UNSOLICITED ADVICE ONE: EXPLAIN

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It isn't enough for mission agencies to tell exciting stories about their work. I give four reasons why they should explain why they do what they do - and I make a cheeky comment about preaching.
Category: Observations

I sometimes get asked to speak to mission agencies on current trends and to advise them about how they should adapt to them and (at the risk of doing myself out of work) I thought that I'd write a short series of blog posts which covers some of the issues.

Above everything, I would say that mission agencies should take time to explain what it is they do and why they do it. This may sound obvious, but in my experience, many agencies don't do this; they tell exciting stories about their work, but they don't explain the biblical rationale for what it is they do. Most missionaries and agencies are activists and are happier doing things than explaining why it is they do them, but this is something that they have to address. Let me give a few reasons why this is the case.

Good Communication Strategy: when you work in a mission agency, you are surrounded by passionate and enthusiastic people who share your convictions and motivations. They understand what it is you do (and theyÂ *may* understand why you do it) but the rest of the world is not like that. It may seem obvious to you that there is a need toÂ *reach unreached people groupsÂ* and your keen supporters probably agree. However, if you want to expand your supporter base you will have to engage people who may struggle with your concepts. Firstly, the whole issue of trying to convert people to Christianity is an uncomfortable one - even within some evangelical circles. People need to understand the Biblical rationale for evangelism and mission. Agencies cannot simply assume that the wider population shares their convictions and assumptions.

Then there is the whole issue of jargon. We blithely talk about unreached people groups or UPGs, but what on earth are they and what do we do once we haveÂ *reachedÂ* them, anyway?

Clarifying Our Understanding: when we set out to explain what it is and why we do it, we have to sit down and sort out our own thinking. What do we mean byÂ *unreached*? We easily slip into jargon and mission-speak, but those terms can be fairly fluid and even within an organisation people can mean different things by them. A consistent approach to mission means that we need to think through what it is we are doing and having to explain it to others is an excellent discipline.

Deal With False Claims: no mission agency wants to say things that are not true, or somewhat dubious in their publicity, but that doesn't mean that they always avoid this. When you are in the agency bubble, talking about your work, it is easy to slip into saying things that may not always stand up to scrutiny. Let me give an example from my own agency. It is not uncommon to hear people say that you can't evangelise or grow disciples in a context where people don't have the Bible in their mother tongue - I've almost certainly said that somewhere here on this blog. The problem is that a quick glance at church history soon shows that this claim is simply not true. There are many examples of churches being planted and growing dynamically in the absence of a vernacular Bible. It's certainly true that this is not ideal and it is far better to have a Bible than not - but that is a rather different statement. Rigorously examining the rationale for what we do forces us to examine some of the basic things that we say about our work and to check them against reality -

this is a good discipline.

It Is Part Of Our Ministry: Matthew's great commission describes mission in terms of making disciples throughout the world and this includes in our own countries. By explaining the biblical rationale for their work, mission agencies can contribute to the development of serious discipleship in their own countries. Stirring stories of mission derring-do can inspire and enthuse people, but they need an underpinning of biblical understanding to complement and shape that enthusiasm.

Just a final thought; this could apply to any area of Christian ministry, not just to mission agencies. For example, it would do preachers good to reflect on and communicate why it is that they spend a significant time every Sunday proclaiming the Bible (and if the answer isn't "to equip the saints for works of service" they are doing something wrong).