

Developing a Relationship of Trust with Your Partner

Many of our Partners may not have people in their lives who are safe to talk with about their losses, disappointments, stresses, and other hardships. They may feel that openness with the wrong people could cause them to be judged unnecessarily or inaccurately.

How do we build relationships that foster trust so that our Partners feel safe to share what is on their hearts?

- Start with treating our missionaries as we would want to be treated.
 - Be genuine, care for them, be involved, listen, and take interest in them and in their family.
 - Seek to serve them, be available, and be approachable.
- When we receive a newsletter from them, consider responding, even briefly: “I am so glad your event went well”, or “So sorry to hear about that outcome”, or “I will be praying with you about your concern”.
 - Let them know that you are responsive to what they are already sharing with you.
- We can set up a time to talk with the intention of doing this on an ongoing basis. (Check the frequency which they have requested communication with you.) Seek to be a reliable presence in their lives, so that they know they can count on you.
 - But remember, if this is a new relationship for you or if you desire to go deeper in this relationship, it takes time to develop trust.
 - Be honest about your own struggles and about what God is teaching you. You can model vulnerability about your own life, as well as express interest in their lives.
 - Give them room to share what is not going so well. Let them know that you are not their judge or evaluator but a friend and colleague in their ministry.
- We can give affirmation to them by reflecting back to them our observations of how God is using them.
 - Tell them what you notice that has been effective in their ministry, how you see God using their spiritual gifts, how you see them persevering, even when there are obstacles and there seems to be little fruit for their labor.
- We can remind them of truths that keep the big picture in front of them, like: God has called them; God has led them thus far; He will complete His purpose for their lives; He is Sovereign.
 - Perhaps share a Scripture with them that could give them assurance or hope.
 - God cares for them, cast their cares upon the Lord (1 Peter 5:7, Psalm 34:4)
 - All discipline seems painful, but a harvest is coming (Hebrews 12:11)
 - God is with them. He will strengthen them and uphold them (Isaiah 41:10)
- They are in a spiritual battle; let them know that you are in the trenches with them in prayer (Philippians 1:3-6).
- Be a hope-giver, not an evaluator. The Advocate role is not within the direct line of authority. We are not tasked with making decisions about the effectiveness or trajectory of their ministry. So, we can focus on our relationship with them and their well-being spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically.
- We can give our Partners “permission” to take care of themselves. We can validate the need for rest and time with God, for time away to decompress and to reset their hearts for ministry, as even Jesus went away to pray (Mark 1:35).

How can we enter conversations about their health, in all of the areas, not just the spiritual one?

- We can learn to ask good questions that are open-ended, not judgmental, without necessarily giving advice. Even simple questions like these:
 - o Where do you see God at work?
 - o What is a challenge you face?
 - o How can I pray for you?
- But if we want to ask about different health areas, we could ask:
 - o In the spiritual area,
 - How do you find rest in your life?
 - What helps you connect with God?
 - o In the social area,
 - Who affirms you or encourages you?
 - What do you enjoy most about your spouse?
 - How does your team function at its best?
 - Who do you enjoy most in your ministry?
 - o We can ask,
 - What do you enjoy reading in addition to the Bible?
 - o Or for physical health,
 - What do you like doing most for exercise?
 - What helps you feel your best physically?