

**GLOBAL CONNECTIONS, IT'S ONLY MONEY! CONFERENCE SEPTEMBER
2005**

**RAISING FUNDS FOR INDIVIDUALS
LOW SUPPORT - ANALYSING THE PROBLEM
(Workshop 2D)**

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An overview of the financial details:

What is the staff member's support target? How was this figure arrived at and when was it last reviewed?

Does the staff member know their support target? Do they agree with this figure?

What average monthly support has come in during the last year?

What is the staff member's current account deficit?

Has the staff member received more than one short pay cheque in the past six months?

How many people support the staff member on a regular, committed basis?

What is the average support from these supporters?

On average, how long have these regular supporters been supporting the staff member?

Do any of the regular supporters also support other staff of your organisation?

Are there any regular individual supporters whose giving is more than three times the average?

Does the staff member have significant support from one church (i.e. a church itself, not individual members of a church)?

Have there been any unusually large one-off gifts that have given a false indication of support levels in the last 12-24 months?

Have there been any significant changes in the staff member's circumstances that have seen an increase in the support target recently, e.g. marriage, birth of child, increased housing costs?

Does the staff member have personal debt?

The staff member's support history:

Has the staff member ever achieved 100% of their support target over a twelve-month period? If so, when did this last happen and what has been the downward trend since then?

Is the current support problem a recent crisis (i.e. support was fine until a few months ago) or an ongoing problem that has reached crisis level?

Have any regular supporters begun supporting the staff member in the last year? If so, what prompted them to start?

Have any regular supporters stopped supporting the staff member in the last year? If so, does the staff member know why they stopped?

Who has given more than one gift in the last 24 months, but does not give regularly?

The staff member's feelings:

How does the staff member feel about their support - e.g. concerned, guilty, in denial, assume it will all work out OK eventually, the responsibility of the organisation simply to pay them, etc.?

Does the staff member agree with the principle of personal support?

How does the staff member view personal support: an ideal way of involving their friends in their ministry or an uncomfortable way of finding the money they need for them to do their ministry?

Is the staff member content in their current work? Do they consider that they have a valid ministry?

Is the staff member considering leaving your organisation?

Is the staff member struggling with personal, emotional, family or spiritual issues that have an impact on their self-confidence?

Is low support causing tension in the staff member's family?

Communication with supporters:

How many supporters has the staff member spoken to (in person or by phone) in the last year?

How many supporters has the staff member written to (a personal letter/note/postcard, not just a note on the end of a newsletter) in the last year?

How many newsletters has the staff member sent in the last year and to how many people have they been sent?

When did the staff member last take concentrated time to visit their supporters, not counting emergency support-raising?

What is the geographical spread of the staff member's current support base?

Has the staff member made his supporters and others on his mailing list aware of the current support need? If so, how has this been done?

On average, how much time has the staff member spent communicating with supporters each month during the last year?

The blockages:

What does the staff member consider to be the main reasons for his/her low support?

What do you (Ministry Head) consider to be the main reasons for their low support?

How serious is the staff member about seeing their support situation improve; i.e. is this current discussion taking place at their initiative, or at least with their co-operation, or is the issue of their low support being addressed now because of the concern of someone else in the ministry?

Are there personal or ministry issues that could make it difficult for the staff member to deal with their low support in the near future?

COMMON LOW SUPPORT PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE RESPONSES

The problems are expressed in the types of statement that a staff member may make about their support. There are variations on each comment, but these tend to be the most common types of problems. Given that low support can either lead to, or sometimes be a result of, difficult emotional pressures, it will be important to help the staff member progress at a level that will build their confidence. It is better to succeed in small steps than to fail attempting too large a jump. Pastoral care will be as important as technical help in this process.

1. "There's no one left for me to ask."

Help the staff member identify people who could be approached. Examples:

- Those who have supported them at the same amount for more than two years and who could be asked to increase.
- Those who have sent a gift or gifts in the past four years but who do not support them regularly.
- Those who used to support the staff member but stopped for no known reason.
- Existing supporters who could arrange a support evening to introduce the staff member to some of the supporter's contacts.
- Any Christian they have met for the first time in the last two months.
- People in their church who they have got to know better in recent months.

2. "I don't have time to work on my support."

If the support is so low that it needs a crisis response that demands immediate action, the staff member needs to understand that they have no option but to work on their support. It is not a case of a good and a bad choice; sometimes in a crisis there are no easy, good options. Stress the importance of the staff member taking responsibility for the needs of their family (see 1 Timothy 5:8), even if it is a single person who is only responsible for him/herself.

If, after the immediate crisis has been addressed, the staff member still needs to raise additional support, help them develop a plan that takes into account their other work priorities. Where necessary, get other staff to take extra responsibility to free up the staff member for a time to work on their support. If a staff member is using weekends and evenings to work on their support, then they will need time off at other times of the week to compensate for this.

If there is no simple way of reducing the staff member's workload, then the Ministry Head needs to take both the decision and the responsibility for the decision about what aspects of the staff member's other work does not get done. It should not be left up to the staff member to make the decision otherwise they will either never get round to freeing the time that they need or they will feel guilty that their decision has let other people down.

Do not let the staff member compromise on the importance of face-to-face (or at least personal letter followed by phone call) contact with existing and potential supporters by attempting to raise support by newsletter to save time. Like evangelism, raising and maintaining support is a relational exercise that will suffer with an impersonal approach.

3. "The last time I asked people for support they were very negative about the support system."

A small number of negative comments about personal support can have a disproportionate impact on staff attitudes to support. Help the staff member identify positive relationships that have grown between them and their supporters. Perhaps they could share their concerns about raising support with some existing supporters with whom they have an especially close relationship and ask the supporters to pray for them in this area.

4. "I've asked a lot of people and they haven't been interested in supporting me." or "My job isn't exciting enough for people to want to support me."

Ask the staff member what he has been telling people about his ministry and how he has been asking for support. Most people are happy to support someone who is involved in a cause that the supporter can understand and accept as being valid. However, most people are not excited about supporting a deficit; even in crisis situations, the staff member needs to explain about the lives changed by your ministry and not just the financial crisis they have at present.

The staff member may need to learn how to present their ministry as part of a process of changing lives, irrespective of their job description. If necessary, help them understand the importance of their role. They may also need reminded that a valid ministry is following God's call and is not dependant on being able to tell ministry "success" stories from their own job. It is enough for the staff member to be able to identify the needs your organisation is addressing, explain how these needs are addressed, their role in this and the part that the supporter can play.

Find out also how the staff member actually asks a potential supporter for supporter. They may not be specific enough, or they may be so hesitant or embarrassed that they are communicating in a manner

that almost expects a negative response.

Much of the above can be discovered and improved through role-play.

5. *"A number of people have said they would support me, but they haven't sent in any support."*

Find out from the staff member what the supporter actually said and if it was clear who was to do what next in the process. Also, was it clear to the supporter how they were to send in their support and have they got the necessary forms or envelope to send in their support? Check that staff member is sure that the supporter is not expecting some further contact about some aspect of the decision. It would also be good to check if the support is coming in but not being assigned to the staff member's account either by mistake or because it is coming in without a designation.

If the staff member has done all they should have and the supporter genuinely wanted to support the staff member, then the staff member should call the supporter to confirm their decision and to check if there is any reason that the support has not come in. In most cases the supporter simply hasn't got round to it and may need a prompt to complete their decision. Although this can be embarrassing for the staff member, it is even more embarrassing for the supporter if they forget to send in the support and then meet the staff member months later.

6. *"The target is too high; I can get by on much less."*

This can be either an excuse for not working on support or a genuine desire to live a more sacrificial lifestyle than other staff. If it is a genuine desire to live a more sacrificial lifestyle, make sure that the staff member has budgeted adequately to cover the needs of their family.

If, however, it is an excuse not to work on support, then the staff member will need to understand that spending too much time worrying about finances is as much an expression of materialism as having too much material wealth. They may need some strong leadership from their Ministry Head to ensure that they fulfil their obligations to themselves, their family and their ministry.

7. *"I'm too tired; I've worked and worked at my support and it simply hasn't come in."*

Sometimes a staff member has done all they can think of and are at the end of their ability to put any creativity or energy into the process. They need help to take small, successful steps forward. Working with them to set targets that are attainable and will help give them the confidence to move forward will be important. Setting smaller steps to work towards also helps remove the heavy burden of support that staff can feel in these situations.

Developing a Plan

If a staff member's support is causing concern, then decisions need to be made about the priority level given to dealing with their support as it will be unrealistic to expect major change without adequate time being allocated to the task.

Possible action:

- Contact all existing regular supporters who have been supporting at the same amount for two years or more and ask them to increase.
- Contact those who have not made a regular support commitment but who have given support irregularly any time during the past four years and ask them to make a regular commitment.
- Contact those who have stopped supporting in the past two years and ask them if they would re-start; an exception would be if the staff member is aware of a major and continuing change in the supporter's circumstances which led to them stopping.
- Ask key supporters to host a support evening for their friends. It will need to be made clear to those coming that the staff member will not only be explaining about the work of the organisation and their role in the ministry, but that those present will be asked to consider supporting the staff member. Ideally, the request is given by the host who would explain that they are part of the staff member's support team.

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