

CRITICAL PATH AND COMMON PITFALLS TOWARD A CPM (Some Definitions Appended)

From China (reported by Bill Smith & Brian Hogan)

Let me suggest that you go over these steps toward CPM and ask your self if you have fallen into a pit at some place along the way. If you have, then take positive action to correct this, and get back up on the best path.

1. Beginning to Witness

Positive Step: Begin to witness boldly to everyone you can communicate with as soon as you arrive on the field. This will usually mean that you have been introduced to them, or as you meet them you sense openness in them. Move as quickly as you sense they are able to. Try to witness to groups of three or four; ask them to bring their friends when you talk to them, and ask them to bring their friends when you show the Jesus Film.

Pitfall: Listen to all the horror stories you have heard about China, and be afraid to witness boldly.

Pitfall: Decide you will wait until you get the language down before you witness, thinking that you should not witness unless you can do so in Chinese.

Pitfall: Decide that, since evangelism is not your gift, you do not have to witness.

2. Putting New Believers in Groups

Positive Step: Group new believers into small groups, and go through T4T with them. As soon as they can give their testimony, know how to witness and have compiled their list, send them out. (Perhaps within two weeks.) Begin holding them accountable to witness to their friends and family as in T4T. Tell them that you want them to be the leader of the group formed by their witness.

Pitfall: Decide that you should put the new believers into an already established group for a few weeks or a month, so they can learn and grow before you ask them to witness.

Pitfall: Introduce them to the HC network in their area.

Pitfall: Introduce them to the organized church in their area.

3. Baptism

Positive Step: Teach your new believers how to baptize people. You may baptize the first one, then ask them to baptize others, the first person baptizing the second who believed, and so on. Ask husbands and fathers to baptize their households.

Pitfall: Ask one person to baptize all the others, such that he will be the only one whom others feel can baptize.

Pitfall: Allow them to choose how they want to be baptized, in the TSPM or with your group. Some may do so, but if you give them a choice, then they get the impression that both are equal steps to their growth. In reality, if they are baptized with a small group, then their bond to that group is stronger.

4. Deciding which materials to use in your group

Positive Step: If the person or people can read, then start them on the T4T materials, next to the M4M materials. Ask and expect that they will lead their group each week and teach what they have just been taught. If they cannot read, then lead them orally through the same steps that T4T uses, then start them on the storying materials.

Pitfall: Decide that all materials are more or less the same, so you will use those that you are familiar with. Since most materials we are familiar with come to the Bible and discipleship from a Western world view, they are probably not the best ones for rural animists.

Pitfall: Use materials that rely on one person teaching new believers a certain amount of knowledge before they are accepted as true believers. Or before they are ready to share with their friends, or start teaching another group. New believers being taught in this way are not active learners, and more than likely they will never learn to feed themselves. Your Bible knowledge will always be greater than theirs, so you will probably spend several years teaching them. By your doing so, they learn bad habits, and they lose contact with their non-Christian friends.

Another point under this step is deciding what language to use in the group

Positive Step: Even if you begin to witness to these people in English, switch to Chinese or their native language as soon as possible. Even if you cannot read the Chinese Bible, you can ask them to read from it, then ask them to discuss in Chinese what they think about a passage, letting you know what they think. If there is a Bible or taped stories in their language, then use these and have someone tell you at the end what they have come up with. By doing so, they can go faster and deeper with the passage they read. They also become accustomed to discussing eternal things in Chinese or in their native language.

Pitfall: Decide to teach in English since it is easier for you to really get “your point” across in English. Besides, there is someone who can do a great job of translating, or they all want to learn English. By doing so you will remain the real “teacher” for ever. They will learn to worship in English but not in Chinese or their native language, and the Bible study or church will depend upon your presence and the presence of the translator. You will have gathered the group around you that learned to depend on you.

5. Developing Leaders in the groups

Positive Step: From the first, after two or three lessons, begin to shadow-pastor two or three members of the group, and let them do the leading. Use the “Just-in-Time” method whereby you teach them a lesson and they immediately go out and teach it to their friends.

Pitfall: Pour all your time and energy into one person in the group. Spend hours and days developing them and teaching them the “correct way” to teach, and lead. This person will often develop an attitude of “superiority” because s/he has the “special training”. They may be able to find another group that will pay them to lead, since they are so “well trained”, and they will leave your group with no leader.

6. Establishing the authority of the group

Positive Step: Teach the group that the Bible is the authority and has the answers to their questions. When they raise a question with you, ask them to read passages in the Bible, if they can read, then ask them what they think the answer is. If they cannot read, then ask them to review the stories that they have learned, and see if they can answer the question.

Pitfall: Tell them what the right answer is to their questions. You will be tempted to do so, since they are so eager to know and it is so easy for you to share. This will teach them that you are their authority, and they will bring all their questions to you for answers rather than learning how to think for themselves. This is easy to do because it makes you feel so useful; you are finally doing what God called you to do! Believers taught like this will become easy prey for Eastern Lightening and other cults, since they are accustomed to letting the teacher tell them what is right and true.

6. Helping the group see themselves as a church

Positive Step: As soon as the group has met for a few weeks, ask the members to look at what the Bible teaches about what a church is, and ask them to discuss what they think they are. If they do not think they are a church, then help them to work through why they do not, and what they feel would be necessary for them to be one.

Pitfall: Decide ahead of time how long a group needs to meet, and what they must do before they become a church. Share these rules with them, and tell them that you will recognize them as a church when they have met these criteria. This will assure that the church looks very “Western” and follows rules of the TSPM rather than the Bible.

7. Decide when you have “Modeled, Assisted, Watched” and are now ready “to Leave”

Positive Step: Continue to shadow-pastor a group of leaders and help them grow. But start asking them each one to teach the group of other leaders, or develop a more organized training that is open to all believers who want to lead. This gives them a place for encouragement and ministry to each other as leaders.

Pitfall: Decide to leave and move on, the first time you see someone teaching the lessons correctly. Do not follow up to see if they continue to reach out and start new groups, or if they have really mastered finding the answers from the Bible and the Holy Spirit. This may set them up to quit when they run into a problem, or may cause the second and third generation of believers not to get adequate training. Instead, you should stay connected and encourage them as a brother and fellow leader.

Pitfall: Stay near enough to prop up the group when any problems arise, deciding that your effectiveness depends upon their not having any problems.

Acronyms

Eastern Lightning is an indigenous Chinese pseudo-Christian cult that attacks believers and fiercely tries to draw them out of existing churches.

HC is a generic reference to House Churches. These might be small, independent churches with no relationships within the broader Christian community, or, at the other end of the spectrum, large churches that are fully integrated into a nation-wide network with distinct doctrine and an authority structure. In China, for many reasons, it is difficult to integrate new believers brought to faith by a foreigner into an indigenous HC.

M4M refers to a two-year series of lessons that is used to help new believers and new congregations. Once again, there is nothing revolutionary about the lessons. They are mostly scripture, emphasizing obedience, multiplication and application.

T4T refers to a series of lessons to help believers grow, share their faith, and immediately follow up new believers. It was developed in Chinese, then translated into English. Presently it is being used in Vietnam, India and several other Asian countries. The process seems to be more important than the content. Much of the content is scripture, while the process gives confidence and encouragement to believers.

TSPM stands for the Three Self Patriotic Movement which is the overall term used to refer to the government-registered churches. Every city has them. Some contain members that are evangelistic. Often the leadership is under pressure not to be evangelistic.

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