TWO WAYS TO TALK ABOUT MISSION

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Category: Mission

My colleague Mark has just posted a superb article on his blog about two different ways in which people present mission work.

> *The first type of person realises that, in explaining his work with a language community, he is a bridge between you (the audience) and the community. But he doesnâ€™t feel any connection with the community â€“ instead he tries to help you to relate to him. He tells you of the large cultural divide, but he does so in order that you can understand him and the difficulties that he has in his work. He puts you in his shoes.*
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> *The second type of person also realises that he is a bridge between you (the listeners) and the community. But unlike the first person he helps you to understand and relate to the community. He tells you of the immense cultural differences, but he does in order to help you to understand and identify with people. He puts you in their shoes.*
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> *But I think it goes deeper than just the things we say. The way we talk about people ultimately shows what our perspective is â€“ how we perceive them, and what we believe about them.*
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> *The problem for the first person is that he sees things from an ethnocentric perspective. He doesnâ€™t seem to respect the local people, or feel that they are his equals. He has come to help them, not to understand them. He sees many differences, and naturally is impacted most by the frustrations and difficulties. He doesnâ€™t seem to notice however, that his cultural mistakes and blindspots are equally frustrating to his hosts. (Read more)*

I think Mark is on to something very important here, he goes on to say:

> *The second person views himself from the perspective of the people he is serving amongst. He doesnâ€™t see them as different, but rather sees himself as different. He respects the local people, and is more aware of the cultural offense he may cause to them than the frustrations he feels. He sees cultural differences not as an obstacle to overcome, but as an opportunity to learn, albeit often very difficult lessons, from people who have a vast amount of wisdom.*
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> *He works hard, but realises that the real impact that he will make will be in and through the relationships that he forms within the community, not in the tasks that he completes. He sees himself just as one small part of a bigger picture â€“ a picture that has been developing for hundreds of years, and will continue long after he leaves.*

Ben Byerly (who is a good example of the second type of person) has posted about Mark's thoughts and comes up with an explanation of why things sometimes go wrong:

> *Some people make the transition from the first perspective to the second relatively quickly; others never seem to. Sometimes I feel a bit schizophrenic when Iâ€™m trying to present one of my worlds to the otherâ€“I find myself being the first person all too often (and the cultural differences of my worlds are meager in comparison to many). This post might help give me a better handle on that, but I know some of my main issues lie in the arrogance of my own heart.*
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> *One of the key questions might be, â€œWhere d0 your personal loyalties and affinities lie?â€ or â€˜Where are your closest friends?â€ One big complication may be that while our heart may be fully engaged in one world, we are depending on a different world (with different agendas and priorities) to pay the bills, and we know where our bread is buttered. (Read Ben's thoughts here).*

It will be interesting to see how this debate develops in the blogging world.