

The Other Side of the Trip: Debriefing Your Team

Leading a short-term mission team is no small task but we hope that you are finding it to be a task that is also filled with many blessings as God uses you to help your team not only impact lives around the world – but also change their own hearts in the process. You are the main person on the team that is looking out for everyone’s best interest, helping them feel connected with each other, with what God is up to, and with their own hearts. You are the one that is there to encourage those who are hesitant or doubt their skills or their ability to share their faith. You are the one that is making sure that everyone is ready to go with the information they need, ensuring that your team is meeting together daily (when at all possible) to pray for each other and process what they have experienced. You are helping them to become a more supportive community to each other as well as a means of encouragement to the long-term field worker or in-country host you are serving with. That is a lot of responsibility – and all that in the midst of making sure you yourself are open to what the Lord has for you on this particular trip ...not to mention your own busy home life and/or work life! So thank you for all you have done already and for all you will continue to do in the days and months ahead as you lead this team for CVM!

One area we wanted to make sure we drew your attention to is leading your team in debriefing once they return home. You will, no doubt, be helping them debrief at the end of each day during the trip – and, perhaps, helping them debrief more in depth on the last day of the trip – but we want to make sure you are also doing something to ensure that they are debriefing well even when they return back home. Research¹ shows that the key to a “successful” mission trip with a long-term impact on the participant’s life is debriefing the trip well after they get back home. The changes your team will be experiencing on their trip – their greater self-awareness, closeness to God, sense of direction and purpose, feelings of connection to community – can quickly fade unless they are able to process that experience well and keep processing it. Finding a few people that they can talk to about their experience, sharing with their church or friends, showing their photos, and continuing to ask God to show them where they can take what they learned and use it back at home in their jobs or their school situation are all ways that help them keep those changes real.

Now we aren’t asking you to be writing or calling them all regularly, but we are asking you to consider checking in with each of them (either as individuals or as a group) and see how they are doing a few times in the months after you’ve been back. In this check-in, remind them what you all saw God do in your midst and encourage them to continue pressing in to what they learned and felt now that they are back at home. CVM will be checking in with them a few times as well. So between you and CVM hopefully they will continue to be shaped by their short-term trip! Here are a few questions to consider asking them to think about:

Daily Debrief (in-country): *Think of this as the “What” portion of the debrief*

(Invite the host to participate in the debriefing process either each day or at some point during the trip. CVM will send these questions to the host as well.)

1. Individually: Have team members keep a journal and write in it every day when they return back to their lodging. In their journals have them write down the following:
 - a. What did they do?
 - b. How did they feel about what they did? What was encouraging about the day? What was discouraging?
 - c. Was there anything that confused them that they might have questions on?
 - d. Where did they see God at work – in the community, in themselves, in another person?
 - e. How did they feel about their role on the team and how they acted that day?

¹ See “Improving the Long-Term Impact of Short-Term Missions” by Randall Gary Friesen - http://www.mbmission.org/files/staff/rfriesen/friesen_stm_thesis_summary.pdf

- f. What are they hoping to experience tomorrow?
2. As a group: After dinner bring the team together along with their journals and take time for everyone to share.
 - a. What was encouraging? (Use this as a time to affirm what you saw in them as individuals and as a group)
 - b. What was discouraging? (Use this as a time to answer questions they may have – either logistical or philosophical)
 - c. What did they learn or appreciate about the people they are working with or the culture they are in?
 - d. What did they learn about God today?
 - e. Where do they need prayer?
 - f. Have the team pray for each other and for their role in the community through this trip as well as pray for the nationals and long-term field workers they are serving with.
 - g. Use this time to defuse any problems that may be arising and to get the team back on track if need be
 - h. After sharing and prayer you can give logistical instructions for the next day of what they can expect to be doing, when you need them to gather, what they need to bring, etc.
 - i. How do they, as a group, want to honor, thank and recognize their in-country hosts for what they have done for them, taught them during this time of service? Is there something they want to do as a team or as individuals to support their hosts' ministry after they return home or to encourage others to serve in this ministry?

Final debrief while in-country:

This is a time to help them celebrate what went well, to make sense of or mourn what didn't go well, and to prepare to take what they learned and experienced back to their own home communities.

1. Page 35 in the Short-Term Manual has some good questions that you can discuss as a group
2. What are their "take-aways" from this trip – people they will keep in their hearts, memories they will hang on to, stories they will tell, things they saw in themselves to hang on to, things they saw in themselves they want to change, etc.?
3. What will they do differently as a result of going on this trip – what are their next steps?
4. Plan a way for the team to officially say their goodbyes to the in-country host, staff there, folks they ministered to. Help them to express their gratitude to whoever impacted them while they were there.
5. Plan a time to reconnect when you return – if you all live in different locations you can let them know you are going to send them an email two weeks after they get back to check in with the group and see how people are doing. Facebook posts? Picture sharing? Return trip next year?

Post-trip Debriefing: *This is the "So, What?" portion or the "What Now?"*

Questions to ask to help your team keep processing their trip:

1. What do you know now that you didn't know before?
2. What attitudes and feelings do you have about the trip/country/people you served that you didn't have before?
3. Are you aware of any other changes that occurred in knowledge, skills, attitudes, or feelings as a direct result of this experience? If so, explain.
4. What do you think was most important to you about this trip?
5. What part of this project was most valuable for you? How was the trip helpful to you?
6. What are some things that would have made the trip better for you?

In addition, CVM will send your team (as part of their Welcome Back Packet) the following list of questions for them to consider. Feel free to ask them any of these as well as a way to keep the dialogue going.

1. What did you learn about yourself during this trip? Strengths? Weaknesses?
2. What did you learn about God during this trip?
3. In what ways did you see God at work in the community? In the local church? In your team?
4. In what ways was your perspective about the materially poor challenged/changed?
5. What were the stories of some of the people you met? How did their stories impact you and change your perspective?
6. If you could share one thing with your church or fellowship group, what would that one thing be? Why?
7. Who is one person that I can continue to process my trip with and with whom I can continue to keep myself accountable to seeking God, both here at home and serving elsewhere?
8. How will I share what I have learned about myself, God, the people I served with those people who helped to send me here? (my financial and prayer partners/supporters)
9. How will your experience on the field, what you learned about yourself, God, and the world around you, change how you live life at home?
10. In what ways can you continue to live out God's calling in your community? In your church? In your school/workplace?
11. How will I continue to support the ongoing work of the ministry where I served? Am I being called to long-term or repeated short-term missions? To planned giving? To committed prayer?
12. What difference would it make if I lived each day with the same intensity and focus on Jesus and others as I during my trip? What keeps me from living life at that level now?