



THERE'S NO "I" IN TEAM

Chris Barnden, Global Interaction's Director of Ministries, offers support to the cross-cultural teams and staff. He reflects on why Global Interaction chooses to place cross-cultural workers in teams.

PICTURES:

Malawi
(Rina Mattinson)

As a new and inexperienced cross-cultural worker commencing my missionary service in Bangladesh in the mid-1980s, I was so glad that there were a number of people who had been there for a longer time to shepherd me through the 'first time' experiences that everyone goes through.

It is difficult to live in a foreign culture, away from all that's familiar, and to work within that culture, often in an isolated situation. To do this, one requires support, encouragement, and accountability. And, aside from the personal side of living and functioning in a foreign culture, it's impossible to provide all that a ministry needs with one's own resources. Therefore, **Global Interaction's policy is, wherever possible, to place our cross-cultural workers in teams.**

We believe that for the viability of each of our teams serving among unreached people groups, there is a need for six units per team. We classify a unit as a family, a couple or an individual, serving in long-term or Gi6pro capacity. Six units per team will result in a variety of skills, a strong support network and the ability to build a number of strong relationships with the local community. It also means that a team will still have the people and capacity to cover absences due to home assignment and leave.

When assessing the current situation of our teams serving our nine identified unreached people groups, we realise the necessity to recruit a number of additional units per team. Our two year goal at Global Interaction, to ensure the stability and functionality of each of our teams, is to have 40 additional units accepted and in process by the end of 2012. This is a daunting goal to set, but something we believe God desires to see accomplished.

It is also worthwhile noting that when we set the goal of 40 additional units in the next two years, this does not take into consideration the replacement of staff who will

conclude their service in this time frame. So in reality, we are seeking more than 40 new units. Thankfully we depend on God to see this goal become a reality.

It is understandable that the recruitment of new cross-cultural workers is a big focus in order to strengthen each of our teams. "The harvest is plentiful," says Jesus, "but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (Luke 10:2) And so we ask our God to send more workers. However, we focus not just on the quantity of members in our teams but also on the quality of our teams.

Steve Richardson, of Pioneers Australia, reflects on the importance of well functioning teams in cross-cultural work. In his article *Third dimension teams*¹, Steve defines three different sorts of teams.

A first dimension team, he says, is a group of people who share the same overarching goal and are labelled a team simply because they work with the same mission agency. He likens a first dimension team to an iron man competition, where participants are in the same race, but little interaction is required. "The team is viewed primarily as a necessary and expedient platform by which each member may accomplish his/her assigned goals within a practical framework," Steve says.

A second dimension team not only shares a common goal and organisational affinity, but also a commitment to a common ministry strategy. Members set team priorities together, make decisions together and work on tasks together. Steve says, "While second dimension teams reflect a deeper level of interaction and mutual commitment, they are still largely dependent on outside life-support systems for their member development and nurture needs."

A third dimension team encompasses another important element – a deep interactive commitment to the development and health of one another. These



teams are both task and member focused. They are better equipped for the development of team members, both personally and professionally, while on location.

This commitment to the team is not seen simply as a means to a greater end, but as a valid pursuit in its own right. Steve reflects that Jesus himself showed this kind of love and support for the twelve members of his team. He wasn't using them to simply achieve a greater goal with the multitudes. He was passionate about developing them personally and equipping them to do the work of the ministry.

At Global Interaction we don't just seek teams with the optimal number of members, but to foster third dimension teams that are passionately committed to the growth and support of team members. **We wish for our cross-cultural teams to act as the body of Christ.**

However, no matter the context of the team model, team life is a challenge. Being part of a Global Interaction team means an expectation to live and work closely with individuals who, in other circumstances, one perhaps would not have chosen to associate with. It demands a good degree of tolerance, patience and forbearance from every team member. It requires interpersonal skills in dealing with each other and encouraging one another in life, relationships and ministry. Teams don't instantly function well together. Working positively in a team is a learned behaviour.

Ideally, teams do not comprise the same sort of people, with uniform personalities and temperaments. There are different and varied skills required in effective teams that cannot be provided by one or two people alone. In addition, different perspectives are helpful in solving problems when they arise. A variety of skills, gifts and personalities are needed, which when put together can achieve wonderful things in mission.

However, therein also lies the seeds for friction and misunderstanding when team members see situations in different ways, or hold different points of view without a willingness to re-examine their views in the light of others' opinions. Skills are necessary to resolve

conflict constructively when problems arise between team members, as they inevitably do.

Another significant factor in the healthy functioning of teams is the role of the Team Leader, which is to create a positive atmosphere in which team members can work together productively and harmoniously in shaping and achieving the team goals. Other characteristics desirable in a Team Leader include positive influence, good judgement of the gifts and personalities of individuals, skill in addressing and overcoming problems, good communication skills and ability to inspire and maintain enthusiasm.

While we at Global Interaction would love to have perfect teams, with the perfect combinations of temperaments, skills and personalities, we don't. No Global Interaction team is perfect or ideal! How can they be? Our teams are groups of ordinary people put together for the accomplishment of a combined goal that is greater than any individual. But, on the other hand, those same ordinary people are also called by God to carry out a particular ministry together with others similarly called. While this does not mean that our teams miraculously avoid any difficulties, it does mean that there is added motivation to make the team work.

Global Interaction teams don't just happen. They develop through hard work and commitment. In a team, we don't always need to get our own way. Instead:

- We do whatever we can to build team cohesion;
- We're quick to listen and slow to speak;
- We're slow to anger and quick to forgive;
- We're honest and keen to encourage; and
- We're ready to accept that we just may be the one who's wrong.

The underlying foundation of our ministry in Global Interaction teams, whether in our relationships with fellow team members, or whether it is with members of our target communities, is that we always aim to reflect the love of Jesus in everything we say and do.

PICTURE:

Cambodian transport
(Di Marshall)

CHRIS BARNDEN
Director of Ministries

¹ Richardson, Steve
Third dimension teams
www.pioneers.org.au