

MISSION PHILOSOPHY APPLICATION—A METHOD FOR EMPOWERING NATIONAL WORKERS

By Bob Young

During the pandemic, I have noticed an increase in the number of research projects focused on the mental and spiritual health of ministers and missionaries and the factors that influence their health. A major challenge of spiritual leadership is that ministry is never done. There is always something more to do. Ministers and missionaries constantly face the challenge of getting everything done that could be done, or even everything that needs to be done.

The solution to such extreme busyness is sharing the work of ministry. The principle of shared ministry is valid in many ministry settings, but this article focuses on the importance of shared ministry in mission work.

A major obstacle to sharing ministry is that things will be done differently. Sometimes things will not be done quite as well or in the same way. At times, things will not be done at all. Another obstacle is that many church leaders, ministers and missionaries tend to maintain control. Once a certain way of getting things done is established, many reject new and alternate ways of accomplishing the task. Many leaders tend to keep their fingers in every pie. The combined result of these factors is a version of ministry and mission work where significant control is retained by leaders and by supporting churches. It is hard to let go. It is hard to help others grow up spiritually.

A popular L.E.A.D. model identifies four steps of leadership:

- convincing a person of the importance of the task
- training that person for the task
- mentoring and walking alongside that person as responsibility is assumed
- maintaining accountability with the original leader no longer actively involved

These four steps can be described in a rectangle of four quadrants where the two axes are control and training

- Counseling and convincing, close supervision = high level of control, training has not yet begun
- Skill development = high level of control, high level of training
- Dependent functioning, mentoring = low level of control, high level of training
- Accountable functioning, independence = low level of control, little additional training necessary

My involvement in mission work has convinced me of the importance of sharing ministry, delegating responsibilities, and empowering others with appropriate authority. Delegation and empowerment help others grow so they can step into new roles. Jesus trained, delegated and sent out his disciples. To be like Jesus, we must cultivate a culture of delegating and sending. Some use a rule of thumb that says, "If someone can do a specific task 70% the way you would do it, you should empower and release that person." One of the great joys of ministry and missions is seeing those we have empowered walk effectively in their God-given calling.

Here is a summary of the process I have developed and used over the past dozen years. The four steps correspond to the L.E.A.D. model above.

- Identify situations, churches, and individuals who are faithful in their commitment to the Lord, those with great potential to become models. Develop relationships to focus and define the task.
- Provide training as necessary.
- Guide them as they assume increased responsibility; continue to mentor and encourage them.
- Develop a system of regular reporting which insures accountability.

I encourage churches that are committed to effective international mission work that can reach the masses to consider the importance of mission models that empower and give primary responsibility to national churches and national Christians. In this way, the gospel will sound forth and the multitudes who are ready for the harvest can be found and reached for Jesus.