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Book Notes -- David Mays, APMC

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BUILDING STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

Daniel Rickett

A Practical Guide to Partnering with Non-Western Missions

Pleasant Hill, CA: Klein Graphics for Partners Intl., 2000, 74 pp.

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This little booklet consists of two articles formerly published in EMQ plus additional material to help churches be successful in strategic relationships with non-Western missions. It is a list of principles with a little commentary on each one, rather like an introductory workshop on the topic.

A growing number of local churches want to be involved with indigenous ministries but lack any real guidance. These principles will be very useful for thinking through the process and evaluating current ministry relationships. There is a very good set of checklist questions at the end of each chapter. For those just beginning, concrete examples would help flesh out the ideas.

Premise: Creating and sustaining intercultural partnerships is necessary to fully take advantage of missions opportunities.

Partnership

Definition: "A partnership is a complementary relationship driven by a common purpose and sustained by a willingness to learn and grow together in obedience to God." (1) True partnership is brotherhood. (2)

What is needed is not always apparent. There is always a subtle danger of dependency and paternalism. But the big question is, "Have we contributed to the self-developing capabilities of our partners?" Are we making them better able to serve God? (3-4) Each partner enables the other to grow in capacity to minister. (6)

There should be shared commitment and interdependency. This requires autonomy, compatibility, and an exchange of complementary strengths and resources. (4-5)

The three characteristics of a developmental partnership are a focus on results, a trusting and communicating relationship, and a compelling vision of what the partnership can achieve. (7-8)

To enhance indigenous ministries we must come alongside, listen, respond to their agenda, and together find ways to move it forward. (9)

Dependency

Dependency is not all bad. It is relying on someone else. Dependency goes over the line when people fail to do what they can. The answer is for both parties to do their part, take responsibility, and give something back. The relationship should be complimentary,

reciprocal, and responsible. Unhealthy dependency is characterized by a one-way flow of resources or by one partner making all the decisions or maintaining control. (14-15, 17,18).

Unhealthy dependency is likely if you support a lone ranger, send money directly to individuals, finance pastors and local churches, give based only on need, or provide 100% of the need. (18-20)

Avoid defining goals and methods unilaterally, sending resources only one way, make money the most valued resource, fund the full cost without justification, interfere in the partner organization, do what they can do themselves, rely on standard policies for different partners. (21-24)

Accountability

Accountability is the “foundation for safeguarding credibility and building trust.” (27) There must be a commitment by both parties, “a clear understanding of what they are accountable for, and a shared set of ground rules.” (27) Accountability is not a one way street and not just about money, although the entire issue is driven by suspicions about finances.

Establish ground rules. Write out your expectations; share relevant information; focus on outcomes (vs. intentions = dreams); review often; resolve conflicts immediately. (32-4)

Building Capacity

Knowing when to get involved and when to hold back is related to the gray area between what they should do for themselves and what you can do for them. (39)

With regard to needs:

People with different values and people from different cultures see different needs.

Needs are diffuse and interrelated, not simple.

Needs must be understood in their context.

Needs change. (39-41)

“The key to building capacity is...enabling people – the leaders and members of the partner ministry.” “The outsider may help, but it is the insider who must do the work.” (42)

Some factors in building capacity. It is important to have a high regard for your partner’s competency. All partners must view themselves as equals in dialogue. Facilitators must be skilled at getting close enough to their partners to understand their situations and points of view. (43)

“The ratio of internal to external funding is a measure of financial self-reliance.” (45) To improve this ratio, establish expectations at the outset, recalibrate them periodically, monitor and review changes regularly, evaluate the impact on self-reliance, and make decisions accordingly. (47)

Avoiding Pitfalls (51-67)

Don’t assume you think alike. Be explicit about expectations and your capabilities.

Don't promise more than you can deliver. Under promise and over deliver.
Don't go without a map. Establish goals.
Don't underestimate intercultural differences. Build understanding.
Don't take shortcuts. Develop and use evaluation procedures
Don't forget to develop self-reliance. Include self-reliance goals.
A good rule of thumb is to provide a minority of their total income.
Don't run a race with no end. Have an exit plan from the beginning.

Six lenses for evaluating a ministry: (63)
Study their priorities and compare to other ministries in the area.
Look for theological agreement
Check out their reputation and relationship with local churches and ministries
Examine their financial situation and support base.
Identify their goals and objectives
Analyze their structure and board of directors

Summary

“Have a vision for the partnership and frame it in terms of achievable goals.
Cultivate trust by practicing respect and integrity in every detail.
Evaluate the relationship by measuring outcomes.” (68)

Obtain the book from Partners International, 800-966-5515 or
danielr@partnersintl.org. Retail cost is \$9.95.
