

MISSIONS TRIP Briefing/Debriefing

Sound briefing and debriefing can be critical to the success of a ministry team. Ideally briefing should begin as early as team members are identified. During whatever meetings of the group can be arranged, team members are informed about the nature of the trip, cross cultural issues, type of ministry, schedules, and travel plans. Where in person meetings are not possible, the pre-trip briefing will have to be handled by email, phone, and hard copy. Team members should be prepared for culture shock relative to the site for the team's ministry. Persons with previous experience in the culture of the site will be important resources at this point.

Even more important is on-site briefing. While on-site, team members need help interpreting events and understanding the significance of what they observe and experience. There will also be culture shock which can be eased through careful discussion with perceptive persons. This debriefing should occur regularly throughout the time in the cross-cultural environment. These debriefings are best done by a missionary or a team leader thoroughly experienced in both cultures. If neither is available, a national leader who speaks English well and understands North American culture may be able to provide adequate briefings.

Debriefing should begin near the end of the on-site time. Team members will be thinking about their returns to North America. They will also be planning what and how they will share with friends, family, and their churches when they get back. Debriefing at this time allows team members to put events and experiences in perspective and to prepare appropriate and accurate notes supportive of what they will share. It also provides guidance for appropriate leave-taking. Thorough discussions on gift giving and promises about future communication, and dealing with requests from nationals are very important near the end of the team's time on site.

During the journey back and back home, if possible, the debriefing should continue. These sessions should include advice on appropriate sharing about the experience, especially in sharing with congregations. Team members cannot assume that congregations have been anxiously awaiting their major presentations, sermons, or extensive sharing opportunities.

Team members often return very inspired and excited and wanting to talk about their own changed lives and perspectives. When they encounter friends, family, and even their own congregation who seem uninterested in, and uninformed about, the ministry team experience, team members can become frustrated, even angry. Debriefing must prepare team members to understand this phenomenon.

Many team members, especially those who have just had their first cross-cultural experience, have reverse culture shock on return to North America. North American culture can seem to be callous and over-commercialized.

-- Global Missions