

Cross-Cultural Perspectives from the General Director



From Here to There

Forewarning: These words may not be for you; yet. I address a select group of people; those, around the world, who feel they are taking three steps forward and two steps back. At heart missionaries are conquerors, ever ready to respond to the challenge of reaching nations for Christ. But, at times the conqueror feels conquered. I'm not whining or complaining; just facing reality. We work in environments we did not create, and find difficult to change. What do we do in such cases?

1. Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). That's the bottom line. It's His Church and not ours; an apt reminder in good times and consoling in not-so-good times.
2. Three steps forward and two steps back is progress. Change is seldom at the lightning speed we prefer. The organizational structure we work with may have a unique characteristic. One man cannot swiftly destroy it. One man cannot hastily revolutionize it. At times, "church evolution" takes place. Things gradually improve as we strive for perfection. It is essential to assemble a team of change agents, cast the vision, and work toward it; despite the hurricanes of resistance. Sound the alarm when you see the church isn't moving forward. However, even setbacks may be development in disguise or may lead to progress.
3. The strength of a man consists in finding out the way God is going and going in that direction. How do we move from where we are to where we want to go? Keep your eyes fixed on the destination. Have a travel plan.

4. It is difficult to see progress during a single day, but obvious when looking back over the long haul. Keep a diary or list of victories. Count your blessings. Name them one by one. It will surprise you what the Lord has done.
5. Encourage fellow sojourners who may be struggling. Our place on this earth is not to see through others, but to see others through.

Dan Southerland in *Transitioning* explains four factors for consideration in moving (churches) from here to there.

- **The distance you must go.** The farther you are going the slower you must move. Turnarounds require time.
- **The size of the ship.** The bigger the church or change, the slower you must go. It takes thirteen miles to turn an oil tanker around.
- **The age of the ship.** The older the church is, the slower change should be implemented.
- **The toughness of the leaders.** The tougher the leaders are who are implementing the change the faster you can go. Leaders should be tough enough to lead but gentle enough to care.

Never lose your vision. Don't give up. You can make it. Remember, I'm on the sidelines cheering you on! I'm looking forward to receiving your monthly report even if it says, "Brother Howell: This month we made three steps forward, two steps back, but we're still hanging tight as we move from here to there!" (How is that for a diplomatic plug for a monthly report from each of you?)