ENCOURAGING THE DISCOURAGED CROSS-CULTURAL WORKER

Encouraging the international and local missionary with awareness and skills of language and culture learning.

Paradigm shift in world mission:

- **Previous trend**: from the West to the rest
- **Now**: from everywhere to everywhere

- How do we meet this shift in our various mission organizations?
- Who is equipping these missionaries?
- How can these cross cultural workers be prevented from being discouraged?

What is Encouragement?

- “The action of giving someone support, confidence and hope”. (Oxford Dictionary)
- The process of facilitating the development of the person's inner resources and courage towards positive movement (The Encouragement book. Dinkmeyer and Losoncy. 1980)
- Aid someone from the philosophy of “I can’t “ to the more productive “I will” and to help people find their own “personal power”. (The Encouragement book. Dinkmeyer and Losoncy. 1980)
- “Courage is not the absence of despair; it’s rather the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair”. (The courage to create. Rollo May. 1975)

What is discouragement?

- A loss of confidence or enthusiasm (Oxford Dicionary)
- Genererally occurs when our expectations don’t align with reality
- Can cause withdrawal and feeling of inadequacy and inferiority
- Overemphasis on personal value and status cause discouraged people to have their worth determined by other people (The Encouragement book. Dinkmeyer and Losoncy. 1980)
- Can be situation specific or total
- Our enemy, the devil, uses discouragement as a stronghold to make us ineffective (1Cor 10, 3-5)

A bit of psychology: (from Dinkmeyer and Losoncy)

**Behavior** is self-determined, chosen, not just influenced by events or situation beyond our control.

- We choose, decide and move in terms of our purposes and goals.
- Goals give direction and become the basis for all behavior.
- All behavior has social meaning (wanting to fit in, living up to expectations etc).

**Belonging** is a basic goal; we all desire to belong to someone or something and are fulfilled as we have a sense of belonging.

- Our willingness to participate in the life of others, our social interest, our desire to identify with others move us toward greater mental health.
Striving for significance, for being valued, accepted and recognized drives our motivation,
- either negatively (manipulating, getting even),
- or positively/constructively (cooperating, being responsible etc).

Blame is the most difficult part of the discouragement process.
- May include blaming self and/or others
- Focus is on failures and shortcomings
- Better focus on better ways to handle similar problems in the future, than get stuck in guilt or anger.
- No matter how bad yesterday was, we can start over again today!

MY-LINC Mekane Yesus Language and Intercultural Center
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- Ethiopia: a multiethnic, multi-language society.
- 83 languages, 200 dialects. Ethnic based political unrest the last 4 years.
- MY-LINC:
  - Established 50 years ago by mission partners from Europe under other name
  - Changed name to MY-LINC 2017 to better reflect our activities.
  - Owned by the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus as of 2009, (8.7 mil members)
  - International Mission Society (IMS)
  - Department for Mission and Theology (DMT)
  - From equipping only incoming expatriates (until 2010) to also training Ethiopian missionaries for local and international ministry

Two training departments:
- Local and foreign languages
- Cross-Cultural Training (CCT)
  - Partnering with church, DMT

1. Local and Foreign languages
Number of Students 2019 by Continent. 32 students from 15 countries
- Local languages
- (7/83 Ethiopian languages)
- Foreign language (English, Norwegian, plans for Chinese)
- Growing Participator Approach (GPA) since 2008
- Cultural Orientation to staff and students
- Short course for visiting family and friends

Trend last 5 years:
- Less students from Christian organizations, more students from secular
- Less long-termers, more short-termers
- Less Normal Track, more Tailor-made and Evening students who want shorter, sector-related courses
- Political unrest, two State of emergencies, resulted in decrease of students.
- Loss of staff to better-paid jobs
Response from incoming students:
Encouraged by:
• Friendships, with fellow students and with Ethiopians
• A loving community
• Random people who comment positively on their language
• Daily devotions at MY-LINC
• Genuine praise from staff
• Knowing what to expect from own reactions when it comes to culture stress
• People who speak the truth in love
• The word of God, a higher source, when there is no one around to offer encouragement

Discouraged by:
• Cultural differences
• Loneliness, when stick out, or only seen for my foreign status
• Comparing myself to others
• Too much correction
• People laughing and mocking my efforts to speak
• Lack of ability to share my faith
• Uncertainty regarding work permits
• Ethiopians who want to fix my problems w/o having proper information about my situation
• Ethiopia being extremely relational; I sometimes feel invaded, at other times loved

How MY-LINC staff encourage students:
• For general problems
• Showing love and patience
• Giving genuine praise
• Smiling
• Correcting mistakes
• Sharing former students’ struggles and progress
• Sharing own experience from learning English
• Knowing and using students’ names

• For ALL problems
• Praying, for and with the students
• Sharing what the word of God says

How the Growing Participator Approach encourages students:
• More fun and laughter in class
• Less performance stress
• Nurturer rather than teacher: more as a parent or sibling
• Starts from easy to complex
• See result sooner
• Visuals and graphics reinforce learning
• The lesson “is always with them” in graphics and recordings
• Small groups encourage one another

2. Cross Cultural Training (CCT)
• Visiting groups from home-churches
• Multicultural teams
• Foreigners from various professional sectors
• Local Ethiopian missionaries (evangelists, pastors etc)

Cross Cultural Training for local missionaries: (trained 700 so far)
• 3-5 days Mission-focused training
• Participants are evangelists and pastors, often theologically undertrained and with little awareness of the need to learn another language and culture
• Material translated to two local languages, and adapted to local context
• Focus on skills for learning a new language and culture through participating in the lives of host people.

• Devotions on Mission
• Some of the material based on Greg Thomson's Pre-field training
• Giving the participants a hands-on experience of learning another language
• Cross Cultural Leadership
• Cross Cultural Conflict Management
• Transition and culture stress
• Cultural Simulation Bafa Bafa
• Discussions on cultural contextual issues

Cultural Simulation: Bafa Bafa
Participants learn two created cultures: Alpha and Beta.
• Groups visit each other, try to figure out their values etc.
• Then debrief about
  ▪ how they perceived the other culture
  ▪ what feelings that arose when visiting the other group

Response from participants after cultural simulation:
• Helpful to understand another culture. Gave me tools as to what to look for.
• Helps us understand the efforts it takes to live in another culture (after only 45 minutes….)
• Makes me more open to differences in other people
• Painful but useful to come out of my comfort zone
• Helped me learn to observe without interpreting

Description of “the others”
• Rude
• Unfriendly
• Don’t greet us
• Threatening
• Self-centered
• Exclusive
• Unintelligible language

Emotions that arise
• Rejection
• Fear
• Embarrassment
• Confusion
• Isolation
• Anger
• Hostility
• Pride

Response from local missionaries:
Encouraged by:
• Awareness of the need to learn host language
• That their emotional response to stress is normal
• Skills on culture and language learning
• Biblical foundation for this

Discouraged by
• Lack of results/progress
• Depending on interpreter
• Isolation
• Self-blame

Transition and Culture stress:
Let the cross cultural worker know that emotions arising from culture stress are normal and healthy reactions to an abnormal situation
• Most international incoming missionaries are prepared for this, although when reality hits, they often become discouraged.
• Local missionaries have generally no knowledge of what to expect from their own reactions, and thus face greater discouragement.

The well-being map
• In a culture were one not easily talks about failures and shortcomings, we have found that showing the model of the well-being map helps people see that what a cross cultural worker goes through when they move is rather dramatic.
• When they see that these emotions are normal worldwide, they more easily open up to admit where they are at, and see what they can do about their own situation.

Life at home place
Characterized by a sense of engagement and involvement
• We know – we are known
• We understand – we are understood
• We belong
• There is a sense of familiarity - confidence – natural social position

Transition research shows:
“Disruption of one’s social support system is one of the primary sources of overseas stress, so building up our support system is vital towards reducing this particular course of stress” (Source unknown)

CCT testimonies:
• I’ve lived in another people group for 10 years, but never thought of the need to learn their language.
• We Christians are living on separate islands from the people around us. We don’t know their lives!
• We were told God would not hear our prayers if we prayed in our own language. Now I have the courage to sing and pray in my own language.
• I used to be afraid of my Muslim neighbors and didn’t even want my husband to drink their canned powder milk. Now I want to get to know them!
• If I had only known these thing 20 years ago, my ministry would have been so more effective!

Impact assessment
• Meeting with former trainees to see what impact the CCT has had on their ministry and lives. Met with 3 groups so far.
• Feedback:
  • The CCT gave me a completely new way of thinking about languages; that the many languages are a blessing, not a curse.
  • I’ve tried learning a new language, and I’ve encouraged others to do the same.
  • I now look at other ethnic groups as being as valuable as my own.
  • The CCT gave me courage to visit others. I used to be skeptical.

Method for encouragement: (from Dinkmeyer and Losoncy)
• Expectations, valuing people for what they are, recognizing that the individual has resources in him/her.
• Showing faith in the person, having confidence, believe in them without evidence that they are believable.
• Build self-respect by helping them be more aware of their resources
• Recognizing effort and improvement, communicating that they are acceptable as they are, not only as they could be. Help them establish realistic goals.
• Recognize and focus on strengths and assets. In a mistake-oriented society, help them list 10 things they already can do well.
• Identifying resources, seeing the raw talent and visualizing it develop.
• Use interests to energize, find out what excites them, and help them develop this.
• Develop a sense of humor, learn to laugh at ourselves and our mistakes, give up trying to control, become more relaxed, seeing the good in others or the situation.

CONCLUSION
• Encourage before people need encouragement. Avoid encouraging only during down times
• Use the “sandwich approach” (encouragement- correction-encouragement)
• Catch the cross-cultural workers before they fall!
• Be available.
• Equip with skills and knowledge
• Remember: Our past experience and failures do NOT determine our future. 2Cor 5,15
• Let them know that broken things can be useful in the hands of the Lord. 2Cor 4,7