become a barrier to indigenous people connecting with missionaries.
7. They often see themselves as the “top person” in the local “sophistication pyramid,” which can be isolating either inadvertently or knowingly.
8. They are usually more wealthy than those they serve.
9. They tend not to maintain genuine “accountability” partners, with whom they openly share their lives.
10. There is often a lure to wear masks that communicate, “I’m just fine, my walk with Jesus is terrific, my family’s great, and we’re all happy.” They often fear that if they take the mask off, they could lose their jobs, or at least their credibility.
11. At least at the beginning of their lives as missionaries, there is a tendency to view most relationships as “professional tasks,” rather than as potential close friends.
12. Even their relationships with home churches and donors can be stilted, as missionaries feel a need to consistently paint a picture of “field success in serving Jesus.”

GGF aims at linking our people with field teams. Yet even so, team-members can be separated by long distances, thereby causing missions to be somewhat isolating.

As a result of time and distance, missionaries' relational support systems often slowly atrophy. This deficit is often exacerbated through things such as: the normal stresses of being a missionary; marital or parenting tensions; issues with organizational compatriots; unforeseen challenges with their children's education or socialization; and even health problems.

It is therefore part of good mental health to diligently and consistently build and maintain the "springs" around one's personal Trampoline. Research shows that people whose Trampolines are weak, tend to crash sooner and recover more slowly when facing normal field stresses.