

Building a Mission Team with a Servant Heart



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As an associational missionary, I have had the privilege of enlisting, training and leading many mission teams to various locations in the United States and to other countries. Building a mission team with a servant heart has always been my second highest priority for each mission project. The number one priority has been to have a clear sense of calling from God to join Him in doing the project. A mission project will be successful if God has initiated it and the project participants have a deep desire to bring glory to Him through the project.

The Importance of Servant Leadership

Jesus said: “Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant” (Matthew 20:27). If the leader expects the team to have a servant’s heart then the leader must demonstrate one before the team. Leaders must lead by example. No leader should expect the team to do something that the leader is unwilling to do. The leader should be willing to mop floors, carry out trash, run an errand or whatever else is needed to get the job done.

A mission team will have difficulty rising above the spiritual level of its leader. Therefore, each leader must be a person with a consistent Christ-like character. This requires a daily, intimate walk with the Lord. The team that sees their leader walking with Jesus will want to follow.

As a person of character, the leader must practice what has been preached. Rules that have been established for the team must also be followed by the leader. The leader should exercise great care to be fair and impartial with each team member, always displaying a positive attitude.

Serving with High Expectations

I have found that groups who are well informed about the expectations for the project do better and accomplish more. Orientation meetings are essential for bringing the people together as a team, creating ownership in the project, and for making clear what each person is expected to do. A guidebook giving answers to questions such as “Who’s going?” (information on participants and leaders); “What will we see?” (travel information, including rest stops and meals); “Where will we stay?” (lodging, room assignments, room captains); “What will we do?” (daily schedule, worship, shopping, sightseeing, individual assignments); and “What should we know?” (clothes, luggage, emergencies, money, conduct) help the team members and their families to feel more comfortable with the mission experience.

Team members need to learn the importance of being flexible. No matter how well you plan there will be unexpected circumstances to arise. The more mission projects you do, the more you learn to anticipate the unexpected. Train team members to keep their cool and to improvise as needed to deal with these circumstances.

There needs to be a clear leader of the team. However, team members should be expected to share leadership responsibilities. People need to be prepared to step into leadership positions as needed. You never know when someone will get sick or injured.

Have team meetings each evening. This gives an opportunity to evaluate each day and to review assignments for the next day. Worship, involving testimonies and prayer, should be a part of the daily meeting.

Serving Should be Enjoyable

Rules of conduct and schedules are very important; however, people will do better if they enjoy what they are doing. A mission trip should include times for relaxation, recreation, and shopping. Free time should be built into the schedule so that people know when to expect it. Depending on your mode of travel, plan activities along the way, such as singing and playing games. Award inexpensive prizes for the winners of the games. Help your team to have a good mission experience.

In Conclusion

People should go to the mission field with a motivation to serve the Lord. It takes time to build a team that has a servant's heart for missions. However, taking the time to build such a team will be well worth the effort.