

## SEASONED ADVICE

### Experienced Mobilizers Share Words of Wisdom

Postings interviewed a number of agency personnel who have been connecting with churches for some time. Here is their candid advice about being effective in the role of church mobilizer.



**Postings: What are the best ways you have found to develop quality relationships with pastors and other local church missions leaders?**

**Tim McElhaney** (Northeast Area Director of Ministry Partnerships for Trans World Radio): I simply ask the straight-up question, "What is it that God is calling you to do?" And then I listen carefully. Sometimes they haven't the foggiest idea, so I start drilling down to see if they have a vision. If not, then I pull out tools and resources or perhaps refer them to others who can help them.

I develop a relationship long before I suggest doing something with TWR, and I keep in contact with them on a regular basis. Especially during the process of developing a focus, rather than handing them off to somebody else, I walk through the process with them. Sometimes this means leading them on a survey trip to the field to introduce them not only to TWR staff but to our key partners there, too.

**Dave Manske** (Director of Missions Mobilization for the Western Great Lakes District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance): It's critical to understand their leadership style. Some pastors have all of their ducks in a row, and if I come through with a goose, it messes everything up! So I have to fit into what they are doing. And it takes time to earn their trust, especially since some assume I'm just touting the party line because I represent the denomination. I try to listen as much as possible. Once I've given them a tool or concept, I analyze how they engage with it and adjust my approach according.



**Rick Calenberg** (Northwest Regional Director for SIM): It's not easy, but being perceived by them as a peer rather than a representative with an agenda is crucial. Those who know my teaching and pastoral experience tend to view me that way which allows me to speak to them on missions issue as a trusted consultant.

**Steve Niphakis** (Eastern Regional Director for OMF International): I find out if there is chemistry. A large part of my budget is hospitality because I love to take people out for

lunch! I focus on a small number of people because I see my role as developing them. Talking to one person who is interested is far more productive than speaking to a group who are apathetic.

**Mike** (Regional Church Partnership Advocate for PIONEERS): Getting to know pastors just after one of their people has been appointed as a PIONEERS missionary is key for me. I try to visit the church of new appointees to give the pastor a better idea of what we are all about and also to listen to him describe the church's other passions. This face-to-face session allows me to answer questions and opens other doors.

**Tim Dahlin** (former Church Missions Consultant with the Evangelical Free Church International Mission, now serving in mentor and course design with the Latin American Training Network): Personal visits are the best way, but I also attend pastors meetings. And I find it is important to go more than once to demonstrate that I'm really interested. I find that when I meet with a missions chair and maybe one or two other people from the missions leadership team, we can have direct, intensive interaction that is productive. Our conversation is driven by what God is laying on their heart right now.



**Postings: What are the skills you find most crucial to success as a mobilizer?**

**Craig McClun** (Mobilization Director for the Evangelical Free Church of Canada Mission): Understanding the trends in missions and communicating them to church leaders. We track what many churches are doing and then share that information. For example, we collected several PowerPoint® presentations and shared copies at our annual meeting for missions chairpersons.

**Adriaan Overbeeke** (Director of Missions Mobilization for the Rocky Mountain District of the C&MA): Casting the vision of the Acts 1:8 model. The skill of vision casting is significant in mobilizing people—watching for the light bulb to go on. I paint the Acts 1:8 picture and inquire about how their church is impacting their local community and their world. Then I give

examples of how they could be plugged in, regardless of the size of their church.



**McElhane** The ability to coach and hold people accountable is key for me. In the beginning, I usually lay out some ground rules for success. We sit down, and I try to tell the church leaders what we need to expect from one another. I warn them quite honestly that they are going to feel overwhelmed and want to give up because it's a spiritual battle. But I promise them that I will follow up with them. I may tell them I'm going to call them in two weeks to see what has happened, and I will do that.

As we progress, the goals may change but I am still there to mentor. At that point it's more encouragement—sort of running alongside them after I've passed them the baton. For example, I may find an article on their people group or the type of ministry they are doing and send it to them. It gives me a handle to keep in touch and apply a bit of gentle pressure to keep them moving.



**Manske:** My most important skill is my nose! I have to sniff out my key allies in the local church. It may be the person in charge of the missions committee, the senior pastor, or someone else. These people will be champions because they are praying people with global hearts. They may not have the same "bookends" of understanding, but I listen to hear their

heart, then I nurture their interest in missions. They are the people to whom I give tools—like a DVD or a ministry trip opportunity—and they get it out there to the church.

**Mike:** The ability to discern potential partnership opportunities and to match up potential church and field partners are important for me. One aspect is having basic understanding of key leaders on the field because we want to set up field-driven partnerships.



**Niphakis:** Networking is crucial for me. Since I am the only OMF regional staff person, I have to figure out how to get other people to do my job! I also have to prioritize the really key venues in which to do ministry. My focus is primarily on seminaries and colleges with the goal of teaching students to work with their churches.

I encourage schools to adopt a people group and design a program for in-depth involvement of students in the process of planting a church there. Part of the goal is to prepare the

students to go back to their churches and recruit them to get on board, too. I mentor the students in how to share the vision with people in their church to get them involved. So far we haven't had a lot of response from students' churches, but we are still developing the model.



**Postings:** How did you learn the ropes as a new mobilizer, and then stay fresh and up-to-date about churches and how to help them?

**Doug Hazen** (Northwest Church Connections Director for WorldVenture): For several years, five of us mobilizers from different agencies met monthly. Nobody came with an agenda, but we were starting from the same point—an absolute conviction that the local church is the key to missions. We talked about what local church initiatives could look like. We brainstormed ways we could work together. We encouraged each other. A lot of my thinking was formed by interacting with those guys.



**McClun:** The best way to stay current is to spend time with pastors and missions leaders in churches. You have to be intentional about it though. A couple of years ago, our support staff called all of our churches and asked four or five questions. We gleaned good information, and we need to make this a regular part of our communication process with our churches.

**McElhane:** I have developed a very specific personal mission statement. Not only have I defined a life focus, but most important, in order to achieve it, I have identified a short list of things I will do, a list of things I will not do, and a list of things I must have in order to fulfill it. To stay on course, it is crucial to be very clear about when I must say "no."



**Mike:** I stay tuned to church leaders by visiting them one-on-one and spending time with them when they attend our Church Partnership Forum or other regional gatherings. Ideally it would be good to go on several vision trips with churches. Spending that kind of time with them would help me really understand them better.

**Niphakis:** After I started in mobilization, I enrolled in OMF's leadership development program. It helped me develop a focused vision and strategy, and challenged me to think about how church multiplication strategies could be incorporated into mobilization.



**Postings:** Do you mind sharing what you think was the biggest mistake you made as a new mobilizer? What have you learned the hard way?



**Hazen:** I thought churches always saw agencies as the bad guys. Because I believed they always saw us as coming in with our hand out, I over-corrected and downplayed my agency. It was a self-image issue. But churches really do see the value of agencies. I make sure I go in with a listening ear, but if there is an opportunity for

partnership, I've got something to offer. After all, the whole Kingdom of God might be impacted by a church and an agency collaborating in a particular area.

**Dahlin:** I have learned how important it is to spend time informally getting acquainted with senior pastors. The phone is more effective than email.

**Mike:** I have an ongoing struggle with being too task and business oriented in a highly relational and ministry kind of work.

**McClun:** I needed to learn to take more initiative in getting a team of people to help me find those interested in missions.

**McElhaney:** My biggest mistake was assuming that everybody I contacted understood what it was to do missions. I've had to learn to go in open minded and not assume they are at any one level. If I start with a preconceived idea, I have taken control of the situation and I'm not listening. I'm putting my fingerprints all over the thing, and it is crucial that we don't leave our fingerprints on it at the beginning. Their ownership is a big deal.



**Overbeeke:** I tried to do too much myself instead of empowering others to do the mobilizing. If I do a mission trip, I don't go unless I take people with me. My priority is to give church leaders freedom, resources, and cheerleading. And younger generations really want hands on.



**Postings:** What are some of your best resources for helping churches?

**Manske:** Illustrations of what is working in other churches. Returning short termers and candidates who can communicate really well. Couples who provide pastoral care to our missionaries.

**McClun:** The Design Your Impact Workshop (published by DualReach). Sending out an occasional email recommending a helpful website or book.

**Dahlin:** I've developed my own seminar on how to develop a plan for global outreach in your church. The "Shaping Eternity" video (published by Caleb Project).

**Overbeeke:** ACMC. Perspectives.

**Mike:** Interdev's advocacy training. Field experience has really come in handy as well; I couldn't image doing this job without it.

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