

Correct Motivational Factors for Work with Children at Risk

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In working with children at risk the people who work directly with the kids, and the people in the support roles, are the most important resource that we have in working with children at risk. It's not the money, the buildings, all the projects and programmes, it's the people that are the most important. You'll find out later that this involves things like caring for those people when they are coming up against a lot of emotional decisions about working with the kids, but one of the first things that has to be considered with the people working with the kids is why do you want to work with children at risk? What is in you, compelling you to say 'I'm interested in this' or 'I'm willing to give up a summer' or 'I'm willing to give up a life' or 'I'm willing to go to South Africa'. What motivates people to be able to work with the children at risk?

I am talking to you not from theory, because I don't know all the psychological theories, but as a leader of a ministry to street children which has 15-20 people applying every year to work with us, from one month - for life.

I have defined a few different kinds of motivation. No one of these is really bad - it's not like you can't accept somebody because their motivation is pity, or compassion, or the other things on the list. It's not that it's bad to have such a motivation, it's just that it is not enough, and I'm hoping to end up by saying what really is enough, and what it is the focus that people need to aim towards, so that they can really reach the kids to the potential that God wants.

One of the first things we try to figure out from our application forms is 'Why do you want to work with the children?'

Child-Centred Motivations

Pity

One of the things that most often comes up is pity for the children. An example of this is when a child is begging. The younger, dirtier, more wounded the child is the more pity you feel, for the child's physical or emotional suffering. This is all child-centred, it is their suffering which elicits your response.

People with this motive of pity think that if they can just feed the children, clothe them, take them into their home, give them a sense of belonging, - that this will be enough. It is aimed at meeting the child's most obvious needs.

People with this motive are affected by the children's suffering, so they are always running here, there and everywhere meeting children's needs wherever they find them. This is not wrong, but what happens is that you have a lot of people who are there for the short term,

because since they can't meet everybody's needs, and they have pity for everything, they burn out. Within a month or two they are exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. They quickly burn out.

Compassion

Compassion is something very Godly. Jesus felt compassion for the multitudes. The motivation of the compassionate person is a lot deeper. It is often rooted in a more biblical perspective of the needs of the kids, but they are still focused on the needs of the child. The focus is the child, and his needs. The people that are compassionate are often more persevering than those that just have pity. They reach the child in deeper ways. They look beyond the physical, surface needs of the child. They may visit the child's family, or be concerned for the spiritual development of the child. They think more long-term. Instead of just taking food and clothing to the kids they seek to find ways that the kids can consistently have food provided for them.

Compassionate people start losing some of their spiritual basis though when working for the children because the 'work for the children' becomes the highest priority, often at the expense of the staff member's personal relationship with the Lord. You'll find that over time compassionate people get bogged down in serving all the needs that they see in a compassionate way. It is much deeper than pity but it's still based upon the needs of the child. It is still not enough - you need something deeper than that.

Self-Centred Motivations

Personal need

There are some people who do not see the focus as the needs of the child but who have a self-centred motivation. They have some needs in themselves that they think working with children are going to be able to help them to solve. In some cases they have experienced suffering and abuse themselves.

It is difficult to tell from an application that someone was abused in their past, even if references are taken up, because maybe no-one else knows. But the person may feel that if they are useful to else then they can receive healing from their own abuse.

In our street children project in Colombia new staff members are not taken out onto the streets to work directly with street kids until they have worked with children at later stages of the programme, who are nearly fully restored - in the transition home between the streets and a family, in the drop in centre, or on the school, where we can see first that the person has been able to handle it, and issues they are struggling with can first become apparent. Only then do they work directly on the streets with the street children.

We find that many people are awakened to the abuse that happened to them as a child when they see it happening to other children. Much sexual abuse is repressed, but memories open up when people are faced with it.

Some of the people who come to the project thinking that there is healing for them there become some of the best staff members, because they can feel what is happening to the children. But you have to be willing to invest much time, counselling and resources from

mature staff who need to counsel them and help them work through some of their problems. Suggest people get healing and deal with some of these issues before applying to go and work in a foreign country, where there will be so many other changes to get used to at once.

A need to 'make restitution'

On the team we have had former pimps, madams of prostitution houses, drug dealers, and assassins. Their idea is that they have ruined so many lives in the past, maybe they can rescue some from a future in drugs, prostitution etc. Some people feel they have to do something for God to earn their way to heaven, by restoring something they have destroyed.

These people can really empathise with the needy people, so they make wonderful staff members if you can work through with them that restitution is not enough as a motive. This is not to say that they cannot be on the team if this is their motive, but to help them see that what they have destroyed in the past God can use and multiply back, but this is not the primary motive or the best motive. If they can realise this many then become the best staff. God can use the most vile kind of people to be a blessing to people.

But once again this is a self-centred motive. People with this motivation often only think through short-term solutions, eg to take this girl into their home and rescue her, but not what she will do now. Staff with this motivation have to start thinking through what is the next step, not just the immediate solution. When they can only think of themselves and the healing they need for what they have destroyed then it is very difficult for them to think about what the final stage is for the people they rescue. Most of them come up with the solution that the children rescued should become workers to rescue other people. But this can be a problem because not everyone that you rescue will have the same fire that you have to go and rescue other people - it is a long term process to get people who have had problems to help others who have those problems.

A need to be needed

These are servant hearted people who are willing to do anything that needs doing. These people will do jobs others are not willing to do, and do not complain. But there comes a point where they just blow up and go home because they wanted to be needed; but they were just needed and needed and needed so much that it just burned them out. This is also a self-centred motivation of 'I feel good when serving other people'. People with this motivation get a rude awakening very quickly.

Many of the people you are serving will be ungrateful, turn their back on you, stab you in the back, talk badly of you to the whole community. The very people that you are trying to help are the people who will hurt you the most. The more you love somebody the more hurt you are going to feel. But this does not mean you shouldn't do it - eg Jesus suffered so much because he loved so much. We will serve the people who are ungrateful again and again, but if you are serving them so that you feel better about yourself, with this motivation you will last 3-4 months.

Paedophilia

Programmes run the risk of getting a paedophile, who can get gratification sexually through

being around vulnerable children. Many organisations are desperately looking for staff, but most are now much more careful about who they accept.

But this is difficult to screen because they will just say 'no' to a direct question on an application form, and the local pastor giving a reference often has no idea. You have to be constantly on the lookout for subtle signs, ask the Lord for discernment so that you can weed out the people who are paedophiles before they get you into a lot of trouble.

The welfare of the children is of paramount importance.

A desire to obey God's calling

People who want to obey what God is calling them to do make good workers, as long as that calling is fresh in their lives. But it has to be a deepening calling.

These people want to see results in the kids. They are not very patient when they don't see that the children are changing. They think 'God has called me to rescue these children in need, therefore to fulfil God's calling I have to see kids that no longer have the problems I came here to solve.

The key to maintaining the freshness of their calling is to maintain their walk with the Lord, because God's call dims when you are overstressed, disappointed, when there are divisions within the team, or family pressures. People start to wonder was the calling genuine, really that important, maybe we should just leave.

Leaving is not necessarily negative. I am never going to say that only those people who come to the project for the rest of their life are the people we want to have on the team. We do need people for certain seasons. We have had people come for a short time with an outside perspective, who can see when people are burning out. These people have been wonderful counsellors and encouragers. We just needed them for a season and God took them away again but we were refreshed, rejuvenated to keep going in the work. But if the motivation is just to feel that I am obeying God that is not enough.

God-centred motivations

A desire to bring honour to God

Ezekiel 36:20-32 is about God restoring people who have been destroyed. So much so that they profane the name of the Lord. That was my first clue because the street people profane the name of God like you wouldn't believe. Their actions profane the character of God - eg violence, sexual abuse.

Ezekiel 36:25 is exactly a list of our goals for street people, very clear ones eg 'I will sprinkle clean water on you', 'cleanse you from all your impurities' (drugs) 'I will cleanse you from all your idols' (street people worship their violence, they worship themselves, drugs and alcohol. They will bend the knee in order to get these things. Their addictions are idols). 'I will give you a new heart'. Street people have such a destroyed heart. They are so bitter, so resentful, so hateful, so vengeful. They need a new heart. 'I will put a new spirit in you'. Many street people have dabbled in spiritism, witchcraft. 'I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh'. When I read this I said 'God, this is the

street people, they are so hard-hearted'. Student therapists have come from universities to do their year of internship with us. They come with four years of lectures saying that street people cannot be changed, might as well accept that that is the way they want to be. But I believe what God says here 'I will change them, give them a heart of flesh'. 'I will put my Spirit in you, and I will move you to follow my laws and to keep my decrees'. Street people love to break the law. They don't care about laws or decrees. But God says 'I will move you'. To me that is an internal motive issue. It is not that they have to obey the law because that is what it says, but it is that God himself has put in them a desire to follow God's laws and His decrees.

Then it goes on to some physical things 'you will live in the land I gave to your forefathers, you will be my people'. Most street people feel they don't belong to anything or anyone. If there is anything they belong to it's the drug dealer, or the community of the drug addicts or the assassins. 'And I will be their God'. There is an incredible sense of community. You are mine. When street people get that sense of 'I belong to something' and 'I can count on God to be with me all the time, whatever I am going through' it is just like an incredible revelation, you see the joy come right out of their faces. There is a joy that comes into the faces of the street children when they realise, 'I am God's, and He is mine'.

'I will increase the fruit of the trees and the crops of the fields'. That means He is going to give them food. 'So that you will no longer suffer disgrace among the nations because of your famine. Then you will remember your evil deeds and you will loathe yourselves for your sins'. Most street children will blame everyone else for their problems, they will never take the responsibility for themselves, until they come to the point where God Himself brings them to a point of repentance. When they sense that I am the one who is sinful you are almost there. It is a level that street people come to in the Lord that is the beginning of the change in their lives.

The reason I am sharing this portion of scripture with you is 'Therefore say to the house of Israel, it is not for your sake that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my Holy name, which you have profaned among the nations.'

The motive for working with children at risk is not the need of the kids. It is not for their sake, and it's not for my sake as a worker with children at risk. The reason why we work with children at risk is for the sake of the Holy name of God. That is the only reason that I have been able to see that people have persevered in Christian programmes with needy children, because they do it as unto the Lord.

Once you catch that concept you realise that when you get stabbed in the back - so what? I am doing this as unto the Lord. You realise that when no-one realises what you have done and you are just anonymous you are doing it as unto the Lord - so what if you don't get a lot of credit.

Verse 32 says the same thing, more strongly 'I want you to know, that I am not doing this for your sake, declares the Sovereign Lord. Be ashamed and disgraced because of your conduct house of Israel'. Many street people, once they accept the Lord are God's people, and they need restoration.

'I will show the holiness of my great name.... When I show myself holy through you before their eyes'. God says 'I am going to show myself holy to the nations through you'. What that means to me is that our street kids that we are rescuing today are going to be missionaries, they are going to go to the nations and they are going to show the holiness of God.

Conclusion

Staff members who have the motivation to work 'unto the Lord' and honour the Lord's name are far less affected negatively by physical discomforts, stress, the 'hopelessness' of being unable to meet all the needs that surround them, strife with other workers. Staff members with this motive are the ones who can take these set backs and keep going.